

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Ethical Extensionism Defended

ABSTRACT

Ethical extensionism is a common argument pattern in environmental and animal ethics, which takes a morally valuable trait already recognized in us and argues that we should recognize that value in other entities such as nonhuman animals. I exposit ethical extensionism's core argument, argue for its validity and soundness, and trace its history to 18th century progressivist calls to expand the moral community and legal franchise. However, ethical extensionism has its critics. The bulk of the paper responds to recent criticisms, including (1) environmental ethicists' objection against its austere conception of moral value (2), feminist ethicists' claim that extensionism fails to account for the moral significance of difference, (3) disability theorists' concern that ethical extensionist arguments are offensive, and (4) animal rights theorists' lament that extensionism is a practical failure. While something is to be gained from each criticism, I argue that they ultimately fail and that extensionism remains compelling.

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Ethical extensionism takes a recognized moral value and argues that we should extend ethical recognition of that value to other entities, such as nonhuman animals. Ethical extensionism has been the main framework in the current philosophical literature on the ethical treatment of nonhuman animals, beginning with Peter Singer's seminal *Animal Liberation* (1975), which argues on utilitarian grounds that we should extend ethical consideration to nonhuman animals and fundamentally revise our relations with them because they share with humans the core morally salient trait of sentience. Recent critics claim that ethical extensionism is and should be in decline.

This paper defends ethical extensionism in response to recent critics. Ethical extensionism is theoretically powerful and answers important questions in moral philosophy. It has a long, rich history of practical success in expanding moral status and legal franchisement to the formerly marginalized. Indeed, ethical extensionism has been one of the most effective arguments to expand moral and legal communities. Yet ethical extensionism is not without critics. There is much to learn from each criticism, but I argue that they ultimately fail and that ethical extensionism remains compelling. While ethical extensionism has its limitations and there are promising alternative approaches, I will argue that alternatives are best viewed as complementary rather than mutually exclusive, for it is more fruitful to appreciate different arguments converging on the same conclusion than to engage in a divisive search for *the* best approach to such a complex issue.

More specifically, I first distinguish two forms of ethical extensionism: axiological extensionism from normative extensionism, then articulate and defend the core argument for axiological extensionism and canvas the use of axiological ex-

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tensionist arguments in progressivist advances throughout history. Finally, I consider and respond to the following objections to ethical extensionism: (a.) the environmental ethicists' worry that it contains an overly narrow conception of moral value, (b.) the feminist ethicists' claim that extensionism fails to account for the moral significance of difference in emphasizing similarity, (c.) the disability theorists' concern that axiological extension to nonhuman animals is offensive to the disabled or their loved ones, (d.) the critical animal studies' objection to the reliance on personal morality, missing the systemic nature of the problem, and (e.) the animal rights theorists' lamentation that axiological extensionism has failed to liberate animals.

I. An Analysis of Ethical Extensionism

A crucial distinction must be made at the outset because there is ambiguity in the literature as to what is being ethically extended. *Axiological extensionism* extends a conception of moral value, whereas *normative extensionism* extends a normative ethical theory beyond its traditional application. In other words, axiological extensionism takes a trait that is already recognized as morally valuable *in us* and seeks to extend the recognition of that trait and its value in other entities whose moral status was or is in question. Normative extensionism extends a traditional moral theory or theories such as utilitarianism or deontology to a new domain or upon the occasion of a new way of thinking, such as the recognition of the existence and richness of animal minds or the discovery of ecological relationships.

A few examples of ethical extensionism from the literature will prove instructive to clarify this distinction. In "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments," Thomas Hill (1983) argues that virtue theory provides a com-

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elling account of human obligations with the respect to nature. This is a pure case of normative extensionism. Hill takes a traditional moral theory, virtue ethics, and extends the theory to cover an area of newly recognized or emphasized moral importance, the treatment of the natural environment. This influential paper ushered in contemporary Environmental Virtue Ethics, including such proponents as Rosalind Hursthouse, Val Plumwood, Louke van Wensveen.

When considering whether to extend moral consideration to animals, Jeremy Bentham offers what is perhaps the most famous appeal to axiological extensionism in the history of philosophy:

The day has been, I am sad to say in many places it is not yet past, in which the greater part of the species, under the denomination of slaves, have been treated by the law exactly upon the same footing, as, in England for example, the inferior races of animals are still. The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may one day come to be recognised that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the os sacrum are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog, is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal,

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than an infant of a day or a week or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer? (Bentham 1789, Ch. 17)

Many readers will recognize Bentham as a classic proponent of utilitarianism. While true, note that his preferred *normative* theory does not enter the argument here. Rather, what's important to see is that Bentham asks the reader to engage in a series of thought experiments about what property or properties underlies the moral worth of human beings, whether animals have that underlying property or properties, and whether the presence of that property or properties should grant rights already enjoyed by (some) humans.

The most influential theories in animal ethics mix both normative extensionism and axiological extensionism, which is perhaps unsurprising. Singer extends classical utilitarian moral theory to provide a moral assessment of the treatment of animals in agricultural and experimental contexts (normative extensionism) and argues that it is because we are sentient that we have interests that matter morally, and so the moral standing of all sentient beings, including many non-human animals, must be recognized (axiological extensionism). Similarly, Regan's rights view takes a broadly sentience-based conception of moral status based in our case (axiological extensionism) and uses traditional rights theory (normative extensionism).

II. The Core Argument for Axiological Extensionism

With that distinction in place, I will now give exposition and justification of axiological extensionism to establish the view's

initial plausibility prior to engaging critics. The general idea of axiological extensionism is to establish the claim that we have direct moral obligations to a class of entities not currently recognized as entities to which we have obligations. This argumentative strategy starts with what it is about us, what morally significant property we possess, that is the basis for other moral agents' obligations to us. Then, we extrapolate from this claim about us to the claim that all entities that have this property are owed direct moral obligations, typically on the grounds of fairness, consistency, parity, etc. John Nolt helpfully provides the general logical form of axiological extensionist argument (which he calls "direct obligations to natural entities"):

1. Agents ought to V us (solely) on account of our possession of G.
2. Like cases should be treated alike (principle of parity).
3. So: Agents ought to V whatever has G. (Nolt 2006, 362)

Here, replace V with some verb about moral action, such as "value", and G with some good or valuable state such as "life". (1) asks that we introspect into our own case. (2) is a principle of parity, asking that we move from our own case to others relevantly like us. (3) follows validly from the premises. Nolt plausibly formalizes the argument as follows:

$$\text{Hmg} \ \& \ \text{Oamg}, \ \forall x \forall y ((\text{Hxg} \ \& \ \text{Hyg}) \rightarrow \forall z (\text{Ozxg} \leftrightarrow \text{Ozyg})) \vdash \forall x (\text{Hxg} \rightarrow \text{Oaxg}),$$

where Hxz is a two-place predicate meaning 'x has good z,' Oxyz is a three-place predicate meaning 'Agents ought to do action x to y'

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(solely) on account of y 's possession of good z , the name a stands for an action, and the name m stands for me or us, and the name g stands for some particular good. (Nolt 2006, 362, n. 16)

Singer's axiological argument follows this general form closely. On Singer's view, interests are morally significant by definition: "The capacity for suffering and enjoyment is *a prerequisite for having interests at all*, a condition that must be satisfied before we can speak of interests in a meaningful way" (1990, 7, emphasis original). In defense of sentience as the morally significant property for G in (1), Singer (1990, 8) argues that life is a necessary but insufficient condition for having interests, and interests expressed by our sentient states are the sole reason for which we are morally considerable. Singer (1990, 5) offers his version of the principle of parity (2), claiming that interests matter equally, regardless of which beings have them. leading him to reject speciesism because species membership is morally arbitrary. There are many similar versions of this argument in the literature (e.g. Norcross 2004).

So, the argument form is valid and has a powerful conclusion, but which arguments of this form are sound? Some version of (2) seems difficult to reject, so it comes down to (1), specifically which candidate or candidates for G is (1) true. This premise asks us to perform thought experiments about what we could omit or modify about ourselves and whether it changes our judgment that others ought to V us. Bentham seems correct that skin color, speech, the addition of limbs, body hair ("villosity of the skin"), or a tail (beyond the "termination of the os sacrum") are obviously implausible candidates for G . The most widely endorsed candidates for G amongst contemporary moral philosophers are more plausible: sentience, life, and ra-

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tionality. Each reader should perform this thought experiment for themselves. For my part, I side with the sentientists. I can remove many features about myself, even my rationality, but not my sentience. I am indifferent about what would happen to me if permanently non-sentient, such as a persistent vegetative state. This is not to say that we may do as we please with those in persistent vegetative states, embryos, corpses, etc. There may well be obligations concerning non-sentient humans to others who care about them and there may be obligations because of properties the non-sentient human once had (such concerns clearly underlie the respect with which human remains are handled). The only point being made here is that there is no value in properties currently possessed by the being.

Some maintain that simply being alive is the relevant property that obligates others. This often takes the form of a sanctity of human life view, yet hidden assumptions such as potential rationality or an external relation to a sanctifying god are often involved, for it is not solely because we are alive that we take ourselves to matter. If that were the case then the argument would also extend to parasitic botfly, *Dermatobia hominis*, the trillions of *E. coli* living in our intestines, or each individual blade of grass in an expansive meadow.

Those who maintain that rationality is the only plausible axiological extension typically do so to limit moral status to human beings (Cohen 1992). Enter the argument from marginal cases: not all humans possess rationality (the very young, the severely cognitively disabled, the senile, etc.), so unless one wishes to defend speciesism, which seems arbitrary, one faces a dilemma: either exclude non-rational humans from moral consideration, which few are willing to do, or change the relevant underlying property to sentience (or something like it),

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which inevitably extends moral consideration to some animals. We are now prepared to see how Bentham alludes to the logic of the argument from marginal cases in advancing his case for axiological extensionism above: “But a full-grown horse or dog, is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month, old.”

This argument from marginal cases goes hand in hand with advancing axiological arguments beyond the human species, especially in response to those who wish to defend a version of human supremacism, the view that all and only humans are morally considerable. Albeit brief, the preceding considerations support the claim that at least some versions of the argument for axiological extensionism are both valid and sound. It is worth tracing the history of ethical extensionist arguments to document their influence before moving to respond to criticisms of this argument.

III. The History and Pervasiveness of Axiological Extensionism

Axiological extensionist arguments have a long and rich history in surprisingly varied areas of morality. As Dan Dombrowski has rightly argued, philosophic vegetarianism, including the kind of extensionist arguments under consideration, did not begin with Singer. Indeed, it traces back as far as ancient Greece in the Western tradition, most notably in the work of Porphyry, who gave what is likely the first recorded instance of the argument from marginal cases (Porphyry 2017 and Dombrowski 1984; 1997).

Calls for progressive expansions of the human moral community often also relied on axiological extensionist arguments.

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For example, such arguments were used during the colonial period towards newly encountered groups such as Native Americans. As disgust-worthy as it is today, and without the benefit of hindsight (Abundez-Guerra and Nobis 2018), it was a genuine question for many Europeans at the time whether moral consideration should be extended to these newly encountered peoples. John Nolt documents a rough sketch of the common argumentative pattern as follows:

Beginning with some group of people (e.g., Europeans, men, Christians) whose moral worth is already recognized (by themselves, at least) as founded on certain characteristics (rationality, humanity, autonomy, intelligence, sentience, possession of an immortal soul, or the like) it is shown that members of another group (e.g., Native Americans, women, Muslims) have the relevant characteristics and hence are worthy of the same moral consideration. (Nolt 2006, 361)

The enlightenment saw an especially quick succession of ethical expansionist arguments. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), which is a best read as moral critique of the inegalitarian, aristocratic assumptions of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and a defense of republicanism and the worth of all people (Myers 1977). This was followed shortly with a parallel and similar yet apparently independent critique of Burke's *Reflections* in Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791), which defended the rights claims of all citizens to welfare on the grounds that society ought to make citizens at least not worse off or with less rights, and ought to better secure those rights, natural rights being the basis for civil rights. Two years later, Wollstonecraft (1792) argued in *A Vindication of the Rights of*

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Woman that women are humans and so deserve the same basic rights as men.

Shortly thereafter, *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* (1792) was published, satirizing the works of Paine and Wollstonecraft. The anonymous booklet, attributed to the English translator and Neoplatonist Thomas Taylor, ridiculed the idea of universal human rights on the grounds that animals' intrinsic capacities such as reasoning and emotion should entail that they, too, had rights, which Taylor thought absurd. Due to the seriousness with which scholars now engage animal rights theories, this is surely amongst the most spectacularly backfiring *reductio ad absurdum* arguments in Western intellectual history. More recently within the humanistic or anthropocentric tradition of axiological extension, there has been discussion of extending moral consideration to not-yet existing humans.

As these examples already suggest, axiological extensionism is not restricted to the animal ethics literature. The environmental ethics literature also contains extensionist appeals. Some biocentric individualists and ecological holists make extensionist arguments as well. Gary Varner argued for biocentric individualism, the view that all and only organisms are morally considerable and built an environmental ethic out this position. He assumed that all humans are morally considerable, but to adequately account for what is good (and bad) for us, we must appeal to a biological theory of welfare in addition to the more commonly held psychological theory of welfare, but in so doing, we are committed to the view that non-sentient organisms have a biological welfare, and so they are also morally considerable (Varner 1998, 55-76). It should be noted that Varner now rejects biocentrism and endorses sentientism (see Varner 2012 for details).

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Aldo Leopold, a pivotal figure in environmental ethics, makes explicit appeals to ethical extensionism. Leopold notes that the 3,000 years since Odysseus' Greece have seen a historical series of ethical extensions, and that the next step is to extend ethical consideration to the land itself, what we would now call "ecosystems" (Leopold 1949, 237-239). Leopold stresses that this is an expansion of the moral community, not an expansion of the number of rights-bearing individuals. This ecological holist's take on axiological extension is present even more fully in Roderick Frazier Nash's *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (1989), which is perhaps the first text to explicitly use the term "ethical extension."

A few additional lessons aided by some examples are in order before moving to consider and respond to objections in the next section, for they clarify much of what is at issue in the debate between ethical extensionists and their critics. First, some points about value theory. It is important to note that axiological extensionism is a general argumentative strategy (a point articulated more fully in the next section) not a commitment to any particular conception of moral considerability. In other words, the logical structure of axiological extensionism is agnostic as to the basis for extending moral consideration to other beings. Sentientism is the view that restricts "moral standing to conscious entities" (Varner 2001, 192). To put the point more explicitly, sentientism is the view that sentience—now generally understood to mean affective, phenomenal consciousness, especially of pleasure and pain, and not mere phenomenal consciousness—is both a necessary and sufficient for moral considerability. In the animal ethics literature, sentientism the most widely endorsed conception of moral considerability.

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Occasionally, a value theory and a view of moral considerability are essentially the same, such as with the austere value theory of hedonism, which holds that the only intrinsically morally valuable entities are pleasurable mental states (and the only intrinsically morally disvaluable entities are painful mental states) and that only sentient beings, the subjects of pleasure and pain, are morally considerable. However, a conception of moral considerability is seldom a comprehensive value theory. For example, most have no trouble recognizing that anthropocentrism connotes, roughly, that family of views that holds that only human beings are morally considerable yet there are a variety of views about what is intrinsically valuable to human beings including such things as rationality, family, friendship, a Kantian good will, or being in the image of a god or gods. Most important to present purposes is the point that a commitment to sentientism or any other criteria for moral considerability does not preclude various appeals to what is valuable to sentient beings.

Second, some points about normative theory clarify a common conflation. Whether any traditional moral theory is adequate in general or when extended to contemporary moral problems such as animals and the environment are overbroad questions for present purposes. It is no easy definitional matter whether recent moral theories are truly new tunes or merely riffs on old melodies. Is Andrew Light's or Erik Katz's environmental pragmatism a new ethical theory, or is it an extension of the American pragmatism of Pierce, Dewey, and James? Is Robin Attfields' biocentric consequentialism a new moral theory, or does it replace a hedonistic value theory with a biofunctionalist value theory within the generally accepted normative structures of utilitarianism? Is Tom Regan's *A Theory of Animal Rights* a new rights theory, or does it merely

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extend traditional rights theory to animals? These aren't the right questions to be asking, and answering them with an affirmation or denial seems arbitrary. In what follows, discussion is limited to axiological extensionism because most critiques of ethical extensionism address it, even when their ire is conflated with normative extensionism.

The third point concerns the relationship between the prior two. Whether and to what degree there is a relationship between the good and the right is hotly contested in metaethics, normative theory, and applied ethics (especially animal and environmental ethics) and is beyond the scope of this inquiry (see Garthoff 2015 for a helpful overview). However, a few brief comments here should suffice. Axiological arguments typically appeal to some thinly normative claims such as principles of equality or fairness in order to draw conclusions about moral action, as it defies logic to derive normative conclusions from non-normative premises. What is important to emphasize here is that such arguments do not typically make substantive appeals to comprehensive moral theories. Yet many critics of ethical extensionism assume substantive theses about the relationship, often without argument or acknowledgement, if they are distinguished at all. For example, in "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?" Richard Routley argues:

The dominant Western view [that only human beings are morally considerable] is simply inconsistent with an environmental ethic; for according to it nature is the dominion of man and he is free to deal with it as he pleases. (Routley 1973, 205)

Note how Routley's critique that anthropocentrism inadequately handles environmental issues is both axiological and

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normative and how he moves seamlessly from one to the other: only humans are morally considerable and nature is not, therefore nature is but a possession controlled by humans who have moral permission to do with it as they wish. This belies the fact that some theorists grant only humans direct moral consideration, yet hold that we have obligations concerning (but not to) nature due to non-instrumental values such as aesthetic value assigned by humans (Hargrove 1992). A criterion of moral considerability does not necessarily exhaust a comprehensive value theory or subsequent normative principles.

Lastly, it should be noted that critics of ethical extensionism are often only critics of one facet of the view. This is largely explicable due to the focus on sentience in animal ethics. In the animal ethics literature and increasingly in the general ethics literature, there is a growing tendency to circle the wagons around sentience as the criterion of moral considerability. This point cannot be stressed strongly enough, as many self-professed critics of ethical extensionism are objecting to a particular conception of moral considerability as a basis for ethical extension, not axiological extensionism generally and certainly not all forms of ethical extensionism. Indeed, such authors often use axiological extensionist arguments in making the case for their preferred criterion of moral status, as shown below. In summary, three issues are often run together under the banner “ethical extensionism”:

1. Whether traditional normative theories are adequate.
2. Whether axiological extensionist arguments in general are adequate.

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3. Whether sentientism is the correct form for axiological extension to take.

In what follows, I will be concerned with the second project of defending axiological extensionist arguments but will also tentatively advance the third project by defending sentientism in response to some criticisms of that version of axiological extensionism. The first project will be ignored for the reasons given above.

IV. Objections

Thus far, I have argued axiological extensionist arguments have been used for millennia and at least some versions of them are compelling. But they are not without their detractors. In the remainder of this paper, I will consider objections to axiological extensionism and reply to them in defense of the position. I will restrict myself to what I take to be the most important and commonly voiced objections. Each objection merits careful consideration, and I not only think that ethical extensionism survives these challenges but is the better for taking their lessons to heart.

IV.a. The Narrowness Objection in Environmental Ethics

It will be instructive to begin with what are literally the textbook objections to ethical extensionism. In the field's most prominent college-level textbook, *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*, Joseph DesJardins articulates three objections to ethical extensionism widely shared in the environmental ethics literature and occasionally beyond:

1. Ethical extensions have too narrow a conception of moral considerability because they invoke criteria for

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moral considerability that are most clearly present in adult human beings, remaining fundamentally hierarchical and “beg the question of the moral status of other living things... leaving out a majority of living species” (DesJardins 2006, 126).

2. Ethical extensions are too individualistic, leaving out “species, habitat, and relations among entities... yet so much of the science of ecology stresses the interconnectedness of nature” (*ibid.*, 126).

3. Ethical extensions do not result in comprehensive environmental ethics: “philosophers applied ethics to specific problems as the latter arose and as they were perceived, making little or no attempt to build a coherent and comprehensive theory of environmental ethics” that “provides no guidance for environmental issues such as global warming or pollution” and “remains critical and negative. It often tells us what is wrong... but seldom offers guidelines about what the alternative ‘good life’ should be” (*ibid.*, 127).

In summary, DesJardins’ claim is that sentientism is too narrow because it only attributes moral consideration to (1) sentient beings (and not all biological individuals, i.e. organisms), which are (2) individuals (and not biological wholes such as ecosystems), and (3) only addresses negative, domestic concerns such as animal agriculture and research (and is not a comprehensive environmental ethical theory that (3a) provides practical guidance for environmental problems and (3b) has a positive vision). DesJardins concludes that we must put aside philosophical approaches that begin with “a previously articulated ethical theory” (*ibid.*,127). Attentive readers with the

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axiological-normative extension distinction articulated above in mind will notice that Desjardins' three objections are all objections to axiological extensionism because his concerns all reduce to the claim that sentientism fails to extend moral value to environmental goods aside from their instrumental value to sentient beings; none of DesJardins' criticisms concern normative ethical theory.

Much can be said to defend sentientist extensionism from this series of objections. With respect to (1), and contra DesJardins, the claim that a moral theory must attribute moral consideration to non-sentient beings begs the question. We should not dictate in advance the character that our moral obligations to the environment must take. There are many plausible theories of environmental protection with widespread agreement on the basics. Furthermore, this area of philosophical inquiry is young and ripe for exploration.

Gary Varner astutely notes with respect to sentientism specifically as being a non-starter that "the inadequacy of sentientist environmental ethics has been more assumed than adequately demonstrated" in the early environmental ethics literature (Varner 2001, 192). Some have sought to cash out obligations concerning nature solely in terms of the instrumental goods of sentient animals (Singer 1979). The argument for this is that humans and other animals depend on a stable biosphere, as well as often highly localized forms of biotic and abiotic support, including their habitat, food supply, and the broader food web supporting their food supply. In other words, protecting sentient animals means protecting nearly all the world's ecosystems because all or nearly all are crucial to sentient animals.

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This argument is simple yet powerful, but many environmental philosophers, including DesJardins, object that it fails to value nature *in the right way*. Some have attempted to respond to this concern (2) by defending axiological extensionism and sentientism as the criterion of moral considerability but have endorsed richer conceptions of value beyond moral considerability; It is one thing to claim that sentience alone confers moral considerability. It is another thing entirely to claim that *only* sentient states matter morally. For example, some invoke a conception of inherent value for nature, not as an intrinsic value *discovered* in non-sentient states of affairs such as functioning ecosystems, but as objects appropriate for a sentient being to value in themselves. Dale Jamieson argues along these lines that only sentient beings are of primary value and are the source of all value, but that contents of the world, including non-sentient beings such as organisms, species, ecosystems, etc. can have derivative value from sentient beings:

The distinction that I think is useful is that between intrinsically and non-intrinsically valuing something. I speak of 'intrinsically valuing' rather than 'intrinsic value' because it makes clear that the intended distinction is in the structure of valuing rather than in the sorts of things that are valued (Jamieson 1998, 48).

This sentientist way of thinking is not exactly new. Observe the following passage in John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*:

The ingredients of happiness are very various, and each of them is desirable in itself, and not merely when considered as swelling an aggregate. [...] They are desired and desirable in and for themselves; besides being means, they are a part of the end. Virtue, according to

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the utilitarian doctrine, is not naturally and originally part of the end, but it is capable of becoming so; and in those who love it disinterestedly it has become so, and is desired and cherished, not as a means to happiness, but as a part of their happiness (Mill 1957, 46).

While now is not the place to defend this sort of view, the idea that some aspects of non-sentient nature have value that exceeds their use-value yet that value is not mind independent has some plausibility. The view also appears to be compatible with axiological extensionism, and gives environmental philosophers much of what they are looking for without ascribing value as somehow “out there” completely independently of possible experience.

While DesJardins and other environmental ethicists have insisted that ecological wholes deserve moral consideration (2), another reply is that it is far from clear that ecosystems are the sort of things that could be bearers of value in the first place. Some environmental ethics contain romanticized notions of nature as harmonious and teleologically driven, due in part to early ecological theories such as successionism. However, contemporary theoretical biology, both evolutionary and ecological, is increasingly individualistic, stressing in- and out-group competition because the empirical search for teleological organization at the level of ecosystems did not pan out (Worster 1990). It is therefore a mistake to grant moral consideration to an ecosystem because their organization is an incidental by-product, not a goal that could serve as a defensible basis for having interests and hence moral consideration (Cahan 1988). It is for philosophers to insist on *a priori* holistic ethic if the empirical evidence and resultant scientific theories are individualistic.

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DesJardins' final criticism of ethical extension is that it is not a comprehensive environmental ethics (3) nor was it intended to be. It is true that early proponents of sentientism such as Singer and Regan emphasized the poor treatment of domesticated animals, particularly in research and agriculture. This is understandable because, by their lights, these areas involve severe and systematic mistreatment of animals directly by humans. Also, it avoids the problem of too general a discussion consisting largely of platitudes. Lastly, it is odd to think that moral theories should be developed piecemeal for certain areas of inquiry such as the natural environment. All else equal, a comprehensive axiological and normative framework applied to various areas is superior to developing new theories *ex nihilo* each time a new area of moral concern opens.

Wild animals and broader questions about the natural environment are largely afterthoughts in their work. However, this has been an area of intensive research in subsequent decades, closing the gap with environmental philosophy. DesJardins' more specific claim that sentientist ethical theories can give no guidance on environmental problems such as global warming and pollution is false and best understood to be hyperbolic. Singer, for example, explicitly addresses pollution (Singer 1979). Clearly, more work can and has been done to give better guidance on environmental issues from sentientist perspectives.

DesJardins' point is nonetheless well-taken, indicating some redeemable flaws with early sentientist axiological extensionism. Singer has been called a "negative utilitarian" by emphasizing ending animal suffering rather than promoting net utility, and Regan has far more to say about how human actions violate animals' rights than a positive vision of respectful co-

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existence. This is also true of much environmental philosophy, which tells us not to pollute, not to clear-cut, not to reduce biodiversity, etc.

The environmental crises continue with anthropogenic climate change, mass extinction, unprecedented levels of animal exploitation, and a human population expected to surpass ten billion by 2050. In this light, an emphasis on stopping what we are currently doing does seem to take precedence. Self-cultivation is not a priority when the house is on fire. Also, many of us are so disconnected from nature by urbanity and technology, having lost an indigenous connection with a particular homeland, that it can appear difficult to imagine and theorize positive visions, but much recent work in animal rights theory does precisely this.

IV.b. The Objection from Difference in Feminist Philosophy

A related objection comes from feminist ethicists critical of ethical extensionism. The objection is that axiological extensionism arguments only look to similarities between humans and non-human animals. Recall how the main axiological extensionist argument begins with what we take to matter about ourselves, and then argues that we are obligated to value whatever that is in other beings.

The worry critics have is that we will fail to appreciate the moral significance of differences, especially things that are important to animals yet not important to us, when we only attend to the moral significance of similarities. Lori Gruen develops this criticism, relying on feminist criticisms of the assumption that equality and difference are opposites, and stressing what similitude misses and the importance of difference (Gruen

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2015, 16-26). She concludes her criticism of axiological extensionism (which she calls “abstract individualism”) with the claim that “too often in this abstraction, we substitute our own judgments of what is beneficial for other animals for what may in fact promote their wellbeing” (*ibid.*, 25).

Much of what Gruen has to say in this regard is on target. I add only that these matters are best understood as compliments to rather than replacements for axiological extensionist arguments. The question that axiological extensionist arguments answers is: “who (or what) matters, morally speaking?” This is a very particular sort of question to resolve a very important issue. That this question continues to need to be asked is evidenced by the billions of animals whose interests are systematically disregarded each year. It is of course wrongheaded to think that this question is the only morally salient question. After determining what beings are morally considerable, it is a mistake to presume that their interests are identical to one’s own.

Feminism, both intellectually and practically, was the better for embracing intersectionality on issues of class and especially race. Surely the same is also true for animal ethics with respect not only to integrating a variety of perspectives, but to animal ethology to discover species-typical preferences, and by attending to the interests of the particular animals we encounter in our lives. For example, flamingos like incredibly high population densities, so it is a mistake to project our human (cultural) preference for personal space onto them. We must be constantly vigilant against making mistakenly anthropomorphic projections onto animals.

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IV.c. The Offensiveness Objection in Disability Studies

Another important objection is that comparing animals and historically marginalized groups of humans is offensive. Ethical extensionists have drawn comparisons between the treatment of animals and human slavery, the Holocaust, and so-called “marginal case” human beings, i.e. the young, the old, and the cognitively disabled. For critical, enlightening discussion of these comparisons, see Spiegel (1988) for the comparison to chattel slavery, Kim (2011) for the Holocaust comparison, and Kittay (2005; 2009) for the comparisons with the mentally disabled.

This objection is important and cannot simply be dismissed with a trite “I’m sorry that you were offended,” as it would be deeply ironic if moral progress for animals came only through speech acts that gratuitously revictimize vulnerable human others. It should be stressed right away that the fact that some people are offended by a philosophical argument should not be dismissed out of hand. Empathy towards the feelings of others is central to morality. If someone routinely sought to offend others, there is something deeply questionable about their moral character and behavior, nonliteral speech acts such as some satire and humor notwithstanding.

Singer directly parallels speciesism with racism and sexism (1990, 1-9) and unabashedly compares animals with severely cognitively impaired infants (15-18, 240) in ways that are at best insensitive. There is a degree of callous detachment with which some philosophers theorize about such matters, seemingly indifferent to how this might affect readers that are people of color, Jews, and those with cognitive disabilities or those who care for them. Philosophers can and should surely be more attentive to foreseeable offenses that their speech acts

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occasion, particularly when it comes to context, tone, and word choice. Antiquated, offensive terminology such as “retarded” (Singer 1990, 18, 20, 28, 140) and referring to some people as “marginal cases” should be abandoned for more compassionate and inclusive language.

That said, reasonable claims, good arguments, and worthwhile causes can offend people. Some conservative, religious, heteronormative people claim to be offended by the prospect of marriage equality. As recently as 2011, a poll found that 46% of Republican primary voters in Mississippi thought that interracial marriage should be illegal (Hayden 2011). Additionally, some white Americans claimed to be offended by the Black Lives Matter movement, and retort “All Lives Matter”, and worse, “Blue Lives Matter.” Being offended can be the result of peoples’ problematic biases and cultural prejudices. This should be kept in mind when comparisons are made between animals and some subset of humans, as African Americans, Jews, and the disabled may still harbor the same speciesist attitudes towards animals as their abled, white peers. Such comparisons point to an inconsistency in commonly held beliefs to lift animals up, not to put humans down.

Furthermore, the offense can cut both ways, as those working with animals might find comparisons with severely mentally disabled humans to be offensive towards animals in that it fails to do justice to the richness of animals’ capacities. Refraining from making an argument simply on the grounds that it might offend someone stifles dialogue and impedes free speech. Philosophy is where “no intellectual holds are barred” (Sellars 1963, 35). In short, while there is something to be said for being cautious about the offense that philosophical arguments may cause, none of this amounts to sufficient reasons

to forego the kind of axiological extensionist arguments under discussion when done appropriately.

IV.d. Methodological Objections

Human-animal relations have moral, legal, psychological, social, political, cultural, and religious dimensions. I have in mind three areas of recent scholarship. The first are continental philosophical approaches such as critical animal studies, typically influenced by the Frankfurt School of critical philosophy and social criticism (e.g. Twine 2013). The second are recent political approaches to animal rights in the analytic philosophical tradition (e.g. Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011 and Cochrane 2018). The third are social scientists investigating the psychosocial influences on our moral beliefs and behaviors (e.g. Herzog 2011 and Joy 2010). Authors in all these areas object that ethical extensionism focuses on interpersonal ethics, “How should I live?”, rather than address existing power structures underlying animal oppression, such as, “How should humanity relate to other groups of animals?”, where the focus should be.

It may well be the case that many figures within the animal rights literature (and so too for environmental ethics) have overly emphasized individual moral actions rather than power structures framing those choices. For example, while Singer (1990, 161-165) does see a place for the individual to protest and take other political action, he emphasizes economic boycott through dietary and lifestyle changes to vegetarianism or veganism as the most important steps that individuals can take. So, if this is a problem, it is much broader than axiological extensionism or historically influential approaches in animal ethics more broadly. Like the previous objection, tackling structural problems seems to complement rather than necessitate rejecting axiological extensionism altogether.

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It is better to think of this worry as a different but related, larger concern, not a problem inherent within axiological extensionism. Furthermore, these approaches often take for granted the general success of axiological extensionist arguments about who is morally considerable in the first place. Successful ignition, while necessary for takeoff, has little relevance to a rocket's ultimate trajectory and telemetry. The objection is really a call to attend to other matters, towards other aspects of ethical extensionism such as normative and political theory. Furthermore, rule utilitarianism, for example, scales very well from individual moral behavior to social structures and laws. Advancing gender equality in the workplace does not get far if it is not first accepted that women are people and rectifying the U.S.'s racialized criminal justice system will only succeed if it is already recognized that black lives matter. Similarly, animal liberation is possible only if animals come to be recognized as moral subjects.

IV.e. Lack of Progress Objection

A final, practical objection to axiological extensionism claims that it is responsible for the failure of animal liberation or that progress is too slow. Despite nearly 50 years since Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, the number of animals worldwide that are exploited has only increased and the living conditions have often worsened, particularly as U.S.-developed factory farming techniques have globalized, as has the popularity of meat-based diets. Lori Gruen (2013, 224) advances this objection, noting that elephants and cetaceans are kept captive and that great apes are still used in invasive biomedical research.

There are several, reinforcing responses to this objection. First, the lack of progress objection fails to reconcile that there actually has been significant progress with respect to the treat-

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ment of non-human animals. The cosmetics industry essentially abandoned animal testing without government intervention. Companion animals receive far greater protection from domestic abuse compared to decades ago. Dog and cock fighting have been outlawed in most of the world. Several U.S. states now have farm animal welfare laws. Floridians made a constitutional amendment banning commercial greyhound racing in the 2018 election with 69% approval. A pair of Floridian U.S. congressional representatives, Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-FL), and Rep. Ted Deutch (D-FL), introduced the “Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act” in 2019, building on the 2010 Animal Crush Video Prohibition Act, which merely prohibited the dissemination of crush fetishism and other “animal-torture porn”, and seeks to penalize the underlying acts themselves. The bill passed into law in 2020 and is the first federal law with felony provisions for animal cruelty in the U.S. Those who consume animal products enjoy an increasing variety of choices about the welfare conditions under which the products were produced, and those who do not consume some or all animal products are presented with an ever varying and meat alternatives. Fast food chains such as Burger King now serve plant-based burgers which “bleed.”

There has even been progress on all the specific fronts Gruen mentions since her book’s publication in 2013: elephants, cetaceans, and great apes. The Ringling Brothers Circus ceased using elephants in 2016. The last eleven remaining elephants were retired to a 200-acre sanctuary located in central Florida in 2016 (Gomez 2016). While cetaceans have received special legal protection under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (1972) for nearly half a century. SeaWorld has seen its stock value free fall due to a public relations firestorm due to concern about the welfare of captive orcas due in large part to the

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popularity of the documentary film *Blackfish* (2013). SeaWorld announced a stoppage to captive orca breeding and the capture of wild orcas in 2016. The few remaining orcas held captive there will be the last. Under influence by the Great Ape Project, New Zealand banned invasive research on all great apes in 1999, and the Balearic Islands, an autonomous region of Spain, followed suit in 2007. The U.S. National Institutes of Health called for the retirement of almost all chimpanzees used in federal research in 2011-2013, and the U.S. Congress passed the Chimpanzee Health Improvement, Maintenance and Protection Act in 2013 to fund and facilitate the remaining chimpanzees to live out the remainder of their lives in sanctuaries (Dizard 2013). Chimpanzees, including those in captivity, are now listed as an endangered species, which means that “take” (to harm, kill, injure, harass, etc.) without a permit is prohibited, and permits will be limited to activities fostering population growth or benefiting wild chimpanzees (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services 2015).

It bears noting that there is not a consensus amongst animal ethicists as how extensive changes must be. See, for example, the non-abolitionist views of Alasdair Cochrane (2012; 2018) and Erin McKenna (2013; 2018) that are nonetheless sensitive to animal interests and articulate defenses of their positions. I am not here committing to the claim that all the above are morally required. Rather, these are the sorts of examples often appealed to as the kind of progress that common animal rights theories require.

Second, the lack of progress objection presupposes that practical influence is a fitting measure for the quality of philosophical arguments. It is also worth recalling the longstanding distinction between philosophy and sophistry dating back

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to Plato (Duke 2012). By this measure, the number of good philosophical arguments asymptotically approaches zero. Even if the sample is restricted to arguments in applied ethics, there are still scant few “good” arguments, which can’t be right. Decades’ worth of research in social psychology now show that we are more selectively rational than we like to think. Motivated reasoning, motivated skepticism, emotions, etc. influence belief formation and retention, especially when confronting personally and politically challenging data (Bump 2015). Given the ubiquity of speciesism, how ingrained animal exploitation is, and how often such popular discussions take a political dimension, it is hardly surprising that questioning status quo relations seldom results in transformative change of beliefs, attitudes, and behavior.

Third, while surely frustrating to animal advocates, it is generally true that moral progress is slow more often than not, especially when the oppression of the vulnerable benefits the powerful. It will likely be at least as difficult for moral progress concerning animals because they are generally unable to speak for themselves in our legal and political frameworks, unlike has been the case historically for marginalized humans. It bears remembering that the abolitionist movement in the Western world lasted more than half a millennium. Louis X abolished slavery in the Kingdom of France back in 1315, the last country to formally abolish slavery was Mauritania in 1981, and underground modern slavery and human trafficking persist today. It is probably more accurate and helpful to think of human and animal liberation as a perennial struggle rather than an end to history.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that axiological extensionism is an intuitive and plausible form of argument for expanding the moral community. I then argued that axiological extensionism stands up well to prominent criticisms. By way of conclusion, I offer a call for humility both within philosophy and its influence on the world at large. It is important to maintain perspective about what philosophical arguments can achieve, as they are at best part of what affects moral change. If there are other as good or better philosophical arguments or practical means for bringing moral progress in the treatment of animals, there is no reason to think that proponents of ethical extensionism must disavow them. Logical consistency is seldom at issue in such matters. Ethical extensionist arguments played a major role in converting the minds of many public intellectuals and politically active individuals to the abolitionist position. But ethical extensionism alone did not formally end slavery in the U.S. It took centuries of discussion and resistance, decades of legal cases, the fracturing of the union, the death of nearly a million people in civil war, and a constitutional amendment to accomplish that.

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