

KANT ON THE VALUE OF NATURE

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ABSTRACT •

I set out a Kantian account of the value of nature. My proposal is motivated by Kant's teleological conception of nature. In the «Critique of Teleological Judgement», Kant shows that our conception of nature is fundamentally informed by an analogy with reason. I argue that our practical relationship with nature must be guided by the same analogy: we must regard nature as if it had value as an end in itself, and we must regard ourselves as if we were obligated towards it. On my Kantian account, the value of nature is thus independent of its usefulness for human beings and yet essentially tied to the value of reason. I take my account to be based on ideas Kant is explicitly committed to, even though it is not fully developed by Kant himself.

KEYWORDS • KANT, VALUE OF NATURE, ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS, ANTHROPOCENTRISM, BIOCENTRISM

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most fundamental questions of environmental ethics is the question of whether nature has unconditional value. It is closely connected with a second, the question of whether human beings have obligations to protect their natural environment. The answer to these questions standardly attributed to Kant is as clear as it is notorious: the sole locus of unconditional value is the rational being. And since human beings are the only rational creatures on earth, they are also the only creatures that have unconditional value. Non-human nature has only relative worth, and human beings have no obligation towards it. Any duty to protect nature must therefore be grounded in concerns for humans and not for nature itself.

The answer thus attributed to Kant should be deeply dissatisfying to anyone concerned about the relationship between humans and nature. Kant's ethics would suggest an unhealthy anthropocentrism, a position that regards human beings as the only holders of unconditional value and nature as valuable only insofar as it fulfils

human ends. But it is precisely the thought that nature can be used and exploited for our purposes that seems to fuel the environmental crisis. What would be needed instead, one might suggest, is a commitment to biocentrism, an attitude towards nature that extends value from human beings to all living creatures and, perhaps, to nature as a whole. Given the existential importance of climate breakdown, species extinction and other environmental threats, the purely instrumentalist conception of the value of nature thus ascribed to Kant would seem gravely unfit for the 21st century.

In this paper I set out a Kantian response to this critique. I develop and extend my earlier proposal for a Kantian approach to environmental ethics¹ and discuss two objections that may be raised against it. My proposal is motivated by Kant's analogical conception of nature. In the «Critique of Teleological Judgement», Kant shows that we must construe organisms, and ultimately nature as a whole, in analogy with reason as purposively organised and goal-directed. I argue that our practical relationship with nature must be guided by the same analogy: we must regard nature in analogy with reason as if it had value as an end in itself, and we must regard ourselves as if we were obligated towards it. I thus show that, with Kant, we can attribute a value to nature that, on the one hand and against anthropocentrism, is independent of its usefulness for human beings, and that, on the other hand and against straightforward biocentrism, is essentially tied to the value of reason. I take this response to be based on ideas Kant is explicitly committed to, even though it is not fully developed by Kant himself.

The plan is as follows. I begin, in the next section, by spelling out why some critics have found Kant's moral philosophy objectionably anthropocentric, and by discussing the attempt to defend Kant against this criticism by foregrounding the moderate nature of his anthropocentric commitments. I argue that this response goes some way towards answering Kant's critics but that it does not go far enough. In Section 3, I spell out my alternative proposal for a Kantian response. I address two objections to my proposal in Section 4, one concerning its biocentric commitments, the other its analogical approach. I conclude in Section 5 by suggesting ways in which my proposal may be developed further.

2. MODERATE KANTIAN ANTHROPOCENTRISM

Kant famously ties unconditional value to the capacity of reason and, with that, to human agents. As he argues in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, only actions that are grounded in principles of reason have unconditional value. But none of the things commonly regarded as valuable such as «power, riches, honour, even health and the entire well-being and contentment with one's condition, under the name of

¹ See A. BREITENBACH, *Die Analogie von Vernunft und Natur: Eine Umweltphilosophie nach Kant*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2009; *Umweltethik nach Kant: Ein analogisches Verständnis vom Wert der Natur*, «Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie», LVII, 2009, pp. 377-395

happiness» (GMS, AA IV 393, 15)² can be considered good unconditionally. The value of these things is relative to the interests and desires of particular agents. Unconditional value, by contrast, is independent of the preferences of particular individuals. Actions have unconditional value only if their maxims can be followed by all, no matter what their preferences might be. Only maxims of this kind are principles of reason, and only maxims of this kind ground actions of unconditional worth.

Kant holds, moreover, that we can ascribe unconditional value not only to actions that are based on principles of reason, but also to beings who are capable of such actions. Human beings have the capacity of reason and thus have unconditional value. They are ends in themselves, and we have the duty not to use them purely as means for the realisation of our own ends. Kant expresses this idea in his most fundamental moral law, the Categorical Imperative: «so act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means» (GMS, AA IV 429, 87). On Kant's account, we are thus obligated towards persons because, as human beings with the capacity of reason, they are ends in themselves.

The tight connection between unconditional value, moral obligation, and the capacity of reason has important implications for the place of nature in Kant's moral theory. Kant's ethics is undeniably anthropocentric: «the subject that is bound, as well as the subject that binds, is always the *human being only*» (MS, AA VI 418f., 544)³ is his unequivocal position in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. But one may worry that, as the human being stands at the centre, non-human nature can only ever remain at the periphery of our moral considerations. Non-human nature, even living beings that lack reason, have only relative worth. As Kant puts it, they have a «*market price*», which can be compared and traded against «something else, as its *equivalent*» (GMS, AA IV 434, 97). As a consequence, some have charged Kant with speciesism. In line with similar worries about racism and sexism, they have accused him of the «unjustified preference for the human species over other species, or even other parts of the natural environment».⁴ As Martha Nussbaum puts it, Kant's side-lining of non-human animals is the unfounded result, of «his own particular conceptions of moral

² Translations are from I. KANT, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A German-English Edition*, hrsg. M. Gregor and J. Timmermann, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

³ Translations are from I. KANT, *Practical Philosophy*, hrsg. und übers. von M. Gregor, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

⁴ See O'Neill's definition of speciesism in O. O'NEILL, *Environmental Values, Anthropocentrism and Speciesism*, «Environmental Values», VI, 1997, pp. 127-142; p. 128. For a critique of the speciesist implications of Kant's ethics, see A. BROADIE, E. M. PYBUS, *Kant's Treatment of Animals*, «Philosophy», XLIX, 1974, pp. 375-383; J. SKIDMORE, *Duties to Animals: The Failure of Kant's Moral Theory*, «The Journal of Value Inquiry», XXXV, 2001, pp. 541-559; M. NUSSBAUM, *Frontiers of Justice: Disabilities, Nationality, Species Membership*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2006; R. HURSTHOUSE, *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, in *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, ed. by R. L. Walker and P. J. Ivanhoe, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 155-171; P. SINGER, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals*, updated edition, New York, Random House, 2009.

obligation and of humanity, according to which the capacity for moral rationality is essential for ethical status».⁵

Among Kant's defenders, it is common to respond to this critique by highlighting the moderate and benign nature of Kant's anthropocentrism. According to this response, Kant's anthropocentric approach has many anti-speciesist implications. Even if it cannot ground a comprehensive anti-speciesism, it delivers the right response to serious environmental threats and even accounts for our feeling of obligation towards other creatures. I call this response 'Moderate Kantian Anthropocentrism'.

Moderate Kantian Anthropocentrism comes in many forms, but it commonly makes at least one of two claims: first, Kant's anthropocentrism grounds obligations concerning nature that follow from duties to fellow humans; and, second, Kant's anthropocentrism implies obligations that appear to be duties to non-human nature but that are really duties to ourselves. According to the first claim, the fact that human beings are dependent on the natural environment for their survival and for the satisfaction of their needs is sufficient, on Kant's account, to ground human duties vis-à-vis nature.⁶ For instance, it can justify the rejection of transport policies that lead to air pollution and, thereby, to an increase of respiratory and lung diseases in the human population; or of energy policies that enhance climate change and thereby threaten to make parts of the world uninhabitable for humans; or of agricultural methods if these methods irreversibly damage soils and thereby endanger the crops necessary for the survival of human generations. Our obligations to fellow humans generate duties not to destroy the natural environments they depend on. As Onora O'Neill puts it, on Kant's account, «it is wrong to destroy or damage the underlying reproductive and regenerative powers of the natural world because such damage may inflict systematic or gratuitous injury... on some or on many agents».⁷ Moderate Kantian Anthropocentrism thus claims that we have obligations to protect our natural environment, even though the ultimate reason for such protection is the unconditional value of the human being.

According to the second claim of Moderate Kantian Anthropocentrism, Kant has more to say about the fact that we *feel* obligated vis-à-vis non-human

⁵ NUSSBAUM, *Frontiers of Justice*, p. 330, see also M. NUSSBAUM, *Beyond "Compassion and Humanity": Justice for Nonhuman Animals*, in *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions*, ed. by M. Nussbaum and C. Sunstein, New York, 2004, pp. 299-320.

⁶ The following take different argumentative routes to a position of this kind: O'NEILL, *Environmental Values, Anthropocentrism and Speciesism and Kant on Duties Regarding Non-Rational Nature*; V. GERHARDT, *Das Prinzip der Verantwortung. Zur Grundlegung einer ökologischen Ethik. Eine Entgegnung auf Hans Jonas*, in *Recht und Natur. Beiträge zu Ehren von Friedrich Kaulbach*, hrsg. von V. Gerhardt, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1992, pp. 103-131; L. DENIS, *Kant's Conception of Duties Regarding Animals: Reconstruction and Reconsideration* «History of Philosophy Quarterly» 17, 2000, pp. 405-423; A. M. ESSER, *Eine Ethik für Endliche. Kants Tugendlehre*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstadt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2004, pp. 348ff.; A. BREITENBACH, *Kant Goes Fishing. Kant and the Right to Property in Environmental Resources* «Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences» 36, 2005, pp. 488-512; M. LUCHT, *Does Kant Have Anything to Teach Us about Environmental Ethics?* «American Journal of Economics and Sociology» 66, 2007, pp. 127-49; and Kain (2010) P. KAIN, *Duties regarding animals*, In *Kant's Metaphysics of Morals: A Critical Guide*, hrsg. von L. Denis, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 210-33.

⁷ O'NEILL, *Environmental Values, Anthropocentrism and Speciesism*, p. 137.

animals and even non-animal nature.⁸ Kant recognises that we commonly think and speak as if we had moral duties towards nature. But he argues that, on closer inspection, this way of speaking must be recognised as illusory: we have the propensity to take «what is a human being's duty to himself for a duty to other beings» (MS, AA VI 442, 563). What may appear to be a duty to nature will turn out to be a duty to ourselves. Kant explains this qualification further in the *Metaphysics of Morals*:

With regard to the animate but nonrational part of creation, violent and cruel treatment of animals is [...] opposed to a human being's duty to himself, and he has a duty to refrain from this; for it dulls his shared feeling [*Mitgefühl*] of their suffering and so weakens and gradually uproots a natural predisposition that is very serviceable to morality in one's relations with other people. (MS, AA VI 443, 564)

Kant here condemns the killing or injuring of animals not because of the harm it inflicts on them but because of the effects it has on the human agent. Although the cruel treatment of animals cannot itself be denounced morally it would have a negative effect on the ability to feel sympathy towards the suffering of others. Indirectly such behaviour would weaken, and ultimately thwart, our natural propensity to meet others with help and kindness. But since developing the ability to the «shared feeling of the... suffering» (MS, AA VI 443, 564) of others is a duty to ourselves, cruelty to animals would thus conflict with the direct duties we have towards ourselves.

Kant here seems to assume that we regard animals as in some sense analogous to human beings. In his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, he argues: «since the animals are analogues of humanity, we observe duties towards humanity when we observe those [duties] towards analogues and we thereby further our duty towards humanity».⁹ Treating animals cruelly would thus be a violation of an analogue of the duty to other human beings. Kant concludes:

Even gratitude for the long service of an old horse or dog (just as if they were members of the household) belongs *indirectly* to a human being's duty *with regard to* these animals; considered as a *direct* duty, however, it is always only a duty of the human being *to himself* (MS, AA VI 443, 564).

Proponents of Moderate Kantian Anthropocentrism have pointed out, furthermore, that for Kant it is not only the cruel treatment of animals that violates duties to oneself. A similar affront would be the «wanton destruction of what is *beautiful* in inanimate nature» (*ibid.*). By violating inanimate nature a person would act against, and therefore weaken, her ability to feel sympathy for something independently of whether this thing may be of use to her or not. She would threaten the propensity

⁸ For example, J. TIMMERMANN, *When the Tail Wags the Dog: Animal Welfare and Indirect Duty in Kantian Ethics* «Kantian Review» 10, 2005, pp. 128-149 and T. SVOBODA, *Duties Regarding Nature: A Kantian Approach to Environmental Ethics* «Kant Yearbook» 4, 2012, pp. 143-63.

⁹ I. KANT, *Vorlesung zur Moralphilosophie*, hrsg. von W. Stark, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2004, p. 345 (my translation).

«to love something... even apart from any intention to use it» (*ibid.*). But this capacity, just like the propensity to feel sympathy for those who suffer, helps us, according to Kant, to act morally. We have the duty to protect and preserve non-human nature because violating it would threaten what Kant regards as the most valuable aspect of human nature, reason and our capacity for moral action. Kant thus condemns both the cruel treatment of animals and the wanton destruction of inanimate nature not because this would conflict with duties we have towards nature itself but because it would indirectly threaten our own moral character.

Proponents of Moderate Kantian Anthropocentrism have taken these two strands in Kant's thinking as evidence for the non-speciesist implications of Kant's moral philosophy.¹⁰ They have concluded that Kant's moderate anthropocentrism is compatible with many environmentalist demands: on Kant's account, non-human nature directly merits our concern, even though our duty to treat nature decently is a duty to rational beings, our fellow humans or ourselves. And, indeed, Kant's anthropocentric approach is sufficient, as Kant's defenders contend, to rule out many environmentally dangerous practices that are deeply embedded in our lives including the way we travel, heat or cool our homes, and consume food, gadgets or fashion imported from around the globe. Kant's arguments show that these practices are within the remit of morality: they concern the health, well-being, and survival of other humans, and therefore our duties to them; and they impact our propensity for moral action, and therefore our duties to ourselves.

But even if all this is granted, is this *all* there is to the value of nature and our moral obligation regarding nature? Even if, in many cases, our primary motivation for protecting the environment is a concern for human beings, are we not also sometimes concerned about nature itself? Should we reject the destruction of vast eco-systems solely because of the adverse effects such destruction would have on the persons concerned? Or shouldn't the value of those eco-systems themselves be taken into account in the moral evaluation of our actions? Similarly, should methods of intensive mass animal farming be condemned purely on the grounds that these methods would undermine the moral capacity of the humans involved? Or shouldn't we also be concerned about the harm caused to the animals and about treating them merely as a means for the production of meat? Moderate Kantian Anthropocentrism does not seem to offer a satisfying answer to these further worries. While it goes a long way towards defending Kant against the critique of speciesism, I worry that it does not go far enough.

3. ANALOGICAL KANTIAN BIOCENTRISM

I argue that we need not settle with Moderate Kantian Anthropocentrism as Kant's response to the critique of speciesism. On my reading, the key to a more robust environmentalist stance can be found in Kant's theory of natural teleology and, in particular, in his conception of organisms as natural purposes. As I'll suggest, Kant's

¹⁰ See notes 6 and 8 above.

analogical characterisation of purposes in nature makes it a particularly promising basis for a Kantian theory of environmental ethics.

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant spells out a teleological conception of organic, or «organised», nature (*KU*, AA V 372)¹¹. As he outlines there, we experience organisms as essentially distinguished by an unusual kind of organisation: an arrangement of the parts within the whole and a reciprocal interdependency between the parts. Consider, for example, a tree. Its parts seem to be determined by their function within the organism as a whole. Although the whole is made up of its parts, the roots, trunk, branches, leaves etc., the whole is not simply determined by these parts. The parts are, in turn, dependent on the tree as whole: the form and working of the roots, trunk, branches, and leaves are determined by their role in ensuring the life and survival of the organism as a whole. Moreover, the individual parts of an organism also seem to be reciprocally dependent on each other. The leaves of the tree use sunlight for the production of energy-carrying substances that are necessary for the functioning of the tree's branches, trunk and roots. The same leaves, in turn, require water and minerals, which the roots draw from the ground. In its generation and growth, and in the regeneration of its damaged parts, the tree thus displays not only a particular organisation, but also a capacity for self-organisation: the parts of an organism bring about each other, and in so doing, are dependent on the organism as a whole.

Kant makes two important claims about organisms thus characterised as organised and self-organising beings. The first is negative: organisms cannot be explained mechanically.¹² By means of mechanical laws we can explain how material parts form complex material wholes, but we cannot explain how material wholes determine their parts. Mechanical explanations do not make sense of how the parts of an organism contribute to the form and functioning of the organism as a whole.

Kant's second claim about organisms is positive: we can make sense of living beings in teleological terms, as having a purposive internal organisation and as striving for the existence and survival of the organism as a whole. This second, positive claim is complex. The concept of a purpose, on Kant's account, is essentially tied to intelligent agency, to a conscious subject that intentionally sets itself an end. As Kant puts it, purposes have «a direct relation to reason» (*ÜGTP* AA VIII 182; see also *KU*, AA V 369f.).¹³ By contrast, the «general idea of nature» as «the sum of the objects of the senses» (*KU*, AA V 359) is such that «we do not assume [it] as an intelligent being» (*KU*, AA V 359). Kant is therefore quick to add that we have no reason to expect to encounter purposiveness as an objective feature of nature. A more and more detailed investigation will lead us to a more and more detailed

¹¹ Translations from the *KU* are my own.

¹² See A. BREITENBACH, *Mechanical Explanation of Nature and its Limits in Kant's Critique of Judgment* «Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences» 37, 2006, pp. 694-711.

¹³ My translation. This assumption has been criticized. H. GINSBORG, *The Normativity of Nature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015 argues that, on Kant's account, natural teleology is independent of intentionality. G. TOEPFER, *Zweckbegriff und Organismus: Über die teleologische Beurteilung biologischer Systeme*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2004 argues that, pace Kant, the purposiveness of living beings should not be interpreted on the model of intentional agency but as a type of circular causality.

account of the causal mechanism of nature, but it will never provide evidence for any purposively acting intelligence as the origin of that mechanism. All we can observe in nature are events and processes determined by causal laws, not purposes or the end-setting activities of an intelligent mind.

What, then, grounds the teleological conception of the organisation and end-directed self-organisation that, on Kant's positive characterisation, distinguishes living beings from non-living things? Kant's answer is that we «project» (KU, AA V 360) purposiveness onto nature. We conceptualise organisms as natural purposes through «a remote analogy with our own causality in accordance with ends» (KU, AA V 375). At the heart of Kant's teleological conception of organisms thus lies an analogy with the purposiveness familiar to us from ourselves.

This analogy has often been construed as the well-known analogy with artefacts. According to the artefact analogy, living beings are like the products of intentional production.¹⁴ They are the result of the actions of an intelligent agent, just as artefacts are the realisation of the plan of an intelligent designer. The problem with this interpretation of the analogy is that Kant explicitly rejects the artefact analogy: as he puts it, «one says far too little about nature and its capacity in organised products if one calls this an *analogue of art*» (KU, AA V 374). While the parts of an artefact are purposively arranged so as to result in the finished product, they do not display the purposive striving that distinguishes living beings. The artefact analogy can therefore account only for the purposive organisation of organisms, and not for their capacity for self-organisation, their striving towards their own existence and survival. The analogy with artefacts offers an insufficient basis for Kant's teleological conception of organisms.

On my reading, Kant's teleological conception of organisms is grounded in an analogy, not with the artful products of rational activity, but with the very capacity for that activity, namely, the capacity of reason itself.¹⁵ On this reading, living beings are not like artefacts but like reason: organisms are directed at their own ends including, above all, their own continued existence, just as reason is directed at its own ends and, above all, at maintaining itself; moreover, organisms are the realisation of the purposive activity of their own interdependent parts, just as reason is a complex capacity whose parts and functions contribute to realising and maintaining the capacity of reason as a whole.¹⁶ In other words, like reason, organisms are goal-directed and, like reason, they are purposively organised so as to bring about and maintain themselves. To appreciate the teleological organisation and self-organisation of living beings on Kant's account, we must thus consider them in analogy with the «practical faculty of reason in us» (KU, AA V 375).

This characterisation of the analogy that grounds Kant's teleological conception of organisms shows that Kant's second, positive, claim is a complex one:

¹⁴ E.g. P. MCLAUGHLIN, *Kants Kritik der teleologischen Urteils kraft*, Bonn: Bouvier, 1989, p. 39; P. GUYER, *Organisms and the Unity of Science*, in *Kant and the Sciences*, hrsg. von E. Watkins, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 259-281, pp. 65ff.

¹⁵ See BREITENBACH, *Die Analogie von Vernunft und Natur*, pp. 84-108 for a more detailed interpretation of Kant's analogical conception of the organism.

¹⁶ See B XXII f. and B XXXVII f.

organisms must be construed in teleological terms; and although we cannot objectively cognise purposes in nature, such purposes must be read into nature in analogy with reason. Kant sometimes describes this analogical-teleological approach as a «heuristic» for the mechanistic investigation of nature (*KU*, AA V 411). This might lead one to misunderstand the teleological analogy as a tool that may be adopted at our own choice. But Kant is clear that our teleological construal of organisms is not optional: it is necessary in order for us to distinguish a natural being as alive at all. For instance, in order to examine the causal relations that hold between the parts of a tree, its leaves, branches and roots, we must first pick out the tree as an organised and self-organising unity that is distinct from its environment. And it is the teleological analogy with reason which enables us to do that. For Kant, the analogy with reason is thus a fundamental condition for conceiving of something as alive at all.¹⁷

Kant goes on to extend the teleological conception of organisms to larger natural complexes and, ultimately, to nature as a whole. On his account, the same analogy with reason is necessary not only for distinguishing living beings from non-living things but also for individuating larger complexes of organic and inorganic nature such as eco-systems. These more encompassing ecological systems are characterised by the interdependent relation between the individual members and by the apparently teleological directedness of the parts of the system towards the survival and stability of the system as a whole. For instance, in order to individuate a forest as a natural habitat that comprises trees, fungi, insects, birds and many other forms of life, we must regard its parts as purposively related to one another. By construing the relationship between parts of nature by analogy with the purposive directedness and systematic unity of reason, we can thus make sense of the idea of a complex system of organic nature. And, as Kant adds, by the same analogy we can ultimately identify nature as a systematic whole (see *KU*, AA V 379):

The principle of reason is appropriate for it [reason] only subjectively, i.e., as a maxim: everything in the world is good for something; nothing in it is in vain; and by means of the example that nature gives in its organic products, one is justified, indeed called upon to expect nothing in nature and its laws but what is purposive in the whole (*KU*, AA V 379).

The analogy with reason thus grounds our teleological conception of organisms, ecosystems and nature as a whole. In the following I refer to this cluster of related analogies simply as the ‘analogy between nature and reason’.

How is all this relevant to a Kantian theory of environmental ethics? My proposal is that if, as Kant argues, our understanding of nature is not reducible to causal-mechanistic claims but entails a conception of nature that is grounded in the analogy with the free activity of human reason, then this has implications for the moral status of our behaviour towards the natural environment. The basic thought is

¹⁷ In A. BREITENBACH, *Teleology in Biology: A Kantian Approach* «Kant Yearbook» 1, 2009, pp. 31-56 I show that it is this foundational feature of Kant’s teleological conception of organisms that makes his position compatible with evolutionary theory.

this: since we have to construe living nature as purposive in analogy with reason, and hence in analogy with an end in itself, we also have to treat nature as if it were such an end. On pain of contradiction, the same analogy that guides our theoretical approach to non-human nature must also ground our actions: we ought to treat nature «always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means» (*GMS*, AA IV 429; 87). We must extend the scope of the Categorical Imperative by analogy to include non-human animals, non-animal organisms, and even ecosystems and nature as a whole. Not only rational beings, but all those parts of nature that must be construed in analogy with reason, ought to be treated as if they were ends in themselves.

On my reading, a Kantian response to the charge of speciesism thus finds support in Kant's teleological conception of nature. Since, first, we have to view nature in analogy with reason as purposively striving for its own ends, we also, second, have to consider it, again in analogy with reason, as an end in itself. By implication, third, we have to think of ourselves, again by the same analogy, as having obligations towards non-rational nature just as we are obligated towards rational creatures. If we follow this line of argument, we need not settle with Moderate Kantian Anthropocentrism but can embrace what I refer to as 'Analogical Kantian Biocentrism'.

4. TWO OBJECTIONS

Analogical Kantian Biocentrism may be criticized along at least two dimensions: its biocentric commitments and its analogical approach. One might argue that in attributing a form of biocentrism to the chief proponent of anthropocentrism the reading claims too much. And one might worry that in grounding the value of nature in nothing more than an analogy the reading achieves too little. I address both objections in turn.

First, in light of Kant's explicit anthropocentric commitments one may well be sceptical about the attempt to attribute to Kant a form of biocentrism. One might worry that, even if the suggested biocentrism is supported by the text, as I have argued in the previous section, it is nevertheless at odds with core Kantian commitments. In response to this first objection, I argue that because the biocentrism I have suggested is based on an analogy with reason, it is compatible with Kant's explicit anthropocentric – or, more properly, *logocentric* – commitments.¹⁸ More precisely, it is compatible with the view that only reason is the seat of value, but it adds that attributions of reason and value must be extended by analogy to non-human nature. To bring out the distinctive features of my reading, I compare it with two non-analogical forms of biocentrism.

The first is Paul Taylor's straightforward biocentric account, according to which the value of nature is derived from factual claims informed by biology.

¹⁸ See A. WOOD, *Kant on Duties Regarding Non-Rational Nature I* «Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume» 72, 1998, pp. 189-210.

According to Taylor, organisms are «teleological centres of life» that «have a good of their own».¹⁹ By this he means that there are biological and environmental conditions that benefit or harm the organism. From this Taylor infers the value of organic nature: all organisms can be regarded as striving towards their own good and, thus, as valuable from their own perspective. And since, according to Taylor, there is no reason to take the human perspective as the only valid criterion of value judgments, all organisms have the same intrinsic value, and humans are obligated to preserve and promote such value.

Taylor's account has to answer the central question of what grounds the inference of the value of nature, understood in a prescriptive or moral sense, from the good of nature, understood in a descriptive or biological sense. On Taylor's account, the value of the biological good of non-human organisms should be judged by «standards derived from *their* good.»²⁰ This 'good' refers to the biological conditions advantageous to the life of the organism. But by the 'standards' to be derived from this good Taylor means standards from which to judge the intrinsic, normative value of these biological conditions. How are we to derive these 'standards' of value from the biological knowledge that certain conditions are more advantageous to the survival of an organism than others? We can do this only if we presuppose that the life and survival of the organism, to which certain biological conditions provide the means, have intrinsic value. But that they have such value is precisely what the argument set out to prove. Even if we agree with Taylor that the value of an organism should not be judged purely from the human perspective, this by itself is not sufficient for showing that each organism has inherent worth.

Analogical Kantian Biocentrism does not fall prey to the same problem, since it does not attempt to ground the value of nature in anything other than the value of reason. On my reading, we do not infer the value of nature from descriptive claims about nature. We infer it from a conception of nature that is already normative because it is grounded in an analogy with reason. In this sense, Kant's conception of natural teleology is stronger than Taylor's: on Kant's account, what is projected onto nature when it is considered organised and self-organising is the free and purposive activity of reason. It is this activity to which we ascribe unconditional value in our moral considerations. By judging something as an organism, we therefore regard it by analogy with something that we simultaneously regard as an end in itself. From here it is a short step to the claim that we must also *treat* the organism as if it were an end in itself.

Hans Jonas proposes another non-analogical form of biocentrism, which construes the teleology of nature as a normative element distinctive of the «inner character» of nature.²¹ On Jonas' account, to say that an organism strives for its own good, is not simply to describe biological processes but to imply that there is something about the organism's good which is such that it ought to be brought about.

¹⁹ P. TAYLOR, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 119 and p. 66.

²⁰ TAYLOR, *Respect for Nature*, p. 131.

²¹ H. JONAS, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, Chicago 1984 (German 1979), p. 71.

On Jonas' account, the goal-directed processes we seem to observe in nature *could* be described in terms of natural causes and effects, but this causal description would be a methodological abstraction. A description of the true character of nature would have to include goal-directedness as a real quality of nature itself. By contrast with Taylor, Jonas does not infer the value of nature from descriptive facts about nature. The move from nature's purposes to its values, is direct: because nature is inherently normative, it incorporates a value that is independent of any instrumental ends; it is an end in itself.²²

The central question for Jonas' account is how the value of nature can be inherent in any constitutive characterisation of nature itself. Jonas relies on a conception of value that defenders of Kant have rightly found suspect, a value mysteriously grounded in nature itself.²³ But without a satisfactory defence of Jonas' conception of normative ontology his teleological conception of nature seems to presuppose what must be shown: that nature is purposive and, hence, has moral value.

Analogical Kantian Biocentrism avoids this problem, too. On my reading, Kant's advantage over Jonas is that he construes the teleology of nature as analogical. In this sense, Kant's conception of natural teleology is weaker than that of Jonas: unlike Jonas, Kant does not argue for the existence of purposes as an inherent part of the ontology of nature but construes nature as purposive only by analogy with reason. As a result, the conclusion the Kantian argument yields, too, is weaker than Jonas' conclusion. In contrast with Jonas, Kant does not attribute any normative qualities to nature itself. Instead, on Kant's account, we have to view and treat nature as if it had unconditional value. Analogical Kantian Biocentrism thus asks us to reflect about the purposiveness and value of nature in analogy with human reason without making purposes and values real qualities in the natural world.

My reading thus avoids problems that beset other forms of biocentrism. It can hold on to the key Kantian idea that value is grounded in reason, while extending such value, by analogy, from rational beings to nature. This suggests that, contrary to the first objection, Analogical Kantian Biocentrism does not claim too much in attributing a form of biocentrism to Kant. However, this response to the first difficulty leads me to a second: is what was presented as the specific strength of my account not in fact its central weakness? More specifically, is the analogical approach I have proposed sufficient for ascribing unconditional value to nature, and for grounding moral obligations towards nature?

I offer two sets of comments in response. First, one might worry that the analogy between nature and reason is not strong enough to generate the desired conclusion. One might argue that it is not strong enough because it does not attribute to organisms the capacity for deliberation and dialogue that we are familiar with from human beings endowed with reason. One might point out, furthermore, that on Kant's account, value and obligation require precisely such deliberation and dialogue:

²² JONAS, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, p. 78.

²³ See O'NEILL, *Environmental Values, Anthropocentrism and Speciesism* and C. KORSGAARD, *Fellow Creatures: Our Obligations to the Other Animals*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018.

in Kant's ethics, the morality of an action has to do with the possibility that all others could in principle act on the same maxim. All those to whom I have duties are obligated in the same way. All rational agents are part of the kingdom of ends, a system in which actions and responses must be negotiated and coordinated. But if non-human nature does not have the capacity to deliberate or communicate, but can only be regarded by «a remote analogy» (KU, AA V 375) with reason, must we not infer that non-human organisms cannot really be part of «all others» who stand under the same laws as we do? Must we not conclude that non-human nature can never be a member, let alone an equal member, of the kingdom of ends?

In response to this worry, I argue that the analogy between nature and reason allows for disanalogies, just as any analogy does. More specifically, I argue that the disanalogies just pointed to do not invalidate Kant's analogy. Take the analogy between organisms and reason. It picks out the identity of two types of relation: it claims that the interdependent relation between the parts of the organism is the same as the purposive relation between the components of our practical capacity of reason; and it maintains that the goal-directed relation between the parts of the organism and the organism as a whole is identical to the end-directed relation between the component parts of reason and reason as a whole. On Kant's account, it is this analogy that sheds light on the peculiar teleological nature of organisms. More specifically, it is *only* this analogy that makes the special character of organisms accessible to us. Even an organism without the capacity to deliberate or communicate is thus one we can make sense of only with the help of the analogy with reason. In our analogical reflections about nature, even unconscious nature, we thus already consider nature in analogy with something that is regarded as an end in itself. We can therefore infer that we have to view nature, again in analogy with reason, as an end. No further premise is needed in order to conclude that we consider nature as if it had unconditional value. The fact that nature and reason have other differentiating properties does not lead to the break-down of the analogy. Rather, if we want to be consistent in our thinking and acting vis-à-vis nature we have to judge nature both in our theoretical and practical considerations in analogy with reason.

It is worth comparing this response with Christine Korsgaard's non-analogical Kantian attempt to accord non-human nature moral standing. According to Korsgaard, animals by nature aim for what is good for them. On Korsgaard's account, by pursuing their own good, animals «necessarily» take their own good to be good absolutely and, thereby, take themselves as ends in themselves.²⁴ As Korsgaard puts it, «that is simply animal nature, since an animal just is a being that takes its own functional good as the end of action».²⁵ Korsgaard admits that not all animals do this consciously or intentionally, as we rational beings do; but she argues they all do it to the extent of which they are capable. Via her constructivist account, Korsgaard then takes this teleological conception of animal nature to be the basis of the value of animals. This is because, she argues, there is no relevant difference between my or your perspective or that of any other rational being, and the

²⁴ KORSGAARD, *Fellow Creatures*, p. 137.

²⁵ KORSGAARD, *Fellow Creatures*, p. 146.

perspective of any other creature that values itself. It follows, she argues, that I must recognise not only my and your or any other rational being as having value as an end in itself, but also any other creature that values itself by pursuing its own good. Because all animals value themselves as ends in themselves, and their valuing is no less important than mine, I must value them as ends in themselves. All animals thus have a moral claim on us.

The difficulty with Korsgaard's account is that it is unclear why we should accept that the way in which animals pursue their own goods is a way of taking those goods as goods absolutely and, thereby, a way of taking themselves as ends in themselves. Is the fly that flies towards my lunch really taking itself to be an end in itself, albeit not consciously or intentionally? Moreover, even if we grant Korsgaard this point, it is unclear why this kind of valuing is enough for us to attribute the status of an end in itself to the fly. Isn't the fact that the fly's pursuit of food is not conscious or intentional enough of a difference to take our valuing, but not the fly's, as indicative of end-in-itself status?²⁶

On my reading, and by contrast with Korsgaard's, organisms need not be construed as actually valuing themselves as ends in themselves. By contrast, goal-directedness is read into non-human nature only by analogy. Nor is the organisms' valuing themselves as ends in themselves the basis for *our* valuing them as ends in themselves. Instead, according to Analogical Kantian Biocentrism, it is because we can only conceive of nature by analogy with something that we regard as an end in itself that we must also treat nature as if it were such an end. The analogy with the free and practical capacity of reason is built into our conception of nature, even unconscious and non-intentional nature, and, for that reason, must also guide our practical action towards nature. Moreover, in allowing for disanalogies, the analogy between nature and reason has the advantage that it allows for differences in response to different parts of nature. The analogy implies that we must regard non-rational nature as if it were an end in itself and as if it had a claim on us, without implying that all parts of nature ought to be treated equally.

This leads me to a second comment in response to the objection that my proposal does not achieve enough in grounding the value of nature by analogy. One might worry that a theory of environmental ethics that justifies only an analogical ascription of value to nature could not deal with conflicts between the interests of humans and those of their natural environment. Human beings, so the objection may run, are after all considered really and not merely analogically to be ends in themselves and to have intrinsic value. In case of conflict between the interests of humans and those of nature, would not the real value of humans always take priority over the purely analogical value of nature?²⁷

In response, it is worth reflecting on the status of analogies. What is important is that the analogy with reason does not lead to any determinate ascription

²⁶ Similar questions are raised in more detail by J. BIRCH, *Review Essay: The Place of Animals in Kantian Ethics* «Biology & Philosophy» 35, 2020, pp. 1-11; and A. CHIGNELL, *Book Review: Fellow Creatures: Our Obligations to the Other Animals by Christine M. Korsgaard* «Mind» 130, 2020, pp. 363-373.

²⁷ This problem is made worse by the fact that there are inevitable conflicts between species. Compare Korsgaard's discussion of the problem (KORSGAARD, *Fellow Creatures*, p. 154).

of purpose or value to nature. But it does compel us to reflect on nature as if it were an end in itself, and thus as if it had a claim on us. It does not lead us to know nature as an end. But it guides the way we distinguish living from inanimate nature and ecosystems from haphazard structures. It does not lead us to know nature as having intrinsic value. But it guides us in acting as if it had. I believe this guiding function of the analogy is sufficient and appropriate for practical purposes. And it does not ground any important differences from value ascriptions to fellow humans. Their value is not the object of determinate knowledge claims, and yet we do recognise their value as a feature of our practical lives; it determines how we ought to act towards other persons.

More generally, analogies are not unusual in ethics. Much of our beliefs about the rational, free and purposive activity of ourselves and other human beings is based on analogical reflection. On the one hand, we often recognise actions as purposive and as based on reason by comparing them with the actions we are familiar with from ourselves. On the other hand, much of what we know about ourselves, about our capacity for purposive action and reasoning, is known by analogy with our experiences of, and interactions with, other agents.²⁸ Our own rational capacity, we might thus argue, is less the object of introspective knowledge and more properly understood by the use of analogies with others.²⁹ But if analogies are important for understanding the capacity of reason in ourselves and others, then the use of analogical reflection should be no specific problem for a theory of environmental ethics. Although Analogical Kantian Biocentrism provides no determinate foundation for claims to the intrinsic value of nature, I therefore believe that it offers a compelling case for considering nature as if, like us, it were an end in itself.

5. CONCLUSION

I have argued that, on Kant's account, our conception of nature is fundamentally informed by an analogy with reason. And I have argued that our practical relationship with nature, too, must therefore be guided by the same analogy: we must regard nature as if it had value as an end in itself, and we must regard ourselves as if we were obligated towards nature. In spelling out my proposal for this Kantian response to the speciesism critique, I hope to have shown that we must regard and treat nature as if it were an end in itself, where its value as an end in itself is essentially tied to the value of reason. There are thus good Kantian grounds for going beyond Moderate

²⁸ Kant's discussion of the *sensus communis* points to the political and social character of ascription of reason to oneself and other beings. See A 820f./B 848f.; *KpV* AA V 238f.; and *Anth* AA VII 219.

²⁹ Kant speaks, for example, of the «tribunal» of reason (A XI). O. O'NEILL, *Constructions of Reason*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 9 describes the project of a critique of reason therefore as a «reflexive and political task». See also P. KLEINGELD, *The Cognitive Character of Reason in Kant's Philosophy* «Journal of the History of Philosophy» 36, 1998, pp. 77-97. In BREITENBACH, *Die Analogie von Vernunft und Natur*, pp. 106ff., I argue, furthermore, that knowledge of our own rational capacity is not only dependent on the analogy with other agents but also, in turn, on the analogy with organisms.

Kantian Anthropocentrism and embracing Analogical Kantian Biocentrism in responding to the speciesism critique.

This conclusion will leave many questions unanswered. In particular, it does not spell out any concrete implications of my proposal for human obligations towards nature. The idea that, because we must conceive of nature by analogy with an end in itself we must treat nature always also as an end, does not yet specify what particular types of action are required of us. The analogical biocentric conception nevertheless captures a way of thinking about nature that is absent from standard interpretations of Kant: the idea that human beings are not separated from but are inherently part of nature, that they do not act against but within nature and that environmental problems should therefore be viewed not as problems of opposing interests but as problems internal to natural systems. This holistic way of thinking about the natural environment is more suitable to thinking about environmental threats than the idea that humans and nature form an opposition. And it will be more helpful to think of human responsibility towards nature not only as a responsibility to individual organisms or parts of nature, but also to the integrity and stability of ecosystems and of nature as a whole.

My proposal for an Analogical Kantian Biocentrism shows that we have reason to regard nature itself as if it had moral status. Not all considerations about the protection of nature are reducible to our concern for human beings. Although there are many anthropocentric reasons for changing the way we treat the natural world, the analogical Kantian account proposed in this paper suggests a way of articulating a more direct moral concern for nature.