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Advancing towards Cenozoic Community Ethics

A Holistic Framework for Surpassing Anthropocentrism

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the groundbreaking concept of Cenozoic community ethics or Cenozoic ecocentrism, which signifies a shift away from the anthropocentric perspective that has largely fueled environmental degradation. It advocates for a new ethical framework beyond anthropocentrism, one that integrates the principles of sentiocentrism (valuing sentient beings), biocentrism (valuing all living things), and ecocentrism (valuing ecosystems as wholes), thereby acknowledging the intrinsic value of everything from individual organisms to entire ecosystems. This forward-thinking approach leverages insights from geology and evolution to highlight the interconnectedness and essential worth of all life forms during the Cenozoic era. Instead of seeking to resolve the conflict between individual rights and the health of ecosystems, this document proposes a flexible, situation-aware balancing of these diverse ethical views. It envisions humans as considerate partners within a thriving, multi-species community, prompting us to rethink our moral obligations to the vast non-human world. The aim is to shed light on the intricate moral relationships we share with the broader living world, calling for a deeper empathy and fairer coexistence among all species.

Keywords: anthropocentrism; biocentrism; Cenozoic community ethics; Cenozoic era; ecocentrism; environmental ethics; ethical pluralism; geo-ontology; multispecies solidarity; sentiocentrism.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper embarks on a transformative exploration aimed at challenging and transcending anthropocentrism by examining post-anthropocentric ethical frameworks, namely sentiocentrism (zoocentrism), biocentrism,

and ecocentrism. It advocates for a unified approach encapsulated in the concept of Cenozoic community ethics, or Cenozoic ecocentrism, which marks a notable departure from human-centric frameworks. This perspective integrates geo-historical and evolutionary biological insights, acknowledging the intrinsic value of both individuals and collectives across species-level (diachronic) and ecosystem-level (synchronic) dimensions. Rather than resolving the tension between individualism and holism, it recognizes the necessity for context-driven negotiations among values that cannot be reduced to one-size-fits-all solutions.

The critique of anthropocentrism is not novel within the realms of environmental philosophy and ethics; it stands as a cornerstone of much environmental philosophical discourse (Zimmerman and Callicott 1998). Since the 1970s, coinciding with the emergence of environmental movements, numerous scholars have highlighted anthropocentrism as problematic, striving to conceive of societies that transcend human-centeredness both ontologically (in terms of human exceptionalism) and ethically (in terms of human chauvinism). However, the pressing urgency and intricate nature of contemporary ecological crises demand an immediate and profound reassessment of our ethical frameworks (Ripple *et al.* 2017). Put differently, they compel us to revisit non-anthropocentric value theories that have not yet permeated global culture to a significant degree. The deteriorating global ecological situation accentuates the necessity for such a reassessment.

Despite facing criticism, anthropocentrism continues to maintain its status as the dominant paradigm. This worldview has not only shaped philosophical discourse but has also wielded significant influence over political, economic, and social decisions as an all-encompassing perspective. By prioritizing human interests and values above all others, anthropocentrism has enabled a pronounced detachment from the non-human world, resulting in the exploitation and degradation of Earth's ecosystems and the multispecies community. The author of this article advocates for a different paradigm, one that moves beyond anthropocentrism altogether rather than seeking a softer or more sustainable version of it.

This paper begins by defining the moral agents it addresses, encompassing all individuals who either actively or passively adhere to anthropocentrism, while also providing an overview of anthropocentrism's role in Western culture. It then delves into Eileen Crist's critique of anthropocentrism, particularly as human supremacism, emphasizing the risks associated with both strong and weak forms of anthropocentrism, as well as technofix solutions (Crist 2019).

The paper stresses the necessity of avoiding exclusive reliance on technological remedies without simultaneously revising the ethical foundations guiding our actions, and highlights the importance of integrating intrinsic values into environmental ethics. This initial section of the paper navigates through the challenges posed by anthropocentrism, advocating for a departure from its influence.

The following section examines the concept of sentiocentrism (zoo-centrism) in animal ethics as a crucial measure in dismantling the anthropocentric paradigm. This entails acknowledging and treating other sentient beings as moral patients, recognizing our kinship with various other living forms beyond the human species. Sentiocentrism, which highlights the capacity for suffering and pleasure, broadens moral consideration to encompass all sentient beings, thereby questioning the arbitrary boundaries of species distinctions.

In the subsequent third section, Richard Routley's thought experiment in *The Last Man* is revisited, drawing attention to the inherent inconsistencies in an ethics that neglects to consider the moral significance of all living entities (Routley 1973). Despite their evident struggle for existence, these beings often do not neatly fit within the framework of sentiocentrism. To address this, the paper compares the principles of biocentrism and ecocentrism as initially outlined by their respective theorists, examining the fluidity and occasional overlap of these concepts, which are frequently used interchangeably in activism and advocacy (Pike 2017). This comparison aims to foster a dialogue between holistic thinking and individualistic perspectives, illuminating the intricacies of ethical considerations within environmental discourse.

In the final section, embracing a multi-layered ecocentrism guided by the concept of the Cenozoic community, encourages active engagement with the diverse living multispecies community of which *homo sapiens* is a part. This perspective prompts a reevaluation of our role in this community – not as dominant exploiters but as humble participants (Callicott 1989).

Engaging in a historical dialogue with non-human nature allows us to grasp the intricate legacy of ecological transformations and mass extinctions that have shaped life on Earth. It shows that our ethical duty is not towards a timeless biosphere or an abstract notion of life, often sought elsewhere while neglected on Earth, but towards a community that is symbiotically and phylogenetically connected, emerging from the ashes of the last mass extinction event (Roewe 2021).

By situating ethical considerations within the broader narrative of the Cenozoic era, we are reminded of the significant impact of human

activities on the planet's ecological balance. Advocating for the integration of sentiocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism within the framework of Cenozoic community ethics, this paper aims to shed light on the ethical complexities of our relationship with the non-human world.

2. THE PREDICAMENT OF HUMAN SUPREMACY

In contemporary discourse, a robust scientific consensus highlights the severe ecological harm facing our planet, increasingly acknowledged in media and societal discussions, albeit with varying degrees of acceptance due to political, economic, and cultural factors. This harm, evident in daily life, encompasses climate change and its wide-ranging consequences, along with interconnected issues such as ocean acidification, plastic pollution, and urban expansion at the expense of natural habitats. At the heart of this crisis lies relentless extraction and exploitation driven by profit-focused economic paradigms. With the global population surpassing 8 billion, human demands on the biosphere are unprecedented, particularly in wealthier nations with high consumption patterns (Cafaro and Crist 2012). This exacerbates a looming sixth mass extinction event, fueled by the exploitation of species and ecosystems for perpetual growth and consumption (Kolbert 2014).

In grappling with the ecological crisis, it is paramount to scrutinize the significant power imbalances in our relationship with the multispecies community and our limited empathy towards other-than-human life. Despite advancements in environmental awareness and the growth of environmental movements, our approach to other-than-humans remains predominantly instrumental. Non-human life is often treated as means for human benefit rather than entities with intrinsic value. Some philosophers advocate for a revised version of anthropocentrism that balances human needs with ecological preservation, often referred to as the convergence theory (Norton 2003). However, the prevailing mindset still tends towards exploitation and domination of nature (Peterson 2020).

The term “Anthropocene”, amplifying the effects of anthropocentrism on the planet, suggests a collective responsibility of humanity for environmental degradation. Yet, many critics view this as a crude oversimplification, ignoring the fact that some groups and individuals contribute more to ecological harm than others (Moore 2016). Nevertheless, it is undeniable that nearly all share some responsibility for this crisis, as many unwittingly support a system driven by extractive capitalism and

relentless growth, regardless of direct involvement in consumer culture or participation in the reification of non-human others (Dasgupta 2024).

In this discussion, I refrain from distinguishing between the “Anthropocene” and “Capitalocene”, acknowledging the nuanced debate surrounding these terms and their political implications (Davis *et al.* 2019). Instead, I consider humanity as a whole, not to deny the unequal distribution of responsibility among different cultures and histories, and the varying capacities of individuals to address this crisis, but rather to focus on a global humanity largely influenced by Western ideologies that prioritize human interests over everything else.

Thus, the “we” in this discourse denotes every individual who actively or passively supports or benefits from anthropocentrism and human supremacism. This “we” also encompasses humanity as a hyper-object, a concept capturing entities so vast in time and space that they challenge traditional notions of what constitutes a “thing” (Morton 2013). This approach aims to highlight both collective and individual roles in addressing environmental challenges, urging a shift towards recognizing the intrinsic value of all forms of life.

The “we” mindset under examination is deeply rooted in anthropocentric ideologies, which assert human superiority and separation from the rest of nature (Descola 2013). Originating from Western traditions like the “great chain of being” and early Greek philosophies, such as Aristotle’s, this perspective evolved alongside pragmatic anthropocentrism. This pragmatic view secularized nature and favored human dominance, as seen in the Roman Empire’s use of cruel spectacles to assert control over animals and slaves. Christianity further reinforced this hierarchical worldview, placing God at the top, followed by humans – often conceptualized as white, heterosexual, rational males – above animals, plants, and inanimate objects. The Renaissance, especially figures like Pico della Mirandola, promoted humanism, glorifying human potential and intellect. Mirandola’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man* emphasized humans’ unique ability to shape their destiny, reinforcing human superiority in the natural order. Leonardo da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man* symbolized this Renaissance ideal, portraying man as a microcosm of the universe, further bolstering the anthropocentric perspective.

Initially, the concept of *anthropos* excluded slaves, Indigenous peoples, women, and children, relegating them to a status akin to non-human animals (Ferrando 2019). Modernity and the Enlightenment purportedly advocated for human rights and anti-hierarchical thinking, though deep inequalities persisted, fueled by global capitalism. For non-human

animals and the natural world, modernity brought not liberation but heightened domination and dualism. Carolyn Merchant (2019) argues that Cartesian dualism, separating humans as *res cogitans* and animals as mere automatons, worsened this situation. Despite Darwin's evolutionary insights, society often maintains a creationist stance, regarding humans as the apex of evolution (Rachels 1990).

After briefly summarizing the history of Western anthropocentrism, it is essential to further clarify the focus of this paper by examining philosopher Eileen Crist's interpretation. Crist (2017) delineates anthropocentrism, or human supremacy, as a pervasive "lived worldview" characterized by three implicit beliefs: firstly, the notion that the Earth is primarily for human exploitation; secondly, the belief that its resources exist solely for human benefit; and thirdly, the conviction that humans inherently surpass all other species. These convictions subtly influence human interactions with the environment. Crist argues that those influenced by human supremacy exhibit significant consequences: an unbridled pursuit of expansion without considering limits, and a diminished capacity to appreciate the Earth's diversity and beauty. These tendencies, symptomatic of anthropocentrism, align closely with extractive practices and growth-oriented economies, thereby contributing to ecological degradation.

If anthropocentrism, emphasizing human superiority, contributes to the ecological crisis, can a more enlightened form of it be part of the solution? Some environmental ethicists disagree with critiques of anthropocentrism, arguing they may overlook the distinction between legitimate and harmful human interests, and addressing human inequalities is essential for effective environmental preservation. They also suggest that recognizing ecosystems' importance for human survival could motivate environmental conservation, and expanding human self-interest to include concern for non-human beings could lead to greater environmental care (Hayward 1997).

Critics like Helen Kopnina counter these arguments, stating that attempting to redefine anthropocentrism to seem harmless ignores how human actions often prioritize self-interest at the planet's expense (Kopnina *et al.* 2018). They argue that if addressing human disparities is seen as a prerequisite for environmental conservation, preserving biodiversity might be indefinitely sidelined. Moreover, they contend that anthropocentric motivations may only benefit the environment when they align with human self-interest. Lastly, relying solely on "self-love" for environmental action is insufficient; by portraying anthropocentrism

as merely compassion for humans, critics overlook its inherently human-centric bias, complicating the debate. Despite many humans occasionally displaying empathy and compassion towards animals, trees, rivers, and landscapes, solidarity with non-human others remains the exception rather than a norm. Anthropocentrism continues to drive the environmental crisis by fueling ecocide. Humanity relentlessly pursues a “human-centric planet” vision without fully acknowledging our deep interdependence with a broader more-than-human world.

We need to reevaluate our role within the multi-species universe, suggesting a new perspective. Inspired by Timothy Morton’s insights from 2017, one approach is to reconceptualize humanity as “humankind”, placing a deliberate focus on kindness as a form of mutual solidarity. This solidarity, emerging from our ontological connections in the “symbiotic real”, is not elusive; rather, it is fundamentally attainable and “cheap”, signifying that it is abundant, common, and widespread. Such a perspective encourages us to pursue a fresh start, resonating with Roberto Marchesini’s phenomenology of life (2023) and the contributions of contemporary posthumanist scholars. Marchesini’s depiction of humanity as intrinsically post-human and symbiotic from inception necessitates an urgent departure from the prevailing Western, anthropocentric viewpoint. This transformation is crucial for reimagining our relationship with the more-than-human world. This shift entails rekindling solidarity with non-human entities – a solidarity that, as Morton suggests, should be innate but has been diminished by Western human supremacism. Informed by Marchesini’s posthumanism, this solidarity demands puncturing the anthropocentrism bubble, thereby expanding the ethical horizon beyond human constraints. Drawing on the insights of Morton and Marchesini, we can recognize that transitioning towards kindness and solidarity is not only a moral imperative but also an ontological necessity deeply embedded in our symbiotic existence. This reconceptualization of humanity as intrinsically interconnected with all life forms challenges traditional Western anthropocentric ethics, which are constrained by their historical and philosophical contexts.

3. SENTIOCENTRISM AND ANIMAL ETHICS

The preceding analysis has elucidated the detrimental effects of anthropocentrism, the belief that prioritizes human beings over all other living things, on our interactions with the biosphere. To mitigate the negative

consequences of this belief and the exploitation of other species, it is imperative to reform our ways of thinking and acting (Andreozzi 2015). This reform entails recognizing the inherent value of all life forms and their interconnectedness, and integrating this acknowledgment into our environmental principles and policies. Doing so will foster a more equitable and ecologically responsible way of coexisting with the more-than-human world.

Drawing from *Critical Animal Studies* and the field of animal ethics, a robust framework emerges for challenging our anthropocentric biases (Nocella II and George 2019). Reassessing our relationships with other-than-human animals, who share an evolutionary lineage with us, allows us to discern their unique adaptations, cognitive capabilities, and emotional experiences (Safina 2016). These revelations prompt us to regard other-than-human animals as subjects deserving of ethical consideration, countering the simplistic notion that only human-like traits confer value. Martha Nussbaum (2023) argues that the pivotal insight lies not in our similarities with other species, but in our shared embodiment of animality, which she terms the “animal package”. Intelligence should be viewed as a fundamental characteristic of life, crucial for survival and adaptation within ecological systems.

Animals are distinguished not merely by their mobility, but by their capacity to react to stimuli in their surroundings with discernible motivation. Movement propelled by sentience is regarded as a manifestation of intelligence throughout the animal kingdom, driven by the dual imperatives of avoiding pain and pursuing pleasure. This responsiveness lies at the core of their intrinsic ability to differentiate between advantageous and detrimental stimuli, a proficiency evident across diverse animal taxa (DeMello 2012). The ability to feel pain and pleasure is pivotal in facilitating animals’ engagement with their environment, a trait not exclusive to humans but shared by numerous species. This mutual capacity for sentience – the ability to perceive sensations, notably to differentiate between suffering and well-being – shapes our behaviors and ethical considerations.

Recent scientific breakthroughs have challenged traditional views, revealing that fish and potentially invertebrates can experience pleasure and pain (Mason and Lavery 2022; Barrett, Fischer, and Buchmann 2023). This discovery suggests a broader range of cognitive abilities within the animal kingdom than previously acknowledged. Animals demonstrate complex cognitive processes such as learning, memory, and decision-making, which they utilize to navigate their environments and

interact with other organisms (De Waal 2016). Recognizing the depth of animal intelligence and sensibility is crucial for formulating ethical frameworks that guide our interactions with them, promote their welfare, and support conservation efforts. The burgeoning field of animal ethics, enriched by interdisciplinary research, underscores our profound interconnectedness with other species.

This understanding, rooted in Charles Darwin's groundbreaking work approximately two centuries ago, alongside the comprehensive historical context supporting his theories, has reshaped our perception of animality. Darwin's contributions laid the foundation for recognizing the evolutionary continuities between humans and other animals, challenging the anthropocentric narrative of a distinct and unique human ontology and genealogy, and promoting a more inclusive view of intelligence and sentience across species (Marchesini 2022). This shift in understanding prompts a reevaluation of our ethical responsibilities toward non-human animals, acknowledging their complex behaviors and the depth of their experiential worlds. Advancements in ecology and ethology, enriched by the philosophical contributions of thinkers like Marchesini, invite us to extend this reconsideration to our existential context, highlighting our existence as merely one facet of a broader animal kingdom. Marchesini's concepts of "animal epiphany" and zooanthropology illuminate the intertwined nature of human identity with our interactions with other species. This perspective challenges the anthropocentric narrative by emphasizing our recent emergence in evolutionary history and our significant, albeit often detrimental, impact on biodiversity. It calls for a departure from viewing humans as the pinnacle of evolution, advocating instead for a recognition of our shared animality and the ethical obligations stemming from this interconnectedness (Haraway 2016).

Animal ethics explores a range of philosophical frameworks aimed at articulating the moral duties we owe to other-than-human animals, transcending simplistic considerations of pleasure and pain to encompass more nuanced justifications (Armstrong and Botzler 2016). Among these frameworks, care ethics, championed by ecofeminist theorists like Lori Gruen (2011), emphasizes moral obligations stemming from relational responsibilities. It underscores the interconnectedness and care we should extend to all beings, including other-than-human animals. In contrast, the Kantian approach, as interpreted by philosophers like Tom Regan (2001) and Christine Korsgaard (2018), advocates for recognizing the inherent value of other-than-human animals based on their consciousness, desires, beliefs, and sense of their own existence. This

viewpoint positions other-than-human animals as ends in themselves, deserving of rights and moral consideration as subjects of a life.

Deepening the discourse, philosophers such as Claire Palmer (2010) and Nussbaum (2023) stress the significance of context, relationships, and nuanced judgment in ethical considerations regarding other-than-human animals. Palmer's work suggests that our duties to other-than-human animals may vary depending on the context and nature of our relationship with them, while Nussbaum's capabilities approach advocates for considering other-than-human animals' ability to lead lives worthy of their species, focusing on their individual capabilities and well-being.

Since the publication of Peter Singer's groundbreaking work, *Animal Liberation* (1975) the discourse on animal ethics has undergone significant evolution, introducing a plethora of theories supporting the moral consideration of other-than-human animals. Despite the diversity in these theories, they converge on the critical imperative of integrating other-than-human animals into our moral sphere, acknowledging their intrinsic value and potential rights. This evolution in thought underscores the diminished importance of identifying a singular, universally applicable ethical justification for animal rights and liberation, in favor of a broader acknowledgment of the necessity to regard other-than-human animals as beings deserving of ethical consideration. Each approach contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of our ethical duties towards other-than-human animals, nurturing a more inclusive and empathetic moral community (Nussbaum 2023).

The discourse on the ethical treatment of other-than-human animals has long been a pivotal theme in philosophical discussions, engendering a broad consensus within ethical theories about the moral significance of these beings beyond their utility to humans. This consensus underscores the critical need to recognize other-than-human animals as sentient beings with inherent value, deserving of inclusion within our moral considerations. Such recognition demands an acknowledgment of their capacity for sentience, which encompasses their interests, agency, and the ability to experience sensations, thus shifting our perspective from viewing them as insentient tools to acknowledging their moral subjectivity.

Peter Singer's utilitarian framework has significantly influenced contemporary debates on animal ethics, advocating for a non-anthropocentric ethical stance that emphasizes the alleviation of suffering across all sentient beings. More than fifty years since its introduction, Singer's utilitarianism remains a foundational and logical framework for the ethics of

other-than-human animals, serving as a springboard for further theories that enrich and expand the discussion in a generative manner. Singer's philosophy advocates for the principle of equal consideration of interests, arguing that the capacity to experience pleasure and pain, rather than species membership or other arbitrary attributes, should be the cornerstone of moral deliberation. This principle directly challenges societal norms that maintain inequality based on superficial distinctions, promoting an ethical paradigm that seeks the welfare of all sentient beings equally (Singer 2020).

Critiques of Singer's approach, such as those presented by Carl Cohen, who contends that rights are linked to the capacity to participate in a moral community – a capacity he believes other-than-human animals lack – overlook the substantial empirical evidence of animal sentience and the ethical imperative to reduce suffering (Cohen and Regan 2001). These critiques often fail to grasp the broader ethical responsibility to move from objectifying other-than-human animals to recognizing their moral status.

This ethical discourse challenges the legitimacy of justifying dominance on the basis of superiority, proposing instead a moral framework that values sentient experiences above hierarchical classifications. It signifies a profound ethical evolution towards a compassionate and equitable coexistence with all sentient life, extending our concern beyond human interests to include the well-being of other-than-human animals (Bekoff 2013). This dialogue underscores the ethical imperative to avoid exploiting other-than-human animals, calling for a critical reassessment of our interactions with the natural world. It advocates for a society that embraces mutual respect and care for all beings capable of suffering, prompting a thorough reevaluation of our lifestyles, legal frameworks, and personal decisions. This stance not only promotes empathy, justice, and moral inclusivity but also acts as a clarion call for the ethical emancipation of both human and other-than-human animals alike.

In sum, the ethical consideration of other-than-human animals requires more than merely extending human moral principles to other species; it necessitates recognizing their inherent value and sentience. This recognition invites a significant philosophical and practical shift towards a more just and compassionate society, underpinned by the principle of equality, which fosters ethical progress and the advancement of justice for all sentient beings (Nocella II and George 2019).

4. FROM BIOCENTRISM TO ECOCENTRISM

The preceding analysis has critically examined the limitations inherent in anthropocentric paradigms, particularly regarding the advocacy for animal liberation and the ethical consideration of other-than-human animals. Despite a nascent acknowledgment within societal norms that other-than-human animals transcend mere objecthood, prevailing ethical frameworks exhibit a notable deficiency in recognizing these beings as legitimate moral subjects. This shortfall manifests in moral inconsistencies and cognitive dissonance within human-other-than-human animal relational dynamics. However, addressing and ameliorating this discrepancy by broadening our ethical inclusivity to embrace all sentient beings prompts a pivotal inquiry: Is such expansion of our moral considerations adequate?

Therefore, it becomes crucial to interrogate the adequacy of solely reclassifying other-than-human animals from objects to subjects within our ethical frameworks, particularly when these frameworks predominantly assess moral worth through the lens of an entity's capacity for pleasure and pain. To thoroughly evaluate the robustness of our ethical systems, it is essential to critically examine and challenge the confines of anthropocentrism and the doctrine of human supremacy.

Paraphrasing Routley's *Last Man* thought-experiment offers a relevant example: envision a situation where the last human exists in an ecosystem devoid of other animals, with only plant life for company. Would it be morally permissible for this individual to cut down a tree if it offered no benefit to them or to any sentient beings? This thought-experiment typically leads to a consensus that there is no moral justification for the destruction of life that does not directly benefit humans, as most people would likely respond negatively to the idea of unnecessary harm. This underscores the notion that life, in its various forms, holds intrinsic value beyond its utility to human interests (Goodpaster 1978).

These thought-experiments highlight the inherent worth of other-than-human life, independent of their ability to sense pleasure and pain as animals do. Drawing on insights from Routley, we challenge established philosophical conventions, uncovering a deep-seated moral intuition at the heart of environmental philosophy. This approach disputes the idea of categorizing living beings like plants or fungi as mere inanimate objects, comparable to rocks or chairs, and instead acknowledges their intrinsic value (Stone 2010).

This intuitive grasp is in sync with the principles of biocentrism, which call for the acknowledgment of all living entities as moral subjects.

Yet, this perspective does not suggest a blanket equal treatment of all forms of life; it encourages the application of nuanced distinctions within a biocentric ethical framework. These distinctions can take into account phylogenetic variances and the intricacies of nervous system configurations, recognizing the sentience of animals and their capability to experience pleasure and pain. Meanwhile, plants, though not sentient in the conventional sense, exhibit their own types of intelligence, including problem-solving skills and an acute sensitivity to their surroundings (Mancuso and Viola 2015). Such insights prompt a broader reevaluation of intelligence and moral significance, pushing the boundaries of traditional ethical considerations (Marder 2023).

Recent research and philosophical dialogues, notably on topics like “Plant Studies”, are casting new light on the sophisticated intelligence and cognitive capacities of plants, challenging the long-held perception of them as inert beings (Coccia 2019). Stefano Mancuso’s pioneering research in plant neurobiology is particularly illuminating, uncovering the complex cognitive functions of plants and their adaptability through distinct, modular growth mechanisms, a phenomenon unique to the plant kingdom (Baluška, Mancuso, and Volkmann 2007). These revelations encourage a reevaluation of ethical considerations, urging us to extend our ethical considerations beyond anthropocentrism and even sentiocentrism, despite the practical challenges such expansion may present.

To illustrate the feasibility of such ethical pragmatism, consider veganism not merely as a means of aiding other-than-human animals but also as benefiting plants in various ways. Embracing a vegan lifestyle serves as a practical approach to respecting animal sentience and acknowledging plant life’s value (Dorgbetor *et al.* 2022). This lifestyle choice significantly reduces plant consumption and habitat destruction, addressing the inefficiencies and ethical concerns associated with traditional animal agriculture practices (Monbiot 2022).

Philosophers such as Paul Taylor (1986) and Kenneth Goodpaster (1978) advocate that every living entity, across all biological kingdoms, embodies a center of life characterized by unique goals and purposes. They argue that sentience is not merely about the capacity to experience pleasure or pain but rather encompasses a broader biological mandate aimed at the survival and thriving of life. This biocentric perspective, which diverges from the ethical frameworks suggested by Singer or Regan, emphasizes a deep ecological dedication to recognizing and safeguarding the intrinsic value of all forms of life.

Biocentrism disputes the notion of regarding entities like trees as lifeless objects lacking any form of interest. It supports practices of care and engagement, opposing unnecessary destruction or forceful interventions in nature. By affirming the inherent dignity and value in all life, biocentrism directly challenges anthropocentric ideologies, calling for restrictions on human exploitation and overreach (Taylor 1986). It promotes the establishment of ethical guidelines that go beyond mere instrumental evaluations, such as those pertaining to ecosystem services. Additionally, biocentrism aims to heal the alienation fostered by human-centric perspectives, promoting a rekindled affinity with the natural environment. This philosophy cultivates empathy and a receptivity towards the non-human world, serving as an effective counterpoint to anthropocentrism and actively resisting the human supremacist mindset as critiqued by Crist.

Biocentrism, arguably more effectively than sentiocentrism, often supports conservation and rewilding initiatives. However, its emphasis on individuals rather than collective wholes such as populations, species, ecosystems, or the biosphere introduces a contradiction (Hourdequin 2024). This contradiction lies between the generally accepted scientific and societal conservation ethics and the moral implications of ecological entanglements not being considered moral subjects. Indeed, for many biocentrists, these “wholes” – which I prefer to describe as “entanglements” to avoid presupposing that ecosystems are always more than the sum of their parts – lack teleological direction (McShane 2014). They do not inherently strive towards a goal, and their homeostatic tendency, far from absolute, is often merely the result of numerous goal-directed interactions among living entities. In other words, entanglements and assemblages lack interests, and any apparent collective interest is just the aggregate of individual endeavors (Cahen 1988). This raises the question: is there room for alternative ways to ascribe intrinsic value beyond the possession of interests?

This discussion brings to light an environmental ethic known as ecocentrism. Ecocentrism takes a philosophical approach that underscores the significance of entire ecosystems, rather than concentrating exclusively or primarily on the welfare of individual entities. It is founded on the empirical understanding that ecosystems have intrinsic value and that everything we value, such as human welfare and the thriving of all life forms, is reliant on them. From both ontological and ecological perspectives, the integrity of ecosystems is given precedence over the interests of individual organisms within them. This viewpoint fosters an ethical

framework that broadens moral considerations to include more-than-human entities, acknowledging not just their individual importance but also the value of their interactions, connections, and the collective attributes that arise from these relationships (Humphrey 2002). The protection of ecosystems is not predicated on a mistaken belief in their unchangeable condition but on an acknowledgment of their dynamic and evolutionarily adaptive nature. This challenges the idea that ecosystems are unchanging, while recognizing that there is a difference between a generative dynamic and a destructive one, such as that caused by anthropogenic pressures.

Pioneers like Aldo Leopold (1968), through his seminal concept of the Land Ethic, highlighted the significance of behaviors that enhance the stability, aesthetics, and integrity of the biotic community, aka ecosystems. This ethical paradigm, further developed by thinkers such as J. Baird Callicott (1999), posits that ecosystems possess an inherent worth beyond anthropocentric assessments. Ecocentrism represents a complex philosophical position, encompassing views that range from the contentious to those more widely accepted. On one end, it proposes that the welfare of ecosystems might, in certain instances, take precedence over the needs of individual organisms – a stance that has drawn criticism for its potential alignment with ecofascism, which could justify extreme and exclusionary measures. Timothy Morton (2017) provides a critical perspective, cautioning against the idealization of ecosystems as inherently stable or superior constructs. Their concept of “explosive holism” challenges the romanticization of ecosystems, pointing out the risks of oversimplification and bias inherent in some ecocentric approaches, advocating for a more nuanced method to conservation.

However, Leopold might have foreseen certain objections, viewing his Land Ethic as an extension or an additional layer to existing moral norms and considerations. Thus, he implicitly offers a more balanced view of ecocentrism, one that acknowledges the intricate interplay within ecosystems and the value of all members, both human and non-human. His Land Ethic promotes a symbiotic relationship between conservation efforts and a respect for life in all its diversity, urging a comprehensive grasp of nature’s interdependence without undermining the significance of individual entities.

While this approach is enlightening, it requires careful interpretation to avoid the criticisms associated with ecofascism. Despite ecocentrism’s general inclination to safeguard human rights and dignity, it has been critiqued, notably by Tom Regan, for its leniency towards the sacrifice

of individual non-human lives, such as in the controversial eradication of non-native species. Regan contests the notion that the collective's value should invariably overshadow that of its individual members, calling for a more discerning ecocentrism that cherishes the intricate network of relationships, interactions, and collective phenomena without compromising the well-being of individuals.

Holmes Rolston III's (1994) work significantly contributes to ecocentric thought by emphasizing the intrinsic value of diverse life forms and their entanglements. He suggests that animals, by virtue of their sentience and goal-oriented behaviors, manifest interests and inherent worth, while plants and other beings express their interests by striving towards their own form of existence. Rolston extends this idea to populations and species, a concept further elucidated by Thom van Dooren's (2014) recent work on "flight ways", which portrays these entities as intergenerational achievements. Van Dooren's notion suggests that populations and species represent ongoing accomplishments in which individual lives actively contribute to the continuation of their kind. This perspective underscores the symbiotic relationship among all living beings, depicting them not merely as passive members but as active participants in their own perpetuation. This paradigm emphasizes not only the importance of preserving biodiversity for the continuity of life but also aligns with van Dooren's analogy of species participating in a "relay race of existence". Therefore, in Rolston's terms, the extinction of species is regarded as a profound loss, akin to a form of "super-killing". Furthermore, in line with Rolston's ecocentrism, ecosystems and the biosphere are acknowledged as indispensable conditions for all life, fostering generative symbiosis and interconnections. They hold intrinsic value as the wellspring of life, essential for the existence and flourishing of all life forms. Although critics may accuse Rolston of committing the genetic fallacy by attributing value based on origins, he would likely argue that life, within its interconnections, inherently generates value. Therefore, celebrating life entails recognizing and safeguarding its origins and enabling conditions.

The shift towards a nuanced, "soft", and value-pluralistic ecocentrism introduces a complex ethical terrain. Within this context, the quest for definitive solutions to moral dilemmas often grapples with the inherent ambiguity of ethical decision-making. Drawing upon Morton's analogy, certain ethical quandaries can be likened to choosing between two pairs of optical lenses: despite their differences, each pair presents equally compelling advantages and disadvantages, resulting in situations that are

inherently irresolvable (Morton 2017). This essence of ambiguity fundamentally embodies ambivalence – simultaneously representing dualities.

This framework, while avoiding concrete answers, serves as a guiding tool, steering societies away from clear ethical missteps. It introduces the concept of moral residuals, acknowledging that ethical agents may need to reconcile themselves with unresolved tensions at times (Batavia, Nelson, and Wallach 2020). This perspective underscores the intricate and layered nature of environmental ethics, as well as ethics in a broader sense, advocating for a pragmatic approach that seeks to reconcile diverse values and interests in the pursuit of ethically coherent interactions within our more-than-human world.

Addressing the ethical dimensions of conservation, as explored by Emma Marris (2021) and further elaborated by Nussbaum (2023), necessitates an acceptance of ambiguity and a dedication to inclusive dialogue. In this refined ecocentrism, the insights of sentientism and biocentrism are not diminished but rather integrated, emphasizing the significance of ethical considerations at every level of existence within the multispecies community. Inspired by Aldo Leopold and further elucidated by Marris (2021, 258-259) an integrated approach emerges as a means to synthesize the value-pluralism advocated in this analysis: ethical integrity is attained when actions support the flourishing, autonomy, diversity, and intricate interrelations of living entities within the multispecies community. When navigating competing priorities, our decisions must be characterized by thoughtful deliberation and humility. This expanded principle, more intricate than Leopold's concise axiom, recognizes the complexities of formulating a comprehensive ethical framework within the context of our more-than-human world.

Confronted with ethical dilemmas involving incommensurable values, choices that promote the comprehensive well-being of humans or other species may necessitate compromises in biodiversity and ecological complexity, and vice versa. The absence of a universal metric for evaluating these trade-offs underscores the nature of moral dilemmas – situations where, regardless of intent, it may be impossible to avoid causing some form of harm within the multispecies community. This realization underscores the importance of exercising nuanced judgment in ethical considerations, emphasizing the need to navigate the intricate landscape of environmental ethics with a keen awareness of the potential trade-offs and tensions involved (van Dooren 2014, 117).

In the concluding section of this paper, I align with van Dooren's insights to argue that our "soft" value-pluralistic ecocentrism is not

merely an abstract obligation towards life or a timeless biosphere but rather a commitment to a specific multispecies community formed in the aftermath of the relatively recent fifth mass extinction (2014, 42-43). This perspective grounds our ethical responsibilities in the tangible context of this emerging community, emphasizing the necessity for targeted actions and decisions that recognize and address the intertwined fates and collective challenges we face.

5. ADVOCATING FOR THE CENOZOIC COMMUNITY IN POST-ANTHROPOCENTRIC ETHICS

Van Dooren's concept of the Cenozoic community represents a transformative ethical framework that moves beyond the limitations of anthropocentrism. It calls for a profound acknowledgment of the roles that individual organisms play within the broader biosphere, a recognition rooted in the geo-historical and evolutionary kinship shared among all living beings currently co-inhabiting the Earth. This theoretical contribution significantly enriches the discourse in environmental ethics by challenging the abstract nature of popular environmental slogans such as "save the planet" and "save life" (PBS Terra 2024).

Building on van Dooren's insights, my critique underscores the lack of precision in certain calls for environmental action. These calls are often vulnerable to dismissive attitudes that hinge on the assumption that life and the planet will endure regardless of human actions. This perspective fails to recognize the urgency of addressing environmental challenges. More critically, it suggests a shift towards fostering a tangible sense of care and interconnectedness. The emphasis is on the profound necessity to direct our care and responsibility towards those species and ecosystems that are intricately linked with human existence in what could be termed a "symbiotic real" (Morton 2017). These entities have shared a co-evolutionary journey that predates and fosters the appearance of *homo sapiens*, since the last major extinction event around 65.5 million years ago. This shared evolutionary path highlights a history of mutual survival and adaptation, stressing the importance of acknowledging and acting upon our deeply interwoven fates.

In advocating for the Cenozoic community as a cornerstone for the development of truly post-anthropocentric ethics and policies, this paper delves into a multifaceted understanding that synthesizes material, geological, biological, and ontological insights. The acknowledgment

of the Cenozoic era's pivotal role in the narrative of Earth's biological evolution – characterized by profound shifts following the catastrophic Cretaceous-Paleogene (K-Pg) event – provides a solid foundation for embedding ecocentric ethics within the broader ethos of Cenozoic community ethics.

The Cenozoic era, which commenced around 65.5 million years ago in the wake of the cataclysmic K-Pg event, stands as a defining period in Earth's history. Investigations through paleontology and evolutionary biology have shed light on its empirical importance, underscoring its influence on the geological and biological evolution of our planet. This era is notably marked by the aftermath of the Chicxulub asteroid impact, a cataclysmic occurrence that precipitated mass extinctions but also catalyzed the diversification and resilience of life forms, thereby laying the groundwork for the biodiversity we observe today (Meredith *et al.* 2011).

The resilience of life, highlighted by the K-Pg event, along with the interconnectedness of cosmic, geological, and biological processes, illustrates a shared narrative of resilience and evolutionary adaptation. This narrative forms the foundation of the modern multispecies community, emphasizing the interconnectedness and collective history shared among all living entities. Such a perspective enriches our understanding of human existence as intricately linked to the broader community of life.

Furthermore, paleontological findings from the Cenozoic era, including the fossil record, offer concrete evidence of the adaptive radiation of mammals and the emergence of diverse ecosystems (Alroy 1999; Krapovickas and Vizcaíno 2016). Evolutionary biology extends this exploration, elucidating how natural selection and co-evolution have sculpted the genetic and ecological landscapes of our planet (Pearce *et al.* 2018). This enduring continuity, manifest in the genetic legacy of species and the ecological dynamics persisting from the Cenozoic era to the present, significantly influences contemporary ecosystems.

Acknowledging the Cenozoic era's material and ecological heritage invites a deeper ethical reflection on our relationship with Earth's historical narrative and its relevance to current and future multispecies generations. Considering humanity's place within the Cenozoic community fosters a contemplation of the dynamic interactions among individual organisms, the extensive biosphere, and human societies. Supported by the insights of scholars such as Deborah Bird Rose (2013) and Donna Haraway (2016), this perspective unveils a story of evolving connections, adaptive challenges, and nurtured symbiotic relationships, advocating for an ethical stance that honors our deep-rooted connections with the

more-than-human world. This exploration not only advances our ethical discourse but also calls for a re-imagined engagement with the ecological and ontological complexities of our shared existence on Earth.

Exploring the ontological and ethical dimensions of the Cenozoic community, while acknowledging its intrinsic values, opens up numerous avenues rooted in the rich tradition of environmental ethics. In advocating for the Cenozoic ethics framework, it is sufficient to recognize how this emerging concept resonates with and amplifies existing environmental ethical theories, thereby enriching the dialogue with an emphasis on the intrinsic ecocentric values inherent in the Cenozoic community. This perspective aligns with the contributions of environmental philosophers such as J.B. Callicott, Holmes Rolston III, and Ricardo Rozzi, whose works provide a foundational backdrop for this discussion.

The re-evaluation of Aldo Leopold's land ethic by Callicott (1999) marks a significant progression in environmental ethics, intricately weaving the dynamics of ecosystems with human ethical responsibility. Callicott's innovative approach leverages empirical findings from ecology and the philosophical underpinnings of David Hume to argue for a profound ethical engagement with ecosystems. By advocating for an "as if" stance on the intrinsic values of entities in the more-than-human world and multispecies communities, Callicott underscores the necessity of recognizing these values beyond mere utility to ensure both their protection and our survival. This perspective not only challenges the traditional dominator role attributed to humans but also highlights the inherent worth of ecosystems, thus fostering a more responsible and ethical interaction with the more-than-human world.

Callicott's methodology of deriving ontological insights from ecological knowledge places a spotlight on the interconnectedness and inherent value of life forms and ecosystems. This approach transcends a functionalist viewpoint, emphasizing the need to acknowledge intrinsic values in our environmental ethics. By doing so, Callicott posits that we can foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of our role within the multispecies community, particularly within the context of the Cenozoic era, which is characterized by its unique ecological and historical significance.

In contrast, Rolston (1994) offers a critical counterpoint to Callicott's perspective, especially regarding the origin and recognition of intrinsic values. Rolston challenges the idea that intrinsic values are merely human constructs, projected onto the more-than-human world. Instead, he argues that these values are observable and integral to the more-than-human world itself, manifesting across its diverse ecosystems

and the biosphere at large. Rolston's concept of "projective value" seeks to illuminate the inherent capability of the biosphere, and by extension, ecosystems of the Cenozoic era, to nurture life. This perspective elevates the Cenozoic community as a bearer of intrinsic generative value, critical to the emergence and nurturance of the values we hold dear today. Rolston's emphasis on the generative value of ecosystems challenges us to recognize and respect the foundational role of the more-than-human world in supporting life, thus urging a reevaluation of our ethical obligations towards preserving its integrity.

Rozzi's frameworks offer a comprehensive basis for understanding the intrinsic value and ethical considerations within the Cenozoic community. Defined within a geo-historical framework, the Cenozoic community embodies a rich tapestry of biophysical, linguistic, cultural, political, economic, and technological aspects. This complexity dovetails with Rozzi's nuanced conception of habitat, which surpasses traditional biophysical interpretations to encompass a web of interconnected living and non-living elements, organizational forms, and interactive processes. Rozzi's introduction of the term "life-habit" broadens the discourse to consider not only innate behaviors but also those learned and subconsciously adopted, highlighting the dynamic interaction between individual agency and the wider socio-cultural and biophysical environments (Rozzi *et al.* 2019). In the context of the Cenozoic community, this concept deepens our appreciation of species' behaviors, perceptions, and interactions as they mutually shape and are shaped by their habitats through time.

Rozzi's notion of co-inhabitation profoundly resonates within the Cenozoic community's ethos, advocating for a view that moves beyond human-centeredness. Here, co-inhabitants – both human and more-than-human – share a collective living space, engaging in relationships of mutual influence (Rozzi 2015). Their collective actions and interactions enrich the ecological and socio-cultural fabric of the Cenozoic era, contesting the notion of humans as detached or negligent stewards of their environment. This introduces pivotal ethical-ecological and ontological-epistemological reflections. Furthermore, the idea of kinship among co-inhabitants, reminiscent of Aldo Leopold's views, encourages a broader understanding of community that embraces all inhabitants of Earth. This promotes a vision of co-existence that is more inclusive, recognizing the interconnectedness and shared fate of all life forms within the Cenozoic community.

Integrating these philosophical insights, the Cenozoic community emerges not merely as an ecological concept but as a crucial ethical and

ontological construct. It encourages a reevaluation of human interactions with the more-than-human world, urging a shift towards ecocentric values in the face of contemporary environmental challenges. Although this discussion does not delineate a definitive ethical framework for the Cenozoic community, it opens up valuable pathways for further ecological and ethical inquiries.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has explored the need to move beyond anthropocentrism by examining post-anthropocentric theories over the last 50 years, classified into sentiocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism. It has highlighted the importance of acknowledging intrinsic values outside the human-centric viewpoint, emphasizing that moving away from anthropocentrism does not provide simple solutions but rather encourages a nuanced approach to ethical decision-making in the context of complex multispecies interrelations. Advocating for a flexible, value-pluralistic ecocentrism, this study suggests that ethical actions can be pursued even amid moral complexities.

The latter sections argued for ethics rooted in care and interconnectedness, inspired by van Dooren, promoting a materially informed understanding of our ecological and ontological place within the multispecies world. The concept of Cenozoic community ethics is introduced as a foundational principle for more effective ethical and policy frameworks.

The Cenozoic community framework emerges as a significant advancement in environmental ethics, especially pertinent in the Anthropocene. It constructs a geo-historical narrative informed by evolutionary biology and paleontology, enhancing our understanding of life's interconnectedness across time. By merging scientific insights with ethical considerations, this framework broadens the ethical discourse to include all forms of life and their ecological networks, emphasizing our deep, historical ties with the non-human world. This approach not only extends ethical concerns to individual organisms, species, and ecosystems but also challenges traditional ethical boundaries, fostering a more inclusive and ecologically conscious dialogue. It highlights our long-term ethical responsibilities to support the flourishing of the Cenozoic community, affirming our participation in a temporal collective that is part of Earth's extensive history.

By focusing on the Cenozoic epoch, it makes the narrative of human evolution and our connections with that era's community more relevant and impactful, laying a strong foundation for environmental policy and strategy. This framework encourages interdisciplinary collaboration, integrating historical science, ecology, ontology, and ethics, supporting projects like rewilding and ecosystem rehabilitation with a deep understanding of ecological contexts.

In summary, the Cenozoic community framework not only enriches environmental ethics but also has practical implications for policy, research, and ecological restoration. It advocates for a comprehensive, informed, and ethically sound approach to environmental challenges, underlining the value of a geo-historically informed perspective for responsible interactions with Earth's ecological systems.

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