

**Hope, Self-Transcendence  
and the Justification of Environmental Ethics**

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## **Hope, Self-Transcendence and the Justification of Environmental Ethics**

Environmental ethicists often hold that organisms, species, ecosystems, and the like have goods of their own. But, assuming that such goods exist, whether we ought to value them is controversial. Hence an environmental philosophy needs, in addition to an account of what sorts of values there are, an explanation of what, how and why we morally ought to value—that is, an account of moral valuing. This paper presents one such account. Specifically, I aim show that unless there are eternal goods (and maybe even if there are), we have a duty of self-transcendence toward nature—that is, a duty to value at least some of nature’s goods as ends. It is, however, a duty owed not to nature, but to ourselves. It is justified by what I call an imperative of hope. The argument, in a nutshell, is this: we have a duty to ourselves to optimize (in a certain sense to be explained below) human hope. This optimization requires self-transcendence toward entities whose goods are more diverse and enduring than any human goods. But unless there are eternal goods, such goods occur only in nature.<sup>1</sup>

That, of course, is just a sketch. Before filling in the details, I need to explain the concept self-transcendence, distinguish it from identification, show that self-transcendence toward nature is possible, and tease out some of the complexities of the concept of hope.

## Definition of Self-Transcendence

My concept of self-transcendence is a slightly weakened version of that of Ernest Partridge: a person (or *subject*) is *self-transcendent* toward an object if and only if that object is distinct from her and she values its good an end.<sup>2</sup> The object might be a person, but it could be something else: a nonhuman animal, corporation, nation, etc. To value a good *as an end* is to value it non-instrumentally—that is, not merely as a means to other valued goods. To *value* it (in the sense relevant here) is to regard it as good and desire it. Thus, for example, (to put these pieces back together) someone is self-transcendent toward the birds in her neighborhood if she regards their good as good in itself and desires it.

Self-transcendence is an intentional state. It can be directed toward a non-existent object (as when someone loves a fictitious being) or toward a existing object that has no good or whose good it misconceives.<sup>3</sup> But in such cases it fails, because its aim is to value the authentic, not merely apparent, good of an objectively existing, not merely apparent, other. Where the object of self-transcendence exists and the good valued is the object's own (its *authentic* good), conceived with reasonable accuracy, then I call the self-transcendence *true*. And since this paper's concern is exclusively with *true* self-transcendence, I will henceforth omit the qualifier "true," except for occasional reminders.

Self-transcendence is fundamental to many forms of ethics. That there are duties of self-transcendence toward other people is widely acknowledged—though not, in general, by that description. The Golden Rule prescribes such duties, on the plausible assumption that we would have others value our good as an end. Kant's second

formulation of the categorical imperative requires us to treat *people* (not their goods) as ends, but for Kant this means that we should value their goods (as defined by their rational ends) non-instrumentally.<sup>4</sup> Humanistic utilitarianism (whose aim is the aggregate good of humanity) is generally understood to require only that we promote that good, not that we value it; but surely valuing it (that is, self-transcendence toward humanity in aggregate) is instrumental to its promotion. For care ethics, obligations arise from relationship; but relationships of love, friendship and moral consideration all entail obligations of self-transcendence.<sup>5</sup>

Duties of self-transcendence toward sentient nonhumans are also widely recognized. Tom Regan's Respect Principle posits a duty self-transcendence toward all subjects of a life.<sup>6</sup> And Peter Singer, assuming duties of self-transcendence toward humans (whose good he understands as satisfaction of their interests), deduces via his Principle of Equality similar duties of self-transcendence toward all sentient beings.<sup>7</sup>

All such principles demand only *true* self-transcendence. We would not succeed in fulfilling their prescriptions by valuing the goods of nonexistent objects, or the goods of existent objects that do not have goods, or goods otherwise grossly misconceived.

### **The Possibility of Self-Transcendence toward Nature**

Environmental ethics asks whether there are duties of self-transcendence toward nature—though, again, not usually in those terms. But that question raises another: Is self-transcendence toward nature even possible?

By “nature” I mean those parts and aspects of the world that are neither human nor products of humanity. Nature includes, for example, all non-human, non-

domesticated and non-genetically-engineered living organisms and various functional aggregates of them—species, populations, ecosystems, etc. But it also includes geological, hydrological and meteorological, planetary, and galactic systems and their components. While one can value any of these things—perhaps even value them somehow as ends—self-transcendence is *true* only if its object has a good of its own that we both value as an end and conceive reasonably accurately. That any nonliving thing—star, cloud, crystal, atom—has a good of its own is doubtful. True self-transcendence toward an object requires, moreover, an accurate conception of its authentic good, and surely we have no accurate conception of the authentic good of any nonliving thing. Self-transcendence toward nature, then, can only be self-transcendence toward nature’s *living* things.

Self-transcendence toward sentient animals is certainly possible. Indeed it is obligatory, given even the least controversial of what Regan calls “direct duty views”—e.g., the view that we ought, for animals’ sakes, to avoid cruelty to them.<sup>8</sup> But although I too hold that we have obligations—including an obligation of self-transcendence—directly to sentient animals (my view is close to Singer’s), I will not assume any such obligations for the purposes of this paper. It is sufficient here to recognize that self-transcendence toward sentient animals is possible.

What about self-transcendence toward living but non-sentient entities: individual organisms, populations, species or ecosystems, or the like? Non-sentient *organisms* do have goods of their own—or, at least, so I will assume. The case for this claim has been made by many environmental ethicists, and need not be reiterated here.<sup>9</sup> We can, I will also assume, conceive the goods of non-sentient organisms reasonably accurately and

value them as ends. Thus, for example, I may understand that the authentic good of a tree includes its growth and health and I may value this good as an end. Of course, if I am to conceive that good accurately, I must not anthropomorphize. To value a tree's feelings, for example, is factual mistake. But it is not a factual mistake to value—as defenders of trees sometimes do—a tree's well-being as an end. Given that non-sentient organisms have goods of their own, which we can conceive reasonably accurately and value as ends, self-transcendence toward them is possible. Whether biotic entities other than organisms have goods of their own is more controversial. I will not assume here that they do.<sup>10</sup>

Organisms generally, and especially non-sentient organisms, often have for human self-transcendence a certain interchangeability. We can value the good of an individual coyote or an individual tree. But we can also value the goods of organisms—e.g., the red-tailed hawks that soar over the hill of my home—without attending to their individual identities. In such cases it is still the goods of organisms, not of anything so abstract as a species or population or ecosystem, that we value; yet those organisms are not always the same individuals from season to season, decade to decade, generation to generation. Something analogous, I think, occurs in what is called “love for humanity”: what one loves is people, not anything so abstract as the species *homo sapiens*, but one loves them impartially, each like the others.

When I speak of self-transcendence toward *nature*, it is primarily this identity-indifferent valuing of the goods of organisms that I have in mind. Self-transcendence toward an individual coyote counts too, as does self-transcendence toward a species or ecosystem (if such a thing is possible), but these are, perhaps, less typical cases. Thus understood, self-transcendence toward nature is plainly possible.

The question with which this section began, however, was not whether it is possible, but whether it is a duty. A strong case can be made that we have duties of self-transcendence to sentient animals. But it is not clear that we have *any* duties to non-sentient entities. In [Title of Author's Work Deleted] I surveyed a range of arguments for duties to non-sentient entities and found none that succeeded.<sup>11</sup> But I also noted this unrefuted possibility: that we have duties of self-transcendence toward, or identification with, natural entities (both sentient and non-sentient) that are owed not to those entities but to *ourselves*.

### **Self-Transcendence Distinguished from Identification**

With regard to identification, I now regard that suggestion as misguided. *Identification* with an object means taking its good as one's own.<sup>12</sup> This might be a mere metaphor for self-transcendence; that is, "taking the object's good as one's own" might simply mean valuing the object's good as an end. But if understood more literally, it implies that harms or benefits to the object are *ipso facto* harms or benefits to me. Self-transcendence, by contrast, does not entail regarding benefit or harm to its object as benefit or harm to me. I may desire the goods of the denizens of the coral reefs of the Florida Keys as ends, yet consider myself sufficiently distinct from them that I need not be benefited or threatened when they are.

While there is consensus that we have duties self-transcendence toward other humans, there is little reason to think that we have duties literally to *identify* with other humans, let alone non-sentient beings. I contend, however, that we do have a duty of self-transcendence toward nature, even toward non-sentient nature. This duty is

grounded in a duty to ourselves to hope (or, equivalently, to avoid despair). To show this, however, requires an articulation of the surprisingly complex concept of hope. That is the burden of the next two sections.

## **The Dimensions of Hope**

Hope is an intentional attitude of a person toward a state of affairs, which we may call its *object-state*. When George W. Bush hopes that the troops find weapons of mass destruction, for example, the object-state of his hope is the troops finding the weapons. To *hope* for a state of affairs is to value it (regard it as good and desire it) and think it possible. (If we do not regard the object-state as possible, then our attitude is a mere wish, not a hope; if we do not regard it as good, then our attitude is one of desire, but not hope.) Hope is dispositional; one need not be conscious of it at a particular time in order to have it then.

Hope is, further, a matter of degree, assessable along various dimensions. There is first of all the strength of the person's desire for the object-state, which we may call the *strength* of the hope. Hope's desire tends to be stronger for the goods of those with whom we have more intimate relationships, and strongest for our own good. Where hope's desire is very small, the hope itself becomes ephemeral and insignificant; where it vanishes altogether, the hope vanishes as well and what remains (if anything) is only expectation.

The strength of hope's desire should not be confused with three additional dimensions of hope that describe the person's often tacit and usually quite vague assessments of the object-state. These three dimensions are the anticipated goodness,

likelihood and duration of the object-state. We cannot hope for something without thinking of it as in some sense good and having some notion, however indistinct or erroneous, of how good it is.<sup>13</sup> I may hope for an end to my cold (a good I take to be relatively small) or a cure for my cancer (a good I regard as much greater). Similarly, we also have some sense of how likely the hope's object-state is. At the very least, as noted above, we regard the object-state as possible. But often our sense of its likelihood is more specific. In hoping to find my lost watch, for example, I may regard success as very likely or not likely at all. Finally, hope involves some sense of the object-state's duration. I may hope for a good day tomorrow or for a good life in the coming decades.

The person's sense of the goodness, likelihood and duration of the object-state together constitute what I call the *magnitude* of the hope. We may think of magnitude as something like the product of the three—not the numerical product, of course (since the three factors are not definite quantities) but a rough analog of it.<sup>14</sup> Thus a hope is great to the extent that the person regards its object-state as good, enduring and likely, smaller in proportion as her sense of the goodness, duration or likelihood decrease. The hope vanishes if her assessment of any of these three drops to zero.

Finally, some hopes are satisfiable and some are not. A person's hope is *satisfiable* (in the sense intended here) if its object-state is possible and her assessment of its goodness and duration are not greatly exaggerated or otherwise misconceived. If a hope overestimates or misconceives the goodness of its object-state, for example, then hoped-for good cannot occur. In that case, even if the object-state is realizable, the hope is still in an important sense unsatisfiable. If, for instance, I hope that human population will plummet, my hope may not be satisfiable even if some great die-off occurs, if that is

not the good I hoped it would be. Thus satisfiable hopes are hopes for goods that can be realized in more or less the way the hope conceives them. A satisfiable hope need not, however, be satisfiable in a person's lifetime. Moses' hope that Israel would enter the Promised Land, though satisfiable only posthumously, was nevertheless satisfiable.

I have so far mentioned only particular hopes—e.g., Bush's hope or Moses'. But we may also consider a person's *aggregate hope*—the totality of that person's particular hopes at a given time. A person's aggregate hope, too, has a magnitude, which we may think of (again with appropriate caveats for imprecision) as the sum of the magnitudes of each of her current particular hopes.<sup>15</sup> Thus we may say that a person has great hope if she hopes for many object-states that she assesses as very good, very durable and very likely.

So much for the dimensions of hope. In the next section I will argue that we have a duty to uphold the magnitude of aggregate satisfiable hope, and in the three sections following it I will argue that that duty can be fulfilled (unless there can be satisfiable hopes for eternal goods) only by cultivating self-transcendence toward nature.

## **The Imperative of Hope**

Hopelessness or dearth of hope is a form of suffering—namely *despair*. Thus, since (I assume) we have a moral duty to prevent and relieve suffering, we have a moral duty to uphold hope—or, equivalently, to avoid despair. It may seem silly to claim that we have a duty to do what is so clearly in our own interests. But we do, if only because despair unfits us for service to others. This imperative of hope is also thoroughly communal. We ought to encourage hope in one another, and we as a society ought to

cultivate it generally. But encourage and cultivate in what dimension—in magnitude or strength?

It seems clear that, other things being equal, despair decreases as hope's magnitude increases. That is, if I am in despair, my suffering will generally be relieved to the extent that I can hope for goods that I regard as greater or more likely or more enduring. If, for example, I am hungry and without hope of eating this day, my despair will be relieved somewhat if I learn that there are a few edible tubers growing nearby (a relatively small good). It will be relieved more if I learn that aid trucks loaded with food will arrive within the hour (a greater good). Likelihood is also a factor. My despair will be slightly relieved if I learn that there is a small chance of aid, much relieved if I know that aid is nearly certain to arrive. Despair also decreases, other things being equal, as the anticipated duration of hope's object-state increases. If my prognosis for one more month of life is lengthened to a year, my despair will, other things being equal, decrease.<sup>16</sup>

The relationship of suffering to hope's strength (i.e., the strength of hope's desire) is, however, not so straightforward. Strong hopes of great magnitude can be exhilarating. But it is *not* true that the stronger the hope the less the suffering. Strong hopes for improbable goods (e.g., the hopes of the mothers of the “disappeared”) are often anguished. And the dispassionate, whose hopes are relatively weak (though not so weak as to lack significance), do not generally suffer thereby. Hope must have some strength in order even to exist and to matter to us. But increasing its strength seems to have little benefit in reducing despair. It is primarily aggregate hope's magnitude, then, and not its strength, that we must increase to relieve despair.

People ordinarily have various hopes that are in constant flux. Old hopes fade and new ones arise. Ideally, there is a kind of equilibrium, so that the magnitude of aggregate hope stays high enough to prevent despair. We despair when the magnitude of our aggregate hope becomes too low. Given a moral duty to prevent and relieve suffering, then, it follows that we, both individually and collectively, have a duty to maintain the magnitude of aggregate hope and to increase it when it is low enough to permit despair.

Of course none of this quite as simple as I have so far made it. Our duty to prevent and relieve suffering is, for one thing, imperfect. It needs to be understood with certain qualifications—something like this: we (both individually and as a society) ought to prevent or relieve suffering *insofar as this is reasonably possible and consistent with other obligations*. So our obligation to sustain hope must be similarly qualified. The wording of the qualification is not important for our purposes, so I won't attempt to get it exactly right, but we need to keep it in mind.

### **The Imperative of Truthfulness**

There is also this complication: not all hopes are equally worthy of encouragement. Unsatisfiable hopes, in particular, are morally dubious. For since hope takes its object-state to be both possible and good in the way the hope conceives it, unsatisfiable hopes are in a clear sense *false*. Morality, however, demands truthfulness; ordinarily, we should not be in the business of promoting false hopes. There may be situations so grim that false hopes are the only hopes available; and perhaps then false hopes are better than none. But such situations are the exception, not the rule. If lack of

hope is the problem and if satisfiable hopes of substantial magnitude are available, then the solution is to encourage these satisfiable hopes first. Whether we should ever in addition promote false hopes is a question that need not be settled here.

Thus our individual and collective duty comes to this: to prevent or relieve despair, insofar as is reasonably possible and consistent with other obligations, by maintaining or increasing the magnitude of aggregate *satisfiable* hope. Let's call this *optimizing hope*. Our duty, then, is to optimize hope.

It might be objected that increasing the magnitude of aggregate hope is not the only way to relieve the suffering of hopelessness—that one might do it, for example, pharmacologically. If so, there might not be a need to optimize hope. There are, it is true, drugs that can anesthetize us against despair—at least for a time. If a person had some psychological disability that rendered him incapable of hope, then drugs of that sort might be his only resort. But their use would be merely palliative, not curative. They would provide, not hope, but only endurance of hopelessness. Such a person would, moreover, be an extreme case. Despair is often due, not to a generalized incapacity to hope, but to adverse circumstances (and, as I am about to argue, to short-sighted valuing). And for this more typical despair there are genuine cures: change or revaluation of circumstance. Where cure is possible, palliative care (e.g., drugs) might still be temporarily indicated. But the proper goal is cure. We still have a duty to optimize hope.

The most obvious cure, of course, is change of circumstance. If my hopes are low because I am penniless, then acquiring some capital may be the best way to raise them. But there are limits to what we can do; and, in the long run, as I will argue in the next section, we cannot optimize hope without self-transcendence.

## How Self-Transcendence Sustains Satisfiable Hope

We can best appreciate the role self-transcendence in sustaining satisfiable hope by considering what we lose in its absence. Imagine a competent adult who is completely devoid of true self-transcendence. Such a person violates duties of self-transcendence to others and so is morally deficient. But she is also deficient in satisfiable hope. For she will die, and her death will destroy the only thing (if any) whose authentic good she values as an end: herself.<sup>17</sup> Thus the magnitude of her satisfiable hope must tend to zero as her death approaches.

If she were accomplished, she could, of course, even at moment of her death hope for the survival of her works, fame, power, or the like—and these might indeed survive her. Hence her *hope* need not dissipate with the approach of her death. But that hope would not be *satisfiable*. For nothing that occurs after her death can be a good *for her*,<sup>18</sup> and *ex hypothesi* she values as an end no authentic good of anyone or anything but herself. She cannot satisfiably hope for posthumous fame or the like as means to the authentic goods of others, for she does not value the authentic goods of others; nor can she satisfiably hope for them as means to her authentic goods, which cease with her death. She might hope for them as ends-in-themselves, but in that case her hope would still be unsatisfiable, for there is no intelligible way for them to *be* good, independently of benefits to anyone or anything. In sum, she cannot *satisfiably* hope for any posthumous goods because, given her lack of self-transcendence, they cannot actually be good in whatever way she might hope them to be. Thus as her death approaches, the magnitude of her satisfiable hope does indeed tend to zero. She must either take refuge in false

hopes—a risky business, since there is always the danger that her true situation will become undeniable—or endure the increasing threat, if not the dominance, of despair.

But all of this follows only given an utter lack of true self-transcendence. True self-transcendence can increase the magnitude of satisfiable hope and extend the duration of its object-states beyond one's own death. To illustrate, suppose that the person of our previous example acquires a lover whose good she understands reasonably well and values as an end. She now values as ends both her lover's good and her own. Provided that her lover could outlive her and that she recognizes this, she has thereby acquired the satisfiable hope, which she lacked before, that her lover may fare well in her absence.<sup>19</sup> Now, not all the authentic goods she values need come to an end with her death. The magnitude of her satisfiable hope need not, therefore, tend to zero as her death approaches. It will, however, almost certainly diminish. And if her lover dies first, her self-transcendence will cease and she will be in the same predicament as before.

She can, however, make her hope more sustainable by *broadening* her self-transcendence—that is, by directing it toward objects greater in quantity, diversity and/or duration. Imagine, for example, that she comes to value as ends the goods not only of her lover but of friends and family, children and grandchildren. Her death is then a relatively smaller loss of the authentic goodness she values, so long as her friends and family continue to fare well. The goods for which she hopes will probably endure longer and certainly be greater than if she valued only herself or only herself and her lover. The magnitude of her satisfiable hope is therefore greater still. Perhaps she can even approach death in the satisfiable hope that most of what she values will *not* end with her death. And if she broadens her self-transcendence still further (valuing as ends, say,

goods of her community, or humanity, or nature) the goodness and duration of the goods she can satisfiably hope for may be still larger, as will the probability that at least some of her hopes will be satisfied. The magnitude of her satisfiable hopes may thus remain great even to the moment of her death.

In general, then, we can significantly increase the magnitude of our aggregate satisfiable hope in all of its dimensions simply by broadening self-transcendence.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, we can increase satisfiable hope even without improving our external situation—even when action is futile or impossible. And if we *can* act, broadening self-transcendence, by giving us new goods to value, opens new possibilities of beneficial action.

Broadening self-transcendence does, it must be conceded, also make us vulnerable to greater loss. Among many hopes, many will fail. But so long as others replace them, we need not fall into despair. There is an ecological analogy here: by diversifying aggregate hope we increase its sustainability. Hopes come and go, but aggregate hope remains.

Let's now take stock. I have argued that we have a duty to optimize hope and that the magnitude of satisfiable hope is sustainable through a lifetime only by self-transcendence—the broader the self-transcendence the more sustainable the hope. Our duty, then, is to achieve and maintain broad self-transcendence. That, however, is nothing new. For, as I noted earlier, the standard forms of morality all prescribe fairly broad self-transcendence. They generally prescribe it, however, as a duty *to others*. What (if anything) is novel so far is the prescription of self-transcendence as a duty *to*

*ourselves*, both individually and collectively—a duty grounded in the duty to optimize hope.

In the section following the next, I will venture a more novel conclusion, one directly relevant to environmental ethics: that unless we can have satisfiable hopes for eternal goods, we have a duty to ourselves (both individually and collectively) of self-transcendence *toward nature*. This conclusion is based on the claim, defended in the next section, that we cannot eliminate despair if the only goods we value as ends are those of human beings (individually or collectively) and of their artifacts.

### **The Inadequacy of Hope for Human and Artifactual Goods**

We have a duty to optimize hope—that is to prevent or relieve despair (insofar as is reasonably possible and consistent with other obligations) by sustaining or increasing the magnitude of satisfiable hopes. But what sorts of hopes are satisfiable? To hope for an object-state is, as I have noted, to conceive it as good in a certain way. The hope is satisfiable only if that object state is in fact good in that way. So the range of satisfiable hopes is constrained by what sorts of goods there are.

We can divide the candidates into four categories. There are, first of all, finite human goods, individual or collective. Individual goods include (but are by no means limited to) health, relief of suffering, friendship, love, freedom from oppression, etc. There may be *collective* human goods as well—such things as the flourishing of a nation or a culture. Secondly, there are the authentic goods of human artifacts. I here count, for example, domesticated animals as human artifacts. Clearly they have goods of their own. Genetically engineered organisms also fall into this category, as would robots, were they

ever to become so sophisticated as to have goods of their own. Most artifacts, however—e.g., forks—do not have goods of their own and are good only as means to human goods. The third category is the goods of nature: the authentic goods of natural biotic entities, sentient or non-sentient, individual or collective. Finally, there may be eternal goods of various kinds.

This section focuses exclusively on the goods of humans and artifacts. Natural and eternal goods are the subjects of the following two sections. My main claim here is that although we can have satisfiable hopes, including hopes satisfiable only posthumously, for the goods of humans and their artifacts, these hopes by themselves cannot eliminate despair.

Thoreau penned his famous line “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation”<sup>21</sup> in an age of optimism. He was not thinking primarily of the manifest hopelessness of old age or poverty or oppression, but of the mostly suppressed despair that haunts even the young, rich and comfortable. His observation has not lost validity with time. Witness the proportion of contemporary Americans on anti-depressants.

Hope for merely human goods (goods of self, family, friends, organizations) sustains many people through much of their lives, but toward the end it often falters. Concerning the value of self-transcendence toward family in the face of his own death, Leo Tolstoy wrote:

But my family — wife and children — are also human. They are placed just as I am: they must either live in a lie or see the terrible truth. Why should they live? Why should I love them, guard them, bring them up, or watch them? That they may come to the despair that I feel, or else be stupid? Loving them, I cannot hide

the truth from them: each step in knowledge leads them to the truth. And the truth is death.<sup>22</sup>

Unsatisfied with self-transcendence toward family, Tolstoy eventually turned, as many do, to hopes for eternal goods. If self-transcendence toward other people, whose reality is manifest, sufficed to prevent despair, it would be more difficult than it is to account for the popularity of faith in things unseen.

This is not to deny that there is satisfiable hope to be gained, even at life's end, from self-transcendence toward family or other people generally. The point is merely that such hope is often insufficient to eliminate despair. Maybe by training or self-discipline we might come to invest nearly all our hope in others and so lose little at the prospect of our own death. Yet even that would not always be sufficient. The others for whose good I hope might die before me—and in any case, as Tolstoy frets, they too will die within decades. Moreover, since human relationships are fragile, we might become estranged, and so I might lose hope for them before they died. Much the same can be said for any human organization or project that I might value.

Maybe what we need, then, is a generalized hope for all humanity. But that is probably beyond the capability of many, maybe all, people. We readily develop hopes strong enough to matter to us only for what we know fairly intimately. It is difficult even to comprehend, much less to hope for, the goods of billions of people. Humanity is, moreover, in many respects maddeningly foolish, short-sighted and self-destructive. We may easily despair even of the prospects of all humankind.

As for artifacts with goods of their own, these are generally not significant objects of hope. Perhaps in the far future we will invest great hope in our silicon offspring<sup>23</sup> or in

the brave new products of our genetics labs, but the current role of the goods of artifacts in human hope is so small as to be for our purposes negligible. I will henceforth neglect it.

### **The Imperative of Self-Transcendence toward Nature**

Self-transcendence toward humans and their artifacts cannot, then, eliminate all despair. But, it will be objected, neither can self-transcendence toward nature. Quite so. But in this section I will argue that self-transcendence toward nature combined with self-transcendence toward humans makes possible satisfiable hope of significantly greater magnitude than does self-transcendence toward humans alone. Since our duty is to optimize hope, and since hope for the goods of humans cannot prevent all despair, it follows that we have a duty of self-transcendence toward nature.

Of course, if we can have satisfiable hopes for eternal goods, hopes for anything finite may be superfluous, since the former alone may suffice to eliminate despair. But for the remainder of this section, I will assume for the sake of argument that there are no eternal goods. I'll drop that assumption in the following section.

My immediate aim, then, is to show that self-transcendence toward nature combined with self-transcendence toward humans makes possible greater satisfiable hope than does self-transcendence toward humans alone. The idea is straightforward: since nature's goods combined with human goods are more diverse and almost certainly more enduring than human goods, if our aggregate satisfiable hope is directed toward nature as well as humans, then its object states can be richer in value, more probable and more enduring than if it is directed toward humans alone; hence its magnitude can be greater.

Consider, first, the value of the object-states. It is generally held that the authentic good of any nonhuman organism is of less value than the authentic good of any human. Let's grant that assumption. Still, the good of a human plus the good of a coyote (or even a tree) is greater than the good of the human alone. Hence if we are self-transcendent toward not only humans, but nature as well, we can satisfiably hope for greater goodness than if we are self-transcendent only toward humans.

One might, I suppose, object that each person is capable of only so much self-transcendence and no more, so that it is best to invest our limited share entirely in those objects whose goods are greatest: humans. But this objection assumes that (1) there are no natural goods greater than human goods, (2) our ability to value is completely inelastic and (3) the only relevant factor in deciding what we ought to value is degree of goodness. (1) is not obviously true—even assuming, as we are, that the authentic good of any nonhuman organism is of less value than the authentic good of any human—for natural goods might in aggregate be greater than human goods. I know of no good evidence for (2). And (3) is plainly false, for not only degree of goodness but also its likelihood and duration are relevant in choosing what to value. To these two additional factors we now turn.

Just as the goodness of hope's object-states is greater with self-transcendence toward both humans and nature than it is with self-transcendence only toward humans, so too is the likelihood of these object-states. This is largely a matter of diversity. The broader my self-transcendence, the more likely it is that at least some of the goods I value as ends will be realized. But it is also due in part to the interchangeability of natural organisms that I noted earlier. I do not value the hawks that soar above my hill in the

same way that I value the people who matter to me—i.e., primarily as individuals. It suffices for my hope that their like will fly here generation after generation. The survival to any particular date of these hawks, considered without regard to their individuality, is, no doubt, more probable than the survival of any or all of the individual humans whom I love.

It is also likely to be of greater duration. Even individual organisms—the oaks and hickories on my land, for example—may yet survive for several centuries. But red-tails have probably been soaring over this hill for tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of years. My hope that they will continue flourish long into the future may well be satisfiable. Of course I have long-term hopes for humans and certain of their institutions as well. But the two kinds of hopes are not mutually exclusive. And since it is quite likely that nature will outlast humanity, self-transcendence toward nature may thus greatly increase the duration of the object-states of satisfiable hopes.

But what if (as seems likely) the most enduring of nature's creatures are something nasty—like cockroaches? Would it be best, then, to become self-transcendent toward cockroaches?<sup>24</sup> Probably not. The first mistake here is to consider only one or two of the dimensions of hope's magnitude—the duration, and perhaps also the probability, of the object-state—and ignore goodness. That cockroaches have a good of their own, I do not doubt. But surely we may satisfiably hope for greater, if less enduring, natural goods. Moreover, because (let us grant) cockroaches are creepy and dirty, their good is to a certain extent incompatible with ours—at least when they inhabit our floors and walls. Self-transcendence toward cockroaches is therefore difficult or

impossible for most people—and hence not to be widely recommended. Fortunately, nature offers to our hope many more congenial alternatives.

To summarize: by self-transcendence toward nature as well as humans we can reasonably achieve aggregate hope that is significantly greater in all three dimensions of magnitude—the goodness, likelihood and endurance of its object-states—than by self-transcendence toward humans alone. Therefore, since self-transcendence toward humans cannot eliminate despair, we can optimize hope (i.e., optimally resist despair) only by self-transcendence toward both humans *and* nature. We have a duty to optimize hope. Thus, in particular, we have a duty of self-transcendence toward at least some aspects of nature.

But, it might be objected, we need not worry about despair now, while things are going well. When tragedy or old age arrives, then we can take the time to turn to nature for solace. This strategy, however, will fail; for we cannot become self-transcendent overnight. To serve as a firm foundation for hope, self-transcendence requires long cultivation. Our duty, then, is not to become self-transcendent toward nature occasionally, as needed to prevent despair, but, individually and collectively, to cultivate self-transcendence toward at least some aspects of nature throughout our lives.

Still, hope for nature's goods has its limits. Sooner or later all the life of this world will end—if not sooner, then by the expansion or exhaustion of the sun or the collapse or heat death of the universe. Beyond such ultimate disasters, presumably, the duration of satisfiable hope's objects cannot extend. Yet the inevitability of a final end does not nullify our hopes for the interim. And between us and that end may lie a span so vast that for the purposes of human hope it is barely distinguishable from eternity.

## Eternal Goods

But what of eternity itself? We arrived at the conclusion of the last section under the hypothesis that there are no eternal goods. Hence, strictly speaking, that conclusion should be qualified as follows: *unless there are eternal goods*, we have a duty to cultivate self-transcendence toward nature.

So what if there *are* eternal goods? In that case wouldn't self-transcendence toward nature—or, indeed, toward any finite object—be superfluous? There are three issues here: (1) whether eternal goods exist, (2) if so, whether there can be satisfiable hopes for them, and (3) whether affirmative answers to both (1) and (2) would make self-transcendence toward finite objects superfluous.

To address (1) is beyond my competence. Regarding it, I will note only that while the existence of human and natural goods is obvious (health, for example, is a good for all organisms, including humans), evidence for eternal goods is more tenuous. But that simple observation does not settle the matter. Leaving it, then, unsettled, let's suppose for the sake of argument that eternal goods do exist.

Given that assumption, the second question is whether we can have satisfiable hopes for these goods. Hope, of course, is easy, but *satisfiable* hope requires that its object-states not be grossly misconceived. From the sheer variety of extant hopes for eternal goods it seems probable that those goods are sometimes grossly misconceived. Suppose, however, that this is not always that case and that some hopes for eternal goods are satisfiable. Still, such hopes may not be available to everyone. If, for example, the only eternal goods involve impersonal union with the godhead, as some Hindus believe,

then satisfiable hopes for eternal goods may not be possible for those Muslims or Christians whose hopes demand *personal* immortality. In that case, even though eternal goods exist, the only *satisfiable* hopes of the latter are for finite goods.

Suppose, however, that satisfiable hopes for eternal goods are available to everyone. There remains issue (3): whether such hopes would render self-transcendence toward finite objects superfluous. In one sense, certainly not—since, as we saw earlier, self-transcendence toward other humans, at least, is a moral duty. But the point of the question is whether, given that some hopes for some eternal goods are satisfiable, self-transcendence toward finite objects is superfluous *as a source of satisfiable hope*. That depends in part on whether those eternal goods are distinct from the finite ones. It is conceivable that nature's goods are also in some sense eternal—that, for example, nature is most adequately understood, as Spinoza puts it, *sub specie aeterni*. If something like this is true, then self-transcendence toward nature, far from being superfluous, is *ipso facto* self-transcendence toward objects whose goods are eternal.<sup>25</sup>

Suppose, however, to add yet another hypothesis to our growing list, that eternal goods are distinct from finite, worldly goods. In fact, take the extreme case of personal immortality replete with rich and unending goods for oneself (Heaven, perhaps, or the disembodied contemplation of Platonic forms). Wouldn't that make self-transcendence toward nature (indeed self-transcendence of any sort) superfluous as a source of sustainable, satisfiable hope? Still, the answer is not obvious. For one thing, it is not clear that we ought to relinquish hopes that we have good reason to believe are satisfiable in favor of hopes for which we have less evidence, even if the latter really are satisfiable.

Hopes for eternal goods are sometimes overwhelmed by doubt, especially in times of great loss. Given the duty to optimize hope, it might be best to cultivate both.

### **An Apparent Inconsistency**

Thus even if there are eternal goods, we might still have a duty to cultivate self-transcendence toward nature. Let's assume for the remainder of this paper that we do have such a duty. Still, my account of this duty might seem inconsistent. For the duty is on that account a duty *not* to nature, but to *ourselves*. My argument has been consequentialist and anthropocentric, grounding this duty in a more general duty to prevent and relieve human suffering. And yet my conclusion—that we ought to value at least some of nature's goods as ends—is anything but anthropocentric.<sup>26</sup> It might, then, seem that I have contradicted myself, for if the ultimate aim of valuing nature's goods is to avoid human suffering, then those goods are *not* valued as ends, but merely as means to human ends.

We must distinguish, however, the authentic goods of nature (which are possible states of natural creatures) from the valuing of them (self-transcendence, an intentional state of the human being). It is the latter—the state of the human being—that in my account functions as a means to the end of preventing or relieving human suffering. The former, the goods of nature themselves, are in self-transcendence valued as ends, not as means to human ends. We may become self-transcendent for own benefit, but the benefit depends on valuing as ends goods that are *not* ours. Our self-interest, if it is to achieve its aim, must transcend itself, producing genuine desire for the authentic good of others, so

that ultimately we desire as ends both our good and theirs. There is no inconsistency in that.

## **Defending Nature as a Source of Hope**

This paper has presented an account of moral valuing—an account, that is, of what, how and why we ought to value. A complete environmental ethic would do more; it would tell us how we ought to act. This final section adumbrates a few features of a more complete environmental ethic by considering briefly what else my account does or does not entail.

Let's begin with the “does nots.” Nothing that I have said here implies either that the duty of self-transcendence is the only duty we have with regard to nature (it obviously is not) or that the duty to optimize hope is the only justification for it. Though both duties, as I have argued, are owed to ourselves, not to nature, and though I have expressed doubt that there are duties owed directly to nature, nothing I have said implies that there are no such duties.

Indeed, it might seem that that the opposite is true—that the duty to value nature's goods as ends that I have advocated would entail, for example, a duty directly to nature to defend it when those goods are threatened. But I know of no plausible premises that when added to the inference:

We have a duty to ourselves to value nature's goods as ends.

Therefore, we have a duty to nature to defend it.

would validate that inference.

Our duty to optimize hope does, however, imply a duty *to ourselves* to defend nature. For in order to optimize hope we must sustain the conditions for hope's optimization. One of these conditions is the preservation of nature; for to the extent that nature is degraded, the object-states of satisfiable hope diminish in goodness, likelihood, or duration; and hope itself becomes less sustainable. We ought if possible, to prevent this degradation. But to prevent it we must defend nature.

There are, of course, many other reasons for defending nature. All the usual humanistic utilitarian arguments, for example, (nature as natural capital, nature as locus of beauty, nature as recreational resource, etc.) support the same conclusion. But even if all other justifications were to fail, we would still have an obligation to defend nature grounded in our duty to sustain possibilities of satisfiable hope. My account of moral valuing implies, moreover, something that purely humanistic theories do not: a duty to value nature's goods as ends, not merely as means.

That duty, together with the fact that we can most readily value that with which we are intimately acquainted, implies further that we ought to cultivate, insofar as is reasonably possible, intimate acquaintance with nature. Environmental education that is not merely of the classroom is therefore an individual and collective responsibility. One moral aim of an environmental education should be to broaden self-transcendence so as to enlarge hope. While self-transcendence toward all nature, like self-transcendence toward all humanity, is an unattainable ideal, it is nevertheless an ideal, and an environmental education should move us toward it.

The obligations to know, value, and defend nature for which I have argued are obligations owed to ourselves—but not just to ourselves individually. They are, as I have

insisted, communal. I want to conclude by indicating the scale of the relevant community, for that tells us something about these obligations' importance. Because the degradation of nature is often irreversible (extinction is an obvious instance) or reversible only in the very long term, the community of humans for whom we ought to defend nature (and hence preserve possibilities of satisfiable hope) includes not only us and our contemporaries, but all posterity.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The outlines of this argument were first suggested to me by a passage near the end of John O'Neill's rich and insightful paper, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," *Monist*, 75, 2 (1992), reprinted in Light, Andrew and Holmes Rolston III (2003), *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 131-142. (Page numbers in subsequent notes are from this anthology.) In this passage, O'Neill sketches this plan for justifying an environmental ethic:

The most promising general strategy would be to appeal to the claim that a good human life requires a breadth of goods. ... The ethical life is one that incorporates a far richer set of goods and relationships than egoism would allow ... the recognition and promotion of natural goods as ends in themselves involves just such an enrichment. (pp. 139-40).

I have added the ideas that hope is a central requirement of a good human life and that it is sustainable only by self-transcendence.

<sup>2</sup> This definition is in two respects weaker than that of Partridge's "Why Care About the Future?" in Ernest Partridge, ed. (1981), *Responsibilities to Future Generations*, (Buffalo: Prometheus Books). According to Partridge, a person is fully self-transcendent when "(a) he regards something other than himself as good in itself and (b) when he desires the good and endurance of this "something else" for its own sake, apart from its future contingent effects on him" (*ibid.*, p. 208). First, I omit part (a). To love (and hence be self-transcendent toward) someone, one does not need to think of that person as good in herself. We can love a person simply by wanting the best for her, without having any notion of whether she is good in herself. Second, I omit "and endurance" because we

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may be self-transcendent toward an incurable sufferer for whom we think it would be a mercy to die. With these two omissions, Partridge's definition is equivalent to mine.

<sup>3</sup> When I say that an object is non-existent, I intend to speak tenselessly. Thus I hold that self-transcendence may be true even if directed toward entities that do not exist at present, provided that they will exist. (Self-transcendence toward entities that no longer exist is, I suppose, also possible, but not of any interest here.)

<sup>4</sup> “For the ends of any person, who is an end in himself, must as far as possible also be my end, if that conception of an end in itself is to have its full effect on me,” *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, German pagination 430.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Rosemary Tong (1993), *Feminine and Feminist Ethics* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth), chs. 5 and 6.

<sup>6</sup> The principle is: “*treat those individuals who have inherent value in ways that respect their inherent value.*” (emphasis in original); Tom Regan (2004), *The Case for Animal Rights*, updated and with a new preface (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 248.

<sup>7</sup> The principle is: “the interests of every being affected by an action are to be taken into account and given the same weight as like interests of any other being.” Peter Singer (1990), *Animal Liberation*, rev. ed., (New York: Avon Books), p. 5. To give an interest weight is to value its fulfillment not merely as a means, but as an end.

<sup>8</sup> Regan, *ibid.*, ch. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Classic sources are: Holmes Rolston III (1988), *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), ch. 3; and Paul Taylor (1986), *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, (Princeton:

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Princeton University Press), ch. 2. See also the exchange between Rolston and Ernest Partridge in Louis P. Pojman (1997), *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth), pp. 81-92; O'Neill, *ibid.*, pp. 137-8; and [Reference to Author's Work Deleted].

<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere, however, I have argued all autopoietic entities do and that these include species. [Reference to Author's Work Deleted] For doubts about ecosystems, see Harley Cahen (1988), "Against the Moral Considerability of Ecosystems," *Environmental Ethics* 10, 3, pp. 196-216; reprinted in Light and Rolston, *ibid.* (Page numbers in subsequent notes are from this anthology.)

<sup>11</sup> [Reference to Author's Work Deleted]

<sup>12</sup> Arne Naess, for example, defines identification as a condition in which "*the interest or interests of another being are reacted to as our own interest or interests*" (emphasis in original). "Identification as a Source of Deep Ecological Attitudes," in Michael Tobias ed. (1984), *Deep Ecology* (San Marcos, CA: Avant Books), especially p. 261. Similarly, Warwick Fox in *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 249-50, writes that in personally identifying with various entities "we experience these entities as part of 'us,' as part of our identity. An assault upon their integrity is an assault upon our integrity."

<sup>13</sup> We may, of course hope for things that are not good—a cigarette, for example, or the suffering and humiliation of those whom we despise. But insofar as we hope for such things they or some aspect of them will seem good to us. Otherwise our attitude is mere desire.

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<sup>14</sup> This is an oversimplification, accurate only if the expected probability and goodness do not vary over the time envisioned by the hope; that is, if they are constants. For a more explicit account of what I have in mind, I offer the following mathematical model. (It is only a model, and hence not to be taken too seriously, since it unrealistically assumes that the anticipated goodness, likelihood and duration of the object-state have numerical values.) Let  $p$  be some moment (e.g., the present) at which one is hoping for an object-state  $s$ , and let  $t$  be any later moment. Then the *momentary expected value*  $v_s(t)$  of  $s$  at  $t$  is the assessed goodness of  $s$  at  $t$  multiplied by the assessed likelihood of  $s$  at  $t$ , both estimated from the perspective of  $p$ . Clearly  $v_s(t)$  can be non-zero only for times  $t$  at which one hopes that  $s$  will occur. Then the magnitude at  $p$  of hope for  $s$  is given by:

$$\int_p^{\infty} v_s(t) dt.$$

<sup>15</sup> This assumes that the hopes are individuated in such a way that they do not “overlap.”

<sup>16</sup> Assuming, of course, that I want to live!

<sup>17</sup> Believers in personal immortality should add to this example the stipulation that the only authentic goods the person values (if any) are the *mortal* goods of her *mortal* self. Of course if there is no personal survival or if there is but she thoroughly misconceives its goods, then no such stipulation is necessary. Whatever she values regarding her immortal self is in that case not an authentic good at all. I will say a bit more about immortality below in the section entitled “Hope for Eternal Goods.” There is also a sense in which a relational self might survive death. But relational selves are self-transcendent and the person of this example is not.

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<sup>18</sup> John O'Neill (1993) argues, to the contrary, that what happens after death can benefit or harm us. (See "Future Generations; Present Harms," *Philosophy* 68, 263, pp. 35-51.)

But his argument, while cogent, assumes our self-transcendence and hence is not applicable to the case at issue here. The actions of future generations may, he asserts, determine whether our projects succeed or fail; thus they may benefit or harm us. But this is true because those projects aim for communal goods—such as, for example, the preservation of institutions or the progress of science. Someone who values as ends no authentic goods apart from her own has no projects aimed at communal goods. See also Levenbook, B. (1984) "Harming Someone after his Death," *Ethics* 94, pp. 407-19.

<sup>19</sup> She has acquired the hope because (1) given her self-transcendence, she values the realization of her lover's good even after her death and (2) believes this to be possible, which two conditions are sufficient for her hoping that her lover fares well after her death. This hope is, moreover, satisfiable, because (we have assumed) it is possible that that her lover will outlive her and (since her self-transcendence is true) she conceives the lover's authentic goods fairly accurately.

<sup>20</sup> Provided, of course, that the goods that we hope for are possible, but this condition is usually not difficult to meet.

<sup>21</sup> Thoreau, Henry David, *Walden*, in Joseph Wood Krutch, ed. (1981) *Walden and Other Writings*, (New York: Bantam), p. 111.

<sup>22</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession*, Section IV, in John Bayley, ed. trans. Alymer Maude (1978) *The Portable Tolstoy* (New York: Viking Penguin), pp. 666-731; the quotation is from p. 681.

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<sup>23</sup> I have in mind here something like von Neumann machines—robot probes designed to colonize the universe. See, for example, Frank Tipler (1994) *The Physics of Immortality* (New York: Doubleday), ch. II.

<sup>24</sup> Thanks to my daughter, [Name Deleted], for raising this objection.

<sup>25</sup> Erazim Kohak, for example, advocates what I take to be such a view in *The Embers and the Stars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>26</sup> An anthropocentric view is one that sees all value as value for human beings.