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# Rolston and Hayes on Environmental Virtue Ethics: Intrinsic Natural Value, Moral Motivation, and Human-Nature Relationships

## Rolston i Hayes o etyce cnót środowiskowych: wewnętrzna wartość przyrody, motywacja moralna i relacje człowiek–przyroda

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**Abstract:** Environmental virtue ethics represents one of the major approaches within contemporary environmental philosophy, addressing the moral foundations of human relationships with the natural world. Charles Hayes recently presented a defence of environmental virtue ethics in response to criticisms of this stance from Holmes Rolston III. After an outline of Rolston's criticisms, Hayes' argument is depicted, including certain frameworks about motivation which he shows to be deficient, and which he also attributes to Rolston. I proceed to question Hayes' implicit assumption that to act rightly is to do what the virtuous person would do, to contest his attribution of these deficient frameworks about motivation to Rolston, and to endorse Rolston's account of what makes right actions right and meaningful lives meaningful. I also question the view that either virtuous lives or environment-oriented lives are self-justifying, since the actions performed by those who live such lives can (and often do) fail to be morally right.

**Keywords:** environmental virtue ethics, environmental ethics, intrinsic natural value, human-nature relationships, moral rightness, motivating reasons, justifying reasons, anthropocentrism, Holmes Rolston III, Charles Hayes

**Streszczenie:** Etyka cnót środowiskowych stanowi jedno z głównych podejść we współczesnej filozofii środowiskowej, podejmujące problem moralnych podstaw relacji człowieka ze światem przyrody. Charles Hayes przedstawił niedawno obronę etyki cnót środowiskowych w odpowiedzi na krytykę tego stanowiska sformułowaną przez Holmesa Rolstona III. Po zarysowaniu krytyki Rolstona przedstawiona zostaje argumentacja Hayesa, obejmująca określone schematy ujmowania motywacji, które uznaje on za wadliwe i które przypisuje również Rolstonowi. Kwestionuję ukryte założenie Hayesa, że działać słusznie znaczy czynić to, co uczyniłaby osoba cnotliwa; podważam także przypisanie Rolstonowi wspomnianych wadliwych schematów motywacji. Opowiadam się natomiast za ujęciem Rolstona, zgodnie z którym to, co czyni działania słusznymi, a życie sensownym, wymaga odrębnego wyjaśnienia. Poddaję również krytyce pogląd, że zarówno życie cnotliwe, jak i życie ukierunkowane na środowisko przyrodnicze są samouzasadniające, ponieważ działania podejmowane przez osoby prowadzące takie życie mogą, i często nie są, moralnie słuszne.

**Słowa kluczowe:** etyka cnót środowiskowych, etyka środowiskowa, wewnętrzna wartość przyrody, relacje człowiek–przyroda, słuszność moralna, racje motywujące, racje uzasadniające, antropocentryzm, Holmes Rolston III, Charles Hayes

## Introduction

In an essay that (deservedly) won the 2023 Holmes Rolston III Early Career Essay Prize in Environmental Philosophy, and is entitled "Rewilding Anthropocentrism," Charles Hayes presents a formidable defence of environmental virtue ethics in response to criticisms of that stance from Holmes Rolston (Hayes 2025), criticisms made most particularly in Rolston's essay "Environmental Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole" (Rolston 2005). While endorsing many of Hayes' claims, I want to argue that Rolston's case remains defensible against his arguments, and, as he is no longer around to express such a defence, to suggest considerations that can be adduced on his behalf. (There have been other replies to Rolston's critique of environmental virtue ethics, including Simon James' "Human Virtues and Natural Values" (James 2006), but they lie beyond the scope of the current essay).

However, the issues between Rolston and Hayes are not as clear as they might seem. For Rolston gives much emphasis to the question of which values are primary, natural values or human virtues, and discusses matters of people's motivations in the course of elaborating his answers to this question, while Hayes spends most of his essay discussing issues of motivation, about which he makes some profound points. So, the possibility arises that what they both say is correct to some degree. There again, Hayes's definition of "a virtue ethic" (Hayes 2025, 18) diverges from what Rolston had in mind when he included in his title the phrase "environmental virtue ethics"; and this makes it possible that these philosophers might have agreed to a greater degree than initially seems likely.

I begin with an account of Rolston's case. If Hayes' critique of his underlying case is granted, this account of Rolston would need to be supplemented. But Hayes' critique needs to be presented separately, and this is done next. That leads to discussions of the issues at stake (in three sections), and to related conclusions.

## 1. Rolston's Appraisal of Environmental Virtue Ethics: A Preliminary Account

Rolston opens with sections discussing the relation of "Nature and Character," of "Virtuous Persons Embodied in Their Places" and of "Selves Caring for Others." Then, in a longer section called "Human Virtue and Intrinsic Natural Value" he suggests that an acceptable environmental ethics cannot properly be called an environmental virtue ethics. For a full (or adequate) ethic affirms intrinsic values in nature independently of the human virtues with which they have come to be associated or "entwined." In environmental virtue ethics, "Maybe the cart is hooked up to the horse, but the horse has to go before the cart, not the cart before the horse." The context of this passage leaves no doubt that the horse is intrinsic natural value, and the cart is (the related) human virtues. Immediately before it, he explained that his worry was that environmental virtue ethics is "unable to disentwine human virtues from intrinsic values in nature" (Rolston 2005, 70) and appears to assign priority to virtue. What underlies ethics is value or values, which supply the underlying reasons for the virtuousness of virtues and the rightness of doing what is right; and environmental virtue ethics is in danger of underemphasising this.

Part of Rolston's worry concerns the name "environmental virtue ethics." Calling a normative ethic by this name gives undue prominence to human virtues, when what gives these their point, according to Rolston, is the natural values (and the other values) that they foster or preserve. In another passage on page 70, Rolston writes that "To be truly virtuous one must respect values in nature for their own sake and not as tributary to human flourishing." From the range of environmental virtue ethicists that he proceeds to quote, it looks as if some would agree, while others would disagree. His view appears to have been that those who disagree are treating natural values as "tributary to human flourishing," while those who agree should not name their stance

"environmental virtue ethics" because this title underplays the role of intrinsic (or non-derivative) natural value. However, Rolston was not only concerned with nomenclature; he wanted to emphasise that intrinsic value is primary in ethics, and human virtues are subsidiary. And it is intrinsic value that supplies the reasons that uphold whatever is secondary or "tributary."

There are certainly passages where Rolston's focus was on motivating reasons (as well as on justifying reasons). It is wonderful lives (out there is nature) that motivate us, and not just the experience of wonder, he argues on page 71. (These passages help explain Hayes' later focus on motivating reasons.) But Rolston's stance becomes clearer when he states that "It is sometimes a matter of what humans ought to do, like it or not, and these oughts need not always rest on … what ennobles character" (Rolston 2005, 72). In other words, the issue can be one of moral rightness, which can be based on preserving or enhancing or respecting value, rather than on behaving virtuously. Here his talk of what oughts "rest on" shows that he has returned to the question of justifying reasons, rather than that of motivating reasons. It also emerges that at least part of what he means by "environmental virtue ethics" is a certain understanding of what makes actions ones that ought to be done or are the right thing to do, namely doing what the virtuous person would do in these circumstances.

Rolston also maintains that environmental virtue ethics has "Half the Truth." This half-of-the-truth is expressed as "Genuine concern for nonhumans could humanize our race all the more," that is, could make us better people. His concern is that if this claim is taken as the full truth, "it confuses a desirable result with the primary locus of value." And if we are primarily concerned about seeking excellence or with "trying to act nobly, … the sought-after excellence leaks away" (Rolston 2005, 72–73), presumably because it has the wrong underlying reasons.

Later Rolston re-expresses these matters by focussing on "icons of environmentalism": "If we compare Thoreau with other icons of environmentalism, we can see that this search for self-fulfilment does not dominate the concerns of Aldo Leopold, or Rachel Carson, or Jane Goodall, or E.O. Wilson, because all these persons are overwhelmed by self-transcending commitments that are orders of magnitude greater than themselves." These people feared "the loss of wild others," far more than the loss of states of themselves (Rolston 2005, 75). Shortly after, he asserts that "we want the animals and plants to flourish whether or not we are around to be virtuous" (Rolston 2005, 76). Some individual environmental virtue ethicists would probably agree; but not those who hold that what really matters is humans leading the best life that they can.

This summary omits much of the wealth of Rolston's text, which is better grasped when read in full. However, Hayes' critique, to which I now turn, suggests that significant elements of Rolston's stance are not fully disclosed in his text. To that critique I now turn.

## 2. Hayes' Reply and Critique

Before Hayes reaches his critique of Rolston, he presents the central question that he is addressing as "what it means to have the right reasons for doing the right thing" (Hayes 2025, 5). He is also asking whether the answer "Ultimately, to live a better life" is a defensible answer to this question, and, before long, cites the rewilders Paul Jepson and Cain Blythe as being concerned with establishing better relationships with nature, and thus with attaining the best way to live (Jepson and Blythe 2020), a vision that he unhesitatingly calls "*eudaimonistic*" (Hayes 2025, 8, italics in the original).

Hayes entitles the section that follows his Introduction "Criticising the Eudaimonistic Turn," and soon reaches Rolston's critique of how environmental virtue can be attained, which insists on a recognition that environmental value is foundational. Hayes accepts that Rolston has a high regard for

environmental virtue and for virtuous relationships with one's environment; but adds that for Rolston making such virtue one's primary aim is misguided, because this approach is insufficiently selfless and insufficiently altruistic (Hayes 2025, 10–11).

Hayes' response is that the distinction between egoistic and altruistic reasons (whether motivating or justifying reasons) is ultimately unhelpful. So is the claim that making lives meaningful is a secondary reason, secondary to respecting the value of the natural world, as in the stance of Rolston (Hayes 2025, 8–9). His own aim is to call into question the widespread either/or framework so common in environmental thinking, a framework that pits human interest against "ecological interest," anthropocentrism against non-anthropocentrism, and "even" egoism against altruism (Hayes 2025, 8).

To provide background to the dichotomy between egoism and altruism, Hayes shortly launches into its history, introducing the writings of Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther (Hayes 2025, 11). The common strand is that human motivations are divisible into self-interested ones and altruistic ones, and that self-interested ones are, supposedly, wrong (Hayes 2025, 11–12).

The relevance of this framework is that, according to Hayes, Rolston, in his 2012 book *A New Environmental Ethics*, "insists on the same divide between human self-interest and ecological altruism." Hayes quotes Rolston as holding that altruism is only complete when humans can recognise the claims of nonhumans, and that environmental ethics is thus the most altruistic form of ethics. "It transforms residual egos into resident altruists" (Rolston 2012, 59; Hayes 2025, 12). Hayes adds that Rolston actually quotes Luther on the previous page. "Martin Luther described the essence of sinfulness with the Latin phrase *homo incurvatus in se*, the person curved in on himself or herself" (Rolston 2012, 58). This quotation seems intended as evidence that Rolston was also committed to the either/or framework of Augustine and Luther, a framework that Hayes now enlarges on.

Thus, for Augustine, all earthly goods were "a temptation"; Augustine was in turmoil about his own enjoyment of, for example, sunlight, because he could not be sure that he was enjoying it for the right reason, or if his underlying reason was self-interested (Hayes 2025, 12). If Hayes' account of Augustine is accurate, his comments certainly appear to convey a telling critique of Augustine's constellation of views on motivation and his either/or assumptions about love of God and self-interest.

Hayes finds a variation on the same framework in Immanuel Kant's views about motivation, and his requirement to act *for the sake of* the moral law (Hayes 2025, 13; italics in the original). For Kant, motivation is either pure and selfless, or unethical; mere compliance with the moral law is not enough (Kant 2005). Here I take the view that Hayes is right in detecting a version of the same either/or framework.

However, in the last paragraph of his section he attempts to ascribe the same framework to Rolston and cites a sentence of his 2011 book: "To be ethical is to reflect on considered principles of right and wrong and to act accordingly, in the face of temptation." (Rolston 2012, 56; emphasis added by Hayes). While acknowledging that this wording may not reflect Rolston's entire work, he claims that Rolston often characterises ethics this way. And "this way" is claimed to involve participation in the Augustine/Luther either/or tradition about motivation. His evidence is found in the phrase "in the face of temptation," which he claims to involve "this binary framework."

Yet, while Rolston's remark certainly diverges from the view of the rewilders cited earlier, it hardly shows that Rolston held that in every action we are motivated either by altruism or by self-interest, let alone that acting from self-interest is invariably wrong. His phrase "in the face of temptation" can readily be explained as an allusion to the line in the Lord's prayer, "Lead

us not into temptation" (Matthew 6: 13), which, as a church-goer, Rolston will have recited at least once a week, but neither that nor anything else indicates that he held that when we are not behaving altruistically our motives are invariably selfish and wrong. This would imply, for example, that every time he brushed his teeth, he would have to regard this self-interested action as selfish and sinful. Another example of a philosopher concerned about temptation but not adopting the above binary view of motivation is Aristotle, who wrote about temptation in *Nicomachaean Ethics*, Book VII, in the context of "*akrasia*" or weakness of will, the phenomenon of people not doing what they believe they ought to do because of conflicting desires. But Aristotle certainly did not adhere to the binary framework of Augustine and Luther about motivation, which had not at that time been thought of (Aristotle 2000). (I am not suggesting that Aristotle was unaware of possible conflicts between self-love and morality, but just that Augustine's binary framework had not been conceived of in his day.)

However, Hayes is mostly on stronger ground in his new section "Conflation, Ulteriority, and Purity." Conflation is a reply to the Self-Centeredness Objection to virtue ethics, of which Rolston's worry (see above) is said to be a version. This objection (in Rolston's version) holds that virtue ethics prioritizes personal virtue over deeper values such as the value of the living world.

Hayes first mentions a conflation that some critics of environmental virtue ethics are held to commit; they sometimes conflate what makes a trait a virtue with the motives of a virtuous person when acting virtuously (Hayes 2025, 13–15). But he acknowledges that Rolston may not be guilty of this conflation as such (Hayes 2025, 13), and proceeds to argue that the problem lies rather with Rolston's view of self-interested motives, despite his rightly prioritising the independent value of the woods and other wild places (Hayes 2025, 16). Thus in his subsection on 'Ulteriority', Hayes alleges that Rolston and others are prone to criticise "any expression of desiring a better environmental life as having suspect motives," and that this reaction "employs an unhelpfully rigid distinction between egoistic and altruistic reasoning—and between what is anthropocentric and what is non-anthropocentric." He also suggests that "what is pernicious about self-interest is not simply desiring good things for oneself but rather having *ulterior motives*" (Hayes 2025, 16; Hayes' italics). Such motives sometimes make an action wrong. But it is misguided to hold that all motivations are either altruistic or egoistic, and that all self-interested moral reasoning is bad (Hayes 2025, 16). (As I argue below, I have no doubt that Rolston would have agreed.) I return to this crucial issue in section 4 (below).

Hayes goes on to treat a question posed by Rolston as key evidence that he is definitely committed to the binary framework, as has just been alleged. Thus, Hayes turns to Rolston's question (in his 2005 essay) "Would we choose conservation without our resulting virtue?" and likens this to the demand that "a musician should be motivated to make great music without the desire of becoming a better musician," a demand that does not make sense. Rolston's question, however, is held to make sense within the framework "that employs egoism and altruism as a strict binary" (Hayes 2025, 17), presumably because the desire to become a better musician would be treated within that framework as egoistic and wrong.

The context of Rolston's rather staccato question gives little help to interpreters, but even if the binary framework could be held to allow it to make sense, that is far from the only way to make sense of it. For example, conservation could have been achieved by others, and the fruits of their efforts would be just as valuable as if they had been produced by our own virtuous behavior; in that event we should be glad about it, even if our own virtue would not be fostered thereby.

But possibly Rolston's question assumed that the conservation that has been achieved has arisen from our own actions (rather than those of others). However, those actions might not (yet) have set up a related virtuous disposition in ourselves, because, as Aristotle argued in *Nicomachaean Ethics* (Book II), dispositions arise from multiple actions, and our acts of conservation might have been early ones, or even our first, not yet expressive of a stable disposition (Aristotle 2000). So "our resulting virtue" could be yet to result, a possibility that suffices to make sense of Rolston's question. Accordingly, there is no need to read into Rolston's question the presupposition of the binary motivational framework here attributed to him.

Moving to Rolston's recognition that preserving species may involve sacrifices (Rolston 2005, 72), Hayes claims that this kind of sacrifice, far from being at odds with a virtue ethic, "is best addressed by a virtue ethic" (Hayes 2025, 18). He now produces his definition of "a virtue ethic." "A virtue ethic identifies which goods really are worthwhile, which kind of life really is most choiceworthy, and then it identifies what virtues aid us in living such a life" (Hayes 2025, 18), adding that the virtues are what prepare people to identify occasions when sacrifice is required. Here, I set on one side the expansive character of this definition, which appears to include in the scope of "a virtue ethic" the work of value-theory in general. Rather, we should notice that normative theories other than virtue ethics can also explain the choiceworthiness of particular virtues and which ones are needed for a good life.

For example, consequentialists can incorporate virtues in their account of what makes right actions right and explain their virtuousness and why they should be adopted. Dale Jamieson has attempted to explain this in his essay "When Utilitarians Should Be Virtue Theorists" (Jamieson 2007). Maybe amendments are warranted to his stance so as to include practices as well as virtues. But his essay exhibits an alternative approach to that of virtue ethics with regard to explaining the place of virtues in ethics. That approach could also explain the rightness in some circumstances of making sacrifices.

Before closing this subsection, Hayes expresses doubt about approaches that draw a distinction between "doing the right thing and living the best life," and suggests discarding this framework in favour of one that focuses on the best life as involving better relationships with the environment (Hayes 2025, 18). This move appears to assume that living the virtuous life perforce involves doing the right thing. I return to this assumption below.

In a short subsection headed "Purity," Hayes makes perhaps his best point. Quoting Immanuel Kant maintaining that doing what is right is not enough, since it should be done for the sake of the moral law (that is, for the sake of doing what is right), and implicitly for no other reason, Hayes invites (or defies) us to think of actions we have performed for that reason only, with no admixture of other motives. A framework that requires such purity of motives is impractical and needs to be abandoned. This is a shrewd criticism of Kant, but no attempt is made to show that it is as much as relevant to Rolston, who was quite happy to write positively of anthropocentric reasons, including ones that involve benefit for their agents (Rolston 1994, 133–166; see especially 142).

Hayes finally presents his Conclusion. The rewilders on whom he has focused are "happy to talk about happiness" (Hayes 2025, 19), eschewing frameworks in which motives are categorized as either altruistic or egoistic. (This is the eudaimonistic approach mentioned at the start of the article.) Indeed, much of moral life does not fit the framework of doing the right thing even when one does not want to, or resisting temptation, or making sacrifices to do what is right. We are encouraged to forego emphasizing duty and altruistic motivations, and also dividing projects into anthropocentric

and nonanthropocentric ones, and to be proud of building better relations with our environments (implicitly, instead). Despite the absence of any mention here of Rolston, it is his framework, as well as that of others, that seems implicitly to be recommended for rejection.

## 3. Doing The Right Thing

Hayes' article purports, as we have seen, to reflect on the meaning of doing the right thing for the right reasons, and to argue that the right reason can consist in living "a better life" (Hayes 2025, 5). Appraising all this can reasonably include reflecting on what doing the right thing involves, as well as the role of the right reasons, and the adequacy of living a better life as supplying the ultimate answer to questions about having the right reasons. I begin with the issue of the meaning of doing the right thing.

Hayes' answer is not explicit, but almost certainly rests on the assumption, mentioned above, that living the virtuous life perforce involves doing the right thing. For he discourages drawing a distinction between "doing the right thing and living the best life," and suggests that living the best life involves living a life of virtue (Hayes 2025, 18), while also involving having a positive relation to natural environments. In view of his defence of environmental virtue ethics, his implicit answer to the question what is the right thing to do consists in doing what the virtuous person would do in the agent's circumstances. In the absence of an explicit answer to this question, it seems best to respond to the implicit answer just supplied.

A response could go like this. It is not plausible that the virtues form a unity, and that none can clash with any of the others. The moral life foreseeably involves conflicts, when different relationships clash and not all can be prioritized, and when the goods of different others cannot all be honoured. The behest to do what the virtuous person would do in the circumstances, while occasionally being helpful, cannot produce clear answers all the time, partly because different virtues can clash (for example, courage and prudence, or honesty and loyalty). Nor does it help to seek to replace these traditional virtues with environmental virtues, even if that were defensible; environmental virtues, after all, do not assist a person trying to decide which environment to focus on (desert or oasis? hill or plain?), nor how long to spend on doing so, when time could be spent on quite different environmental projects. While some would claim that no answer can be given (even in cases of doubt and uncertainty) beyond doing what the virtuous person would do, the suggestion of appealing direct to the values (including the natural values) that are at stake (as made by Rolston) should not be disregarded.

Besides, the difficulty is not confined to the lack of clear answers in cases of moral dilemmas. What makes doing what the virtuous person would do the right thing to do? The virtuous person is likely to have been brought up to be honest, truthful, loyal and caring, but in a complex, technological age what they should actually do will often not be discoverable by attempting to embody all or any of these virtues in action. To discover this, they will often need to know of the foreseeable or probable impacts of possible actions and of inaction, given the foreseeable or probable impacts of the actions or inaction of others. And the impacts that matter will include the impacts on other people and other living creatures. Adopting the path of the virtuous person will often be far from the right course of action, because of limitations to one's reflection or foresight or imagination. Sometimes the virtuous person will behave with reflection, foresight and imagination, but this is not guaranteed to happen in the generality of actual cases. Nor is it cogent to suggest (in the manner of Hayes) that doing what the virtuous person would do is right because what makes actions right is their conformity with the pursuit of one's own virtue, which builds one's character in ways that lead to happiness. Hayes suggests that

this is why agents should act as the virtuous person would do (even if particular virtues sometimes require agents to put others first). To set on one side issues of whether acquiring a virtuous character leads to happiness, this suggestion is far from plausible in any case. It is far from plausible because it involves sometimes ignoring or neglecting the good of others, who could have been saved from harm or significantly benefited if one had acted differently, but were not thus benefited for the sake of aligning one's actions with the path of virtue. "Others" here include nonhuman others. (Thus Leonidas's decision to withstand the invading Persians at Thermopylae, while adding to his virtue and reputation, involved the futile sacrifice of his soldiers, and of any horses with them too.) Pursuing self-interest does not of itself make actions wrong, but doing so in ways that neglect or damage others can sometimes make actions wrong, even if opportunities to develop one's character have to be postponed or neglected.

It is one thing to claim that impacts on one's own character are a morally relevant consideration when deciding on what to do; for this can certainly be a relevant consideration, as writers like Jamieson (see above) can consistently maintain. It is another to claim that the development of one's character, and thus of "a better way of living", is so important as to justify the relegation of all other considerations to a lesser significance. A good character is good, in part, because of the positive difference that it makes for others. But sometimes such a positive difference stands to be made directly rather than through character-enhancement, and sometimes this makes it right to behave accordingly, rather than in a manner likely to enhance one's character.

## 4. Acting For the Right Reason: Motives

It is with regard to motives that Hayes' case is at its strongest. As he argues, we should avoid any framework that represents all actions as exceptionlessly motivated either egoistically or altruistically. He is also right to maintain that we need to avoid frameworks which require our motives to be exceptionlessly dutiful or moral.

It may prove instructive to consider what makes these conclusions so irresistible. One factor is the meaning of the word "egoistic" (and of cognate expressions). Someone behaves egoistically when they act not merely in their own interest, but when they do so excessively, disregarding either the interests of others, or pastimes that they and others might have enjoyed (such as shared conversations or playing games together). The kind of behavior that is egoistic resembles that of a miser who neglects friends and neighbours, or of an ambitious person who neglects opportunities to pass the time of day with others in worthwhile ways that bring little or no benefit to their own career or finances. By contrast it is not egoistic to perform such self-regarding tasks as repairing one's house, caring for one's garden, or (to repeat an example used already) brushing one's teeth. And this already means that much non-altruistic behavior is far from egoistic, even if (some of) it is self-regarding.

Many ethicists have found a creditable place for self-love, Bishop Joseph Butler (1682–1752) and David Hume (1711–1776) among them (Broad 1930; Crisp 2019, 102, 147) without any hint that the related behavior was egoistic. Rolston too presents a sophisticated view of the role of self-interest within morality in *Genes, Genesis and God*, where self-interested behavior is regarded as far from always selfish; thus the promotion of just rules and of a sense of fairness can be understood as in everyone's self-interest, without those promoting this being considered selfish or self-preoccupied (Rolston 1999, 218–222). There again, in *Conserving Natural Value* he treats self-interest and the self's "investments" (for example, in careers or hobbies) as acceptable and normal, rather than as selfish or objectionable (Rolston 1994, 156). It is also worth noting that in *Science and Religion* he writes in favourable terms of "positive self-regard," that is, freely chosen patterns

of behavior that contribute to shaping one's maturing personality and thus to self-actualization (Rolston 2006, 188–189). No one who writes in this manner could conceivably regard all self-regarding actions as bad or wrong or sinful, the stance that Hayes appears to ascribe to Rolston.

There again, behavior is not normally regarded as altruistic just because it is other-regarding, not even when it is beneficial to others. For example, helping close family members with mundane tasks (like doing the washing or the washing-up) is not regarded as altruism. "Altruism" is normally applied to behavior that involves thought and significant effort in attending to the feelings or the needs of others (whether human or nonhuman). It is accordingly mistaken to think of all other-regarding behavior as altruistic, even when others are benefited. Rolston's usage of "altruism" was aligned to these remarks, and distinctive because he maintained that the concern of an environmentalist for other creatures and species extends "altruism" beyond its usual interhuman context to the context of attention to these other beings, and to their care or conservation (Rolston 2012, 59–60).

So, Hayes' contention that motives are not all either egoistic or altruistic is clearly correct. But there is no reason to suppose that Rolston thought otherwise, despite his early theological training; and considerable reason to hold that he did not accept the either/or framework, and that he could have agreed with Hayes on this issue.

Hayes is surely also right about how our motives cannot be expected to be pure in the sense of being exceptionlessly dutiful or moral and of lacking any trace of self-regard. For many (perhaps most) of our actions are perforce self-regarding; nor is it likely that humanity would have survived and evolved as it did if matters had been otherwise. Even altruistic actions are usually so framed that the altruistic agent manages to preserve herself or himself, although there are of course occasional acts of self-sacrifice where the agent places their own survival at risk. So, any expectation that there should be no admixture of self-regardingness within our motives is unreasonable. There again, many agents are aware that their reputation depends on manifesting high standards in dealings with customers and/or clients; and actions that maintain such standards can quite reasonably be interpreted as motivated in part by concern to uphold the agent's reputation, without this fact sullying the morality of their conduct or of their character.

Immanuel Kant seems not to have fully recognised phenomena such as these. But there seems no parallel reason to criticise Rolston on the same matter, nor others who criticise virtue ethics or environmental virtue ethics. For it is usually recognised that there is scope for criticism of people who are preoccupied with their own virtue(s) to the detriment of practical expressions of concern for others (human or nonhuman). (A familiar example is Maximilien Robespierre, who was so committed to virtue that he favored a virtuous society being introduced through terror.) Yet the making of such criticisms need not involve adherence to a framework which requires all motivation to be dutiful, or even to be other-regarding.

It should quickly be added that there is plentiful scope for the fostering and inculcation of the virtues (virtues both of intellect and of character), even if one is not committed to any form of virtue ethics (as understood in the previous section). For the various virtues are each beneficial overall to others (both human and nonhuman), despite there being exceptions, as when pursuing the path of virtue distracts an agent from opportunities to render benefits. This being so, those theorists who hold that it is right to behave in such a way as to enhance value in the form of the good of all the beings affected can reasonably hold that this is usually (but not invariably) to be done by becoming virtuous and pursuing the path of virtue. There will, however, be other cases where the best outcomes arise through participation in beneficial

practices (such as practices of sustainability), whether or not through behaving virtuously, and yet others where the recognised virtues and the recognised practices would fail to deliver the best outcomes, and where it could be right to depart from both virtues and from characteristically beneficial practices. While this was probably not Rolston's view, it remains a defensible one.

More to the immediate point, there is no reason to suppose that agreeing with Hayes about frameworks that make motives all either egoistic or altruistic, and about frameworks that require motives all to be dutiful and never self-regarding, has any tendency to require us to criticise Rolston's various stances. We have already seen that his remarks about temptation need not commit him to these frameworks, and also that recognition of morality sometimes involving sacrifices need not involve it either. In short, Hayes' case against these frameworks does not amount to a valid criticism of Rolston, because there is no reason to think that he adhered to them. Equally, our understanding of Rolston's overall stance should not be modified to include acceptance on his part of the defective frameworks that Hayes rightly contests.

## 5. Acting For the Right Reason: Justifying Reasons

As we have seen, Hayes acknowledges the distinction between motivating reasons and justifying reasons (Hayes 2025, 8–9). Yet most of his emphasis is on motivating reasons; hence the discussion of motives in the previous section of this article. However, it is important also to consider justifying reasons, and what underlyingly justifies the rightness of right actions, and of actions that ought to be performed. It also makes sense to ask what makes meaningful lives meaningful. To such questions, Rolston replied that the answer lay in intrinsic or independent value, including the intrinsic value of natural creatures. This value, he insisted, is independent of human valuing, human experiences, and of those human virtues that are oriented towards natural beings, whether through our appreciating them or through our preserving them.

Clearly Rolston held that values such as these supply reasons for action, even though he seems not to have defined values in this way. The intrinsic values of natural creatures, he seems to have held, supply reasons for observers to appreciate them and for agents to preserve them, even if the observers or the agents disregard these reasons. But when they develop virtuous dispositions to appreciate and/or to preserve these natural beings, what makes these dispositions virtuous is the underlying value that gives them their point. There again, when a life becomes meaningful through acquiring purpose through appreciating or preserving natural beings, it is the value of what is appreciated or preserved that makes these meaningful lives meaningful.

Rolston would almost certainly have agreed that lives can become meaningful because of their relation to intrinsic value present elsewhere. It is not only nonhuman creatures that have intrinsic value, but human lives as well, and there can be intrinsic value in the fulfilment of their varied capacities. Relatedly, deeds that enhance or restore these capacities can be justified thereby, dispositions to act in these ways can be virtuous ones, and lives dedicated to such projects can be meaningful because of what they are dedicated to. When writing about intrinsic value, Rolston usually acknowledged that intrinsic value can be found in human (as well as nonhuman) life, as well as supplying reasons for related actions to be right and related dispositions to be virtuous. However, where environment-related virtues are in question, it will be, for Rolston, the natural values of nonhuman creatures (and of their relations to each other) that supply the underlying reasons that make these virtues virtuous.

Hayes (who, as we have seen, has a distinctive account of environmental virtue ethics) still appears inclined to reject the abovementioned stance of Rolston, and to hold

that environmental virtues are self-justifying, being elements of "a better life." The happiness that can accompany such virtues and can pervade such a life, he holds, can be an element of what makes it desirable, and need not be viewed as an egoistic (or an objectionably anthropocentric) reason, as if such lives must depend for their value on the intrinsic value of nonhuman beings and thus on nonanthropocentric reasons. Generally, it is mistaken to represent all anthropocentric reasons as defective or unsatisfactory ones.

In this latter claim, Hayes is surely right. Human happiness and human flourishing have intrinsic value, just as nonhuman flourishing does. (It would, I suggest, be open to Rolston to agree.) From this it already follows that far from all anthropocentric reasons are bad ones, and that many actions that promote or enhance or maintain human happiness can be justified accordingly. To categorise justifying reasons as good or bad simply because they are anthropocentric or nonanthropocentric is just as misguided as categorising motivating reasons on this basis. By the same token, not all eudaimonistic justifications can be misguided.

However, happiness is not everything, even when it is the happiness of others, although the happiness of others certainly broadens the range of justifying reasons where one's own happiness was the kind previously in focus. Attaining happiness at the cost of causing distress or harm to others is at least morally questionable, and this holds good both when the others are human and when they (or some of them) are nonhuman. Morally sensitive agents need to take into consideration the full range of intrinsic values, and not only happiness (whether their own or that of other human beings). They need to take into account the good of wild and domesticated nonhumans, as well as that of human beings.

Hayes could agree with this latter statement, as it is environmental virtues, and lives that embody them, that he regards as beyond any need for ulterior justification. Yet this stance is itself vulnerable. A life replete with environmental virtues could be defective in lacking human-regarding virtues such as inter-human sympathy and inter-human kindness; and the happiness based on such a life could prove insecure when the lack (total or partial) of such virtues was called into question. There again, if this happiness turned out to lack adequate concern for the good of either fellow humans or of other living creatures, it would be either incomplete or hollow, because it might lack adequate concern for the happiness or the flourishing of others.

Rolston's concern was that environmental virtues should not be treated as the primary source of value and the primary focus of concern, where the primary source lies in intrinsic value, including that of natural beings. He was in no way opposed to environmental virtues, but wanted us to look beyond them to what accounted for their value, which he understood to be itself derivative. Much the same could be said about the various inter-human virtues. While a life of virtue can bring happiness, and may even partly constitute happiness, the virtues themselves, although they can be seen as valuable just as the exercise of other human excellences also can, must be regarded mainly as having not so much primary or independent value, but rather derivative value, derivative from the values that they either recognize or promote or uphold. And this remains the case, even when we have overcome such temptations as to regard all motives (or even all justifying reasons) as either egoistic or altruistic, or all motives or all justifying reasons as either wholly anthropocentric or wholly nonanthropocentric.

What follows is that the virtues are not self-justifying, and need to be understood on the basis of the values that make them virtuous. And the same holds good of lives of virtue. There again, what makes actions right is not their conformity to what the virtuous person would do, because in some cases we need to think beyond the way in

which the virtuous person would behave. For example, Bonhoeffer argues that ethical reflection should not be confined to the question of how one may emerge honourably from a situation but should also consider the kind of world left to future generations (Bonhoeffer 1953). And this being so, the question of what is right (just like the question of what ought to be done) needs to be understood independently of the question of what is the path of virtue, and with reference to the range of intrinsic values, recognition and respect for which make right actions right. But this was precisely Rolston's point (Rolston 2005).

## Conclusion

Hayes is importantly right to warn us of frameworks which make all motivation either altruistic or egoistic, or that represent all self-regarding motives as egoistic, or that treat all motivations related to human interests as defective because anthropocentric. He is also importantly right to warn of frameworks that make it a condition of actions being moral that they are motivated by dutifulness or by the desire to do what is right, in the complete absence of other motives.

However, there is little or no reason to hold that Rolston subscribed to any of these frameworks, or that his remarks about temptation or about sacrifice suggest that he did. If Rolston's critique of virtue ethics had turned on acceptance of any of them, then it would have lacked the degree of credence that it has. But as it is, he seems to have accepted none of these frameworks, and his critique stands unaffected by Hayes' counter-critique.

There again, contrary to what Hayes appears to assume, we cannot regard an action as right simply because it is virtuous, whether on Aristotle's understanding of virtue, or on that of modern virtue ethicists, or on that of environmental virtue ethicists, or on that of the rewilders mentioned by Hayes (2025, 5–8). As the above examples indicate, virtuous behavior can fail to respect or promote what is independently valuable, which may be located in other people or in other creatures; and this remains the case, even though living by a wide range of virtues can constitute the flourishing of the agent and can thus have intrinsic value accordingly. Not even the aspiration to "live the best life" renders a life lived in accordance with that aspiration immune from ethical challenge.

It should be added that a life spent cultivating the natural world with a view to the preservation of individual creatures or their species or their ecosystems is not immune from ethical challenge either, even though there have hitherto arguably been too few people leading such lives. For such a person might be so placed as to be able to make a large positive difference either to their family, or to the other people around them, or to the prospects of future generations (human or nonhuman), or to rescuing their society from the growth of authoritarianism, and if they pass up such opportunities, their environmental commitments cannot serve to make them ethically invulnerable.

There is much to be said for a life of virtue. Yet those of us who aspire to it need to bear in mind that we are still liable to fall short of doing what is morally right from time to time, and it is wise not to forget this. By the same token it is wise to remember that living virtuously and doing what is right are not invariably the same thing.

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