

IS IT RATIONAL TO CARE ABOUT THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT?

by

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## ABSTRACT

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This paper helps address the question of how people who currently care about the natural environment, or nature, might rationally persuade those who do not currently have such concern. Philosophers have largely ignored this question, but it is important outside philosophy. For instance, many environmental advocates seem to believe that others should care about nature. At least much writing that falls under the broad category of environmentalism intends to persuade us to care about nature in one way or another.

In this paper, I argue that people should care about nature to the extent that they have three other, rationally defensible cares, which I call the etiologies of care about nature: (1) care about the natural dimensions of particular places, (2) care directed at the informational content of natural history, and (3) care originating in biophilia. To show this, I first argue that we have good reason to doubt that care about nature for purely instrumental reasons and in response to nature's intrinsic value are adequate for having rationally defensible care about nature. I then describe the three etiologies and show how together they lead to rationally defensible

care about nature. I also discuss what care and nature are and how the topic of care about nature's rational defensibility relates to the broader question of how people who care about nature might rationally persuade those who lack such concern.

For my parents

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
I. <i>What is care? What is care about nature?</i>	2
II. <i>Caring about nature through caring about others</i>	6
III. <i>Caring about nature for purely instrumental reasons</i>	10
IV. <i>Care in response to nature's intrinsic goodness</i>	15
IV.i. <i>What does it mean to say that nature has intrinsic moral value?</i>	15
IV.ii. <i>Does nature have intrinsic moral value?</i>	22
V. <i>The three etiologies of care about nature</i>	28
VI. <i>Why we should care about nature</i>	34
VII. <i>Concluding remarks</i>	40
References	46

Many people care about the natural environment, or nature.<sup>1</sup> Many others do not care about nature. To my knowledge, philosophers have devoted little attention to the question of how people who currently care about nature might rationally persuade those who do not currently have such concern.<sup>2</sup> The question is important outside philosophy. For instance, many environmental advocates seem to believe that others should care about nature. At least much writing that falls under the broad category of environmentalism intends to persuade us to care about nature in one way or another. In this paper, I argue that people should care about nature to the extent that they have three other, rationally defensible cares, which I call the three *etiologies* of care about nature: (1) care about the natural dimensions of particular places, (2) care directed at the informational content of natural history, and (3) care originating in biophilia.

In §1, I give a general account of care, and I argue that care about nature typically arises from and depends on having other, more basic cares. §2 positions this paper in a broader dialectical context by examining how people might come to care about nature through caring about others' cares. In §3, I argue that we have good reason to doubt that caring about nature for purely instrumental reasons is adequate for having rationally defensible care about nature, and in §4, I find that we also have reason to doubt that caring about nature in response to its intrinsic goodness is adequate, as we have reason to doubt that nature is intrinsically good. In §5, I de-

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<sup>1</sup> I use these terms interchangeably in this paper even though they have different meanings. I discuss this terminology in §1.

<sup>2</sup> Philosophical work has been done on environmental care ethics, especially in a feminist vein, but the notion of care I employ in this paper is slightly different from what care ethicists typically mean. In her dissertation on environmental ethics, Rachel Fedock builds on the care ethics tradition using the Frankfurtian conception of care that I also utilize in this paper, and so her dissertation probably comes closest to the position I present here. But Fedock does not specifically address the question that I am addressing in this paper and that, it seems, has heretofore been largely ignored.

scribe the three etiologies, or sources, of care about nature. I argue that the etiologies are individually inadequate as substitutes for care about nature. In §6, I argue that having all three etiologies is necessary and sufficient for having rationally defensible care about nature. §7 contains my concluding remarks, briefly addresses some outstanding questions about the arguments in this paper, and offers some possible directions for further research.

I. *What is care? What is care about nature?*

Everyone cares about, or has concern for, something. (In this paper, the carers I will focus on are individual people.) When we care about something, we take on the interests of what we care about as our own. In so doing we come to identify with the intentional objects of our cares, so that our cares become part of our personal identities. Moreover, what we care about is whatever we recognize as important to us. Care essentially involves a range of emotional and volitional dispositions: for instance, we feel joy when what we care about flourishes, and we are motivated to do what we can to aid what we care about when it suffers.<sup>3</sup> Even though we might reflect on our cares, care is primarily emotional and potentially non-reflective, and it is the motivating power of emotions that underlies the motivating effect our cares have on us.<sup>4</sup> A care is primarily an emotional disposition to feel certain ways in response to how well what we care about is flourishing.<sup>5</sup> Last, cares come in degrees from minor cares to those that lie at the cores

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<sup>3</sup> My view so far derives from Harry Frankfurt's account. See especially Frankfurt 1988, page 83.

<sup>4</sup> Jaworska (2007) presents a strong argument that care is not essentially reflective, since certain individuals who presumably lack reflective capacities may still have genuine cares.

<sup>5</sup> Jaworska (2007), unlike my view here, characterizes cares as complex secondary emotions, but I think it's easier to see cares as emotional dispositions, and not much hangs on the difference in this paper.

of our identities. On this account of care, we can understand the ethical views of an environmentalist like Aldo Leopold as reflecting his deep care and reverence toward nature. (In Leopold's case, the interests of nature that he personally incorporates have to do with the well-being of land and of biotic communities.<sup>6</sup>)

We can care about virtually any kind of thing: people, animals, plants, physical objects, groups of objects, social causes, and so on. For the most commonly discussed cases, care develops in response to our immediate experience with the intentional object cared about: a family member or favorite activity, for example. Care about nature is not like this, however.

First, by 'nature' I generally mean what people typically mean by nature: something along the lines of that part of the environment (especially that of earth) not influenced by humans. I distinguish this sense of nature from another way the word nature is used to mean the overall universe, or everything that exists (for a naturalist). (In this paper, I do not mean the latter sense of nature unless explicitly stated otherwise.)

We do not experience nature in itself, or as such, because our experience does not readily disclose what parts of things are not under our influence. Nature is essentially a web of interdependent components. Nothing is isolated in nature, just as nothing is causally isolated. Further, nothing on earth is wholly natural or unnatural (though some things might come close). For instance, we ourselves are a mix of nature and non-nature in that we can (and do) in fact change some things but not everything about ourselves: there is some part of us that is irremediably natural. Moreover, human actions affect many aspects of even seemingly natural places. For example, human greenhouse gas emissions affect all ecosystems on earth, and people often

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<sup>6</sup> See 'The Land Ethic' in *A Sand County Almanac* (Leopold 1949).

manage even the most seemingly natural places. In general, it is not easy to tell from immediate experience exactly what is natural, or part of nature, but we are able to build up an idea of what nature is over time.

Second, people at first typically come to care about nature *not* as something mixed in with everything they experience, but through coming to care about some of its immediately experienced components: a wild animal, spontaneous vegetation, or a largely unaltered landscape. That is, concern for nature does not begin with concern for the effects human have on the universe in general, but rather it originates in concern for things like these with which we are much more familiar. Concern for nature then develops into broader concern for the effects we have on similar things and their interests. Thus care about nature, at least as commonly experienced, depends on having initial cares about things like these with which we are familiar. Further, rationally defensible care about nature, as I elaborate below, involves the consideration of other cares.<sup>7</sup>

In what follows I distinguish care from value.<sup>8</sup> I distinguish the two in this paper primarily to avoid general metaethical debates, like that over whether value is metaphysically distinct from valuers. By value I understand an assessment of worth that is taken to be relatively objective, whereas care is an essentially personal and subjective feature of individuals. So, for instance, that somebody deeply cares about another (say, the person's mother) does not necessarily mean that the person takes his or her mother to have correspondingly high value, about which others

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<sup>7</sup> My position, as I will elaborate, is related to Andrea Westlund's argument that self-care involves 'caring about one's cares,' in the sense that self-care entails caring about how rationally defensible one's cares are (2014, 193-5).

<sup>8</sup> Philosophers who write on care typically use the terms to refer to distinct concepts. Jeffrey Seidman, however, has argued that they are not distinct (2009, 301-2).

should rationally agree. Conversely, somebody might hold that a pursuit (say, studying civil engineering) has high value and yet not care about it much at all.<sup>9</sup>

While care about nature is common, there are reasons why environmental philosophers might choose not to focus on care, but instead on whether all or part of nature is good, or has moral value. First, an environmental ethic based on care about nature faces the problem of how to make intersubjectively valid arguments for those without similar concern. Second, focusing on the notion of care might seem to direct environmental ethics away from the intentional object of caring (namely, all or part of nature) toward the carer, thereby directing environmental ethics away from the subject matter of ethics proper (i.e., moral value) toward the subject matter of metaethics (how things might have moral value). I think that both of these criticisms are in the end unwarranted (and I hope this paper helps alleviate them), but I acknowledge their pull.

Last, my approach in this paper substantially differs from current approaches in environmental ethics. Much work in the field focuses on the value of nature: especially on whether nature has intrinsic value (and what that value might be) and whether nature's instrumental value is a sound basis for environmental ethics. For example, J. Baird Callicott (1995) argues that nature has intrinsic value and that its instrumental value is not sufficient for environmental ethics, while the so-called pragmatists, like Bryan Norton and Andrew Light, argue that nature's instrumental value is sufficient for a sound environmental ethic. To my knowledge, care, in the sense I use in this paper, is not discussed in the literature much at all, and if it is, then it is typically used in arguing for the moral value of nature. For instance, Katie McShane (2007a) and (2007b) argues that our caring attitudes are important in evaluating whether nature has intrinsic value.

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<sup>9</sup> This distinction is similar to the one Seidman in fact seems to endorse earlier in the same paper (2009, 287-8).

Further, I do not know of any attempts to give a systematic account of care about nature in the way I am.

## II. *Caring about nature through caring about others*

This paper mainly addresses the question of whether care about nature is rationally defensible. This is a question of whether and why caring about nature might potentially be attractive to other rational agents: that is, whether someone could rationally justify their care to another.<sup>10</sup> The sense of ‘rational justification’ I use is primarily a weak one, so that no one is rationally required to care about nature *unless*, as I argue in §6, they already have the three etiologies of care about nature. That is, to care about nature in a rationally defensible way requires caring about the natural dimensions of particular places, the information content of natural history, and nonhuman living things. If one has all three of these three cares to any degree, I argue, then one should, on pain of irrationality, care about nature as well. But, if one does not have all three of the etiologies, then one is not rationally required to care about nature.

One might think, then, that I am neglecting the question of how people who currently care about nature might rationally persuade those who do not currently have such concern. Addressing this broader question requires that care about nature be rationally defensible, but care about nature’s rational defensibility, in the sense at issue, is insufficient to show how people who currently care about nature might persuade those who do not. Although I will not give a com-

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<sup>10</sup> With the contentious addition that only rationally defensible cares are morally permissible, it is also a question of the moral permissibility of care about nature.

plete account of that broader question, addressing whether care about nature is rationally defensible goes a good way toward showing how people who currently care about nature might persuade those who do not, as I show in this section.

Moreover, there is an additional route by which people come to care about nature rationally that I leave out in the following sections. Namely, people sometimes come to care about nature by caring about people who care about nature. Since someone's cares are part of their identity, caring about another person implies some degree of care about what they care about. This additional way of coming to care about nature through caring about others is closely related to the first aim of this section because caring about other people is more common than (and perhaps to some degree morally required, unlike) caring about nature. Hence caring about others provides an avenue for broadening care about nature beyond those who do not care about nature just in virtue of caring about others.

For example, suppose that Jack cares about nature only insofar as his daughter cares about nature. That is, he cares about nature just because his daughter cares about nature. Perhaps Jack sees how important nature is to his daughter, and, though he does not appreciate why nature is worthy of such care himself, he adopts a caring attitude toward nature for his daughter's sake. Jack's care is rationally defensible in this case only if it is rationally defensible for him to care about nature in virtue of his daughter's care about nature. Since his daughter's cares are part of her identity, then caring about his daughter implies some care about what she cares about. So, if it is rational for him to care about his daughter, then it is rational to care about her cares. But this does not imply that Jack must *share* his daughter's cares. It is only rational to do that if his daughter's cares are rationally defensible to begin with.

In this example, Jack is rational to care about nature only if his daughter is rational in caring about nature. His daughter, by hypothesis, does not care about nature in virtue of anyone else's care about nature. So, if his daughter cares about nature irrationally, then so does Jack. His daughter's care about nature is rationally defensible, I argue in §6, if she has the three etiologies of care about nature. Call those who care about nature just in virtue of caring about others the 'secondary carers,' and call those who care about nature but not in virtue of anyone else's care the 'primary carers.' In general, the primary carers' care about nature must be rationally defensible for secondary carers' care to be rationally defensible.

The picture we are developing is of a network of carers, with primary carer's care spreading to secondary carers. In our example of Jack and his daughter, primary and secondary carer are closely related, both socially and biologically. We can easily extend the example to cover secondary carers whose friends care about nature, but we might doubt that care about nature can spread to secondary carers through more formal or less intimate ties.

I cannot adequately address such a wide-ranging issue in this paper. Nevertheless, if care about nature is not rationally *required*, then care about nature by way of caring about others seems to be the best route open for expanding care about nature beyond the primary carers. I see no way for care about nature to be rationally required, apart from having the three etiologies, and I briefly argue for this conclusion in §7. But this conclusion does not entail that primary carers are the only ones who should care about nature. As we have seen, those who deeply care about others have good reason to adopt their cares. More strongly, care about nature involves respect for nature, and so to act against nature, especially needlessly or wastefully, entails some level of disrespect toward those who care about nature. To what extent such disrespect of nature

carries over to those who care about nature (both primary and secondary carers), I cannot say, but I am sure that it is a nontrivial amount. If that is right, and acting against nature entails some disrespect toward those who care about nature, then even those who do not care about nature have some reason to act as though they care about nature.

As mentioned above, this paper mainly addresses the narrower question of just how the primary carers' care about nature might be rationally defensible. This question is vital, however, to addressing the broader question of how people who currently care about nature might rationally persuade those without such concern. If care about nature were not rationally defensible, then it would be hard to see how anyone lacking such concern could be rationally persuaded to care about nature, even through caring about another person. Moreover, care about nature's being rationally defensible helps strengthen the case that others should, all things being equal, not act against nature because such action disrespects those who care. Since acting against nature is worse, to those who care about nature, than merely disliking it or wishing its downfall, reason not to act against nature is an attractive second-best outcome to convincing others to care about nature.

In the next two sections, I show that we have good grounds for doubting that nature has intrinsic value and that nature's instrumental value is sufficient for environmental ethics. But, as we will see in the §§5 and 6, primary carers can justify their care about nature based on the three etiologies of care about nature.

### III. *Caring about nature for purely instrumental reasons*

Nature surely has some *instrumental value*, or value derived from its utility for something with *intrinsic value*, which we will discuss in the next section. As I noted at the end of §1, philosophers disagree on whether nature's instrumental value is sufficient for environmental ethics. This debate ignores whether caring about nature just in virtue of recognizing its instrumental value is ultimately rationally defensible. The question of whether such care is rationally defensible helps resolve the question of whether nature's instrumental value is sufficient for environmental ethics. If such care is ultimately not rationally defensible, as I argue, then nature's instrumental value cannot be sufficient for environmental ethics. For without any rational support for care about nature in general, there is no rational support for care directed at nature's value, which is ultimately what environmental ethicists (of the sort interested in these issues) seek (as we will see in more detail below and in §4.1).<sup>11</sup>

Nature's instrumental value gives us instrumental reasons for caring about nature. Consider Jill, who cares about hiking along a certain river. Jill thereby has instrumental reasons for caring about particular features of the river, like its lack of pollution. Anything affecting those features also affects Jill insofar as she cares about hiking along the river. Thus Jill cares about the river itself to a comparable extent as she cares about hiking along the river. Similarly, since we all derive instrumental value from nature in some way (whether we recognize this value or not), we all have some instrumental reasons for caring about nature.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. especially the extended quotation from Callicott (2001) on pages 17-18 of this paper.

If we care about nature for purely instrumental reasons, then we care about it solely insofar as human interests (our survival and livelihoods, the pleasure we derive from natural landscapes, and so on) depend on it. The actual object of our concern is not nature, then, but human interests. But there is only a contingent link between our interests and nature. Take the biosphere as an instance of nature. A far more technologically advanced society believing in nature's merely instrumental good might leave very little of earth's biosphere intact if the biosphere no longer supports its interests.

Moreover, to care about something, we must be very unwilling to act against it (at least as we understand its interests), and if we self-consciously act against something we care about, then our action results from a conflict in the interests of different things we care about. But someone who cares only about human interests has no difficulty self-consciously acting against nature, even for petty reasons, as long as the action does not interfere with human interests. So, caring about nature for purely instrumental reasons is not care about nature. For instance, we lack the proper emotional and volitional dispositions to protect nature if we care about nature only instrumentally, and so we do not really care about nature in this case.

As we have seen, care about nature for purely instrumental reasons is not care about nature, but rather care about human interests. Care about nature entails care about more than human interests, perhaps not actually (if, however improbably, everyone in fact derives some use from everything in nature), but at least potentially. Thus it is irrational to care about nature for purely instrumental reasons, since instrumental reasons do not give sufficient reason to care about nature itself.

But, someone might object, why do we need to care about nature, then? Why is care about human interests insufficient to generate adequate support for environmentalist causes? After all, considerations involving human interests alone give broad support for many causes that environmentalists care about, like climate change. Moreover, as long as people want to experience majestic land and seascapes, there will be public support for their protection. Arguments involving intergenerational harms and benefits are also often used to shore up environmentalist support, and such arguments are instrumental, since nature's protection is argued for based on benefits to future generations of humans.

There are two ways to understand the objection. The first way is more obvious but does not seriously affect my project in this paper, while the second is less obvious, would affect my project, but is misguided. First, the objector might be taken to mean that although it is morally permissible for some people to care about nature, most people need not have such care for society to achieve similar aims (e.g., protection of relatively natural places). As we have seen, however, there is a significant theoretical difference between caring about nature and caring about human interests. In actuality, caring about human interests alone will probably not achieve everything that someone who cares about nature would like to achieve. For instance, there are large landscapes, like remote boreal forests (or taiga), threatened by human activities (e.g., clearcutting for paper pulp). Since the forests are remote (and many of them are somewhat unappealing to visit for most people), few people have any strong emotional attachments to them, yet because they are part of nature, those who care about nature care about them, to some degree.

Even granting that there are other reasons for caring about boreal forests aside from potential tourist value (e.g., they store enormous amounts of carbon), the difference in the two

cares results in a difference in how the two kinds of carers want the forests to be treated. For those who care about nature, maintaining the forests as they would have been, absent human influence, is a priority. Further human influence on the forests is inconsistent with their care, even if damage to the forest, say, might be called for, all things considered. For those who care only about human interests, some further human influence is consistent with their care, as long as the benefits outweigh the costs. (Perhaps human emotional attachment to the landscapes can be assigned a value that might be weighed against the value of the forests' natural resources, for instance.)

So, the objector should grant that there are ways for care about nature to come apart from care about human interests. But if the two cares can come apart in actuality, and if the objector grants that it is permissible for some people to care about nature, then the question we are asking in this paper still stands: Is it rationally defensible for people to care about nature? Hence the objector, understood in this way, does not threaten the project of this paper.

We could, however, understand the objector in a second way, if we understand the upshot of the objection to be that the outcome for nature is the same whether we care about human interests or nature itself. Since the outcome for nature is the same either way, and since care about human interests is, for good reason, far more widespread than care about nature, considering care about nature is misspent time. Further, care about human interests is clearly rationally defensible (by any standard of rationality), while care about nature is not so clearly rationally defensible, giving us more reason to ignore it. But, as I have argued, the two cares are not the same, at least not obviously in practice and certainly not in theory, and so considering

the rational defensibility of care about nature apart from a defense based on its instrumental value is probably not misspent time.

In this section, I argued that, while nature undoubtedly has instrumental value, caring about nature just in virtue of recognizing this value is somewhat inadequate. Since nature has great instrumental value, however, considering nature's value might give one good reason to care about nature. I have suggested that care about nature for instrumental reasons is not strong enough to support care about nature, full stop, but one might rightly dispute this claim.<sup>12</sup> In any case, there are sufficient doubts to motivate us to look elsewhere for a rational justification of care about nature.

I first argued that care about nature for instrumental reasons is in fact care directed at human interests. Then I argued that the two cares are distinct. My initial arguments for this conclusion were theoretical and involved hypothetical scenarios. Then, in responding to the objection that care about human interests is enough for support of environmentalist causes, I gave an actual example (involving boreal forests) that seems to support the conclusion that care about nature is distinct from care about human interests. Last, I concluded that because of this distinction between the two cares, seeking alternative support for the rational defensibility of care about nature is worthwhile.

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<sup>12</sup> For instance, one might argue that we should be risk averse or epistemically humble in weighing potential risks to the environment. It could be, though I think there are good grounds to doubt this, that this risk aversion or epistemic humility might be sufficient for giving a rational defense of care about nature. At least, demonstrating nature's instrumental value certainly *can* motivate people to have the right sorts of dispositions toward nature, even if it does not give them sufficient grounds for caring about nature. Whether care about nature is necessary, then, from an environmentalist's perspective, is thrown into question. I am not giving enough consideration of these arguments here, so I am just concluding that there are sufficient doubts for looking elsewhere for a rational justification of care about nature. Thanks to Blain Neufeld and Andrea Westlund for pushing this line of argument.

#### IV. *Care in response to nature's intrinsic goodness*

We might suppose that we can care about nature just in virtue of the fact that we appreciate nature's intrinsic goodness. We can care about some things with intrinsic value (perhaps historically valuable artworks) just by recognizing their intrinsic goodness. Even someone lacking any personal enjoyment of art might have a basic level of care about historically valuable art. Such a person might believe that public expenditures protecting artworks are justified and feel angry when art is destroyed, for example. So, we might believe, if nature has intrinsic value, then some people might come to care about it just because they recognize this value, and they might provide modest support for environmentalist causes.

This section is divided into two parts. In §4.1, I argue that the sense of intrinsic value at issue in environmental ethics implies both non-instrumental and non-extrinsic value and includes some notion of ethical, or moral, standing. In §4.2, I argue that not only do we have good reason to doubt that nature has intrinsic value, but we also have reason to believe that we do not actually hold nature to have intrinsic value.

##### IV. i. *What does it mean to say that nature has intrinsic moral value?*

That nature has intrinsic goodness (i.e., moral worth, or simply value) is an idea central to typical (non-anthropocentric) accounts of environmental ethics, as many have noted.<sup>13</sup> Yet environmental philosophers on the whole are not consistent in what they mean by intrinsic value.<sup>14</sup> Intrinsic value has been variously defined as non-instrumental value (Callicott [1995]); as special

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<sup>13</sup> See O'Neill (2001, 164-75), McShane (2009, 408-10; 2007, 46-7), Callicott (1995), and Afeissa (2009).

<sup>14</sup> See O'Neill (2001) and McShane (2007b, 46-9).

‘ethical standing’ (O’Neill [2001, 165]); as value that things have non-relationally, or due to their intrinsic properties (the Moorean sense of intrinsic value, see O’Neill [2001, 164-5]); and as value that obtains independently of valuers (*ibid.*).<sup>15</sup> I follow J. Baird Callicott in distinguishing between the *source* and *object* of value (1984, 305). That is, I remain neutral as to whether value is independent of valuers or not, so we will set aside the last sense of intrinsic value. We will focus on the three remaining notions that go by ‘intrinsic value’ in the literature: first, non-instrumental value, second, value that solely depends on intrinsic properties, and third, ethical standing.

While the three remaining notions are in principle distinct from one another, they are related in that arguments for the non-instrumental value of nature turn on considerations having to do with the special ethical standing of nature’s intrinsic properties. I present the overall argument for this conclusion before discussing it in more depth. First, nature as a whole, or the universe, (at least for a naturalist) has no external relations (as there is nothing outside nature to which nature itself might be related), and so any properties it has are intrinsic in the Moorean sense. Second, to value nature we must value something about it, and so we must recognize that some of its (intrinsic) properties are good. Hence, applied to nature as a whole, the first sense of intrinsic value as non-instrumental value depends on the second sense of intrinsic value. Last, the sense of ‘value’ in use here is meant to be objective, such that any rational agent should be able to recognize the intrinsic value of nature, and so the value in question is tantamount to ethical standing.

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<sup>15</sup> Another possibility mentioned in the literature: that intrinsic value is a distinctive way to *care* about something (McShane 2007b, 47). I do not think that this interpretation of intrinsic value gets at what most other environmental ethicists mean by the term, and I will position myself in relation to this alternative below, so I will leave it out of the discussion for now.

Let me make a few observations about the above argument. First, if 'nature' is meant to encompass everything that exists, then *care* about nature is misplaced, since we cannot distinguish human interests from nature's interests. And if the two sets of interests are not at all distinct, then we cannot ever act to support or thwart nature. Indeed, overall nature, or everything that exists, cannot be helped or harmed in any way. If that is the case, then it would be irrational to have the set of emotional and volitional dispositions that would constitute care about nature overall, or the universe.

Nevertheless, many people, environmental philosophers included, value the natural order of things. Thus they value nature as a whole because it is responsible for this order. The sense of 'value' I intend here is objective: value that is not necessarily independent of valuers, but that must be somehow connected to our rationality (and maybe some other general features of humans).

Alternatively, sometimes the verb 'value' is used as a synonym for care: that is, as an inherently subjective and personal feature of valuers. Contrast, for instance, the statement that 'some deeply value their mothers' with the statement that 'some consider their mothers to have immense value.' The first statement is not unusual and seems to be using 'value' as a synonym for 'care,' while the second is somewhat unusual and seems to demand the addition of 'for them' after 'value.' So, there seems to be a difference, at least in colloquial usage, between 'value' used as a verb and 'value' used as a noun. By using the term 'value' in this paper (as either a verb or noun), I do not mean to be using a synonym for care, nor do environmental philosophers typically mean by 'value' anything akin to what I mean by 'care.'

For example, in a summary of his work on the land ethic, Callicott argues that the ‘normal’ (pre-human) rates and scales of ecological disturbance are good.<sup>16</sup> He contrasts these normal rates with the excessively fast and massive changes humans effect (2001, 214-6). His main reason for thinking that normal rates and scales of ecological disturbance are good seems to be that nature has intrinsic value, a point that Callicott makes elsewhere (1995). Callicott’s account identifies rightness with the rates and scales of natural changes, and wrongness with higher rates and scales of change (which he takes to be anthropogenic): ‘A thing is right when it tends to disturb the biotic community only at normal spatial and temporal scales. It is wrong when it tends otherwise’ (2001, 215-6).

Callicott’s argument here is not about the value of nature just for him. Rather, he argues that nature should have value for everyone, that there is a connection between being a rational agent and ascribing value to nature. In the following passage, Callicott makes a rhetorical move based on his understanding of nature’s objective (in the sense of rationally committing) value.

Let me first, as a model, recount Leopold’s use of the temporal scale of evolutionary change as a norm for evaluating anthropogenic change. Consider the current episode of abrupt, anthropogenic, mass species extinction, which many people, I included, intuitively regard as the most morally reprehensible environmental thing going on today. [...] Normally, speciation out-paces extinction – which is the reason why biological diversity has increased over time. So, what is land-ethically wrong with current anthropogenic species extinction? Species extinction is not unnatural. On the contrary, species extinction – anthropogenic or otherwise – is perfectly natural.<sup>17</sup> But the current *rate* of extinction is wildly abnormal. Does

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<sup>16</sup> Normal rates and scales are those that obtained prior to humans’ having a massive, irreversible effect on the biosphere (whenever exactly that might have happened).

<sup>17</sup> His use of the term ‘natural’ here differs from how I am using the term in this paper. By ‘nature’ he means the universe overall, but I find his use of the term in drawing moral conclusions potentially confusing and opaque.

being the first biological agent of a geologically significant mass extinction event in the 3.5-billion-year tenure of life on planet earth morally become us *Homo sapiens*? Doesn't that make a mockery of the self-congratulatory species epithet: the sapient, the wise species of the genus *Homo*? (2001, 214-15)

In this passage, Callicott asks if we deserve to be called *Homo sapiens*, given our tendency to exterminate other species. He presumes agreement with the reader that being wise or sapient should be sufficient for avoiding actions that would lead to mass extinctions. But this presumption only makes sense if valuing nature (specifically, the diversity of natural biological kinds) is rationally required.

Other environmental philosophers have made structurally similar arguments. Paul Taylor (1981) has argued that, just in virtue of being 'teleological centers of life,' all living things have intrinsic value in the non-instrumental, non-extrinsic sense we are using (Afeissa 529). That is, being a teleological center of life is non-instrumentally, non-extrinsically good, so it has intrinsic value. By arguing this way, Taylor does not mean to be giving reasons for why *he* especially should value living things, but why recognizing such value is rationally required for anyone.

Moreover, building on his famous 'Last Man' thought experiment, Richard Routley (later Sylvan) argued that we need an alternative to mainstream anthropocentric ethical views because we would think it wrong for the last person on earth to extinguish all other life, given the chance (1973). Routley does not discuss intrinsic value itself in discussing the 'Last Man,' but we can see its application in the following brief argument. If humans are the only things with intrinsic value, ultimately, then there should be nothing wrong with somebody extinguishing all nonhuman life, as long as nobody is negatively affected. Yet we believe, he thinks, that the Last Man should not

extinguish all life, even if that can be done humanely. Thus, we conclude from this argument, humans cannot be the only things that we hold to have intrinsic value.

This argument is unsound, I think, because there might be something wrong with extinguishing all nonhuman life even if such life lacks intrinsic value. Namely, as I argue below, acting against life may seem wrong to us because we care about life, not because life has intrinsic value. Nevertheless, many environmental philosophers seem to believe that this type of Last Man argument for nature's intrinsic value is sound. If such an argument for nature's intrinsic value is sound, then any rational agent should be able to recognize the intrinsic value of nature by considering the Last Man thought experiment.

To say that nature has intrinsic value in the non-instrumental, non-extrinsic sense we have been discussing is to say that nature has ethical standing, where 'ethical standing' refers to something's being a Kantian *end in itself* (O'Neill 165). The upshot of assigning ethical standing to nature or to certain natural objects is that the interests of such things should figure into our practical deliberations. Ethical standing need not give us overriding reasons to act, but it must give us at least *pro tanto* reasons for acting in some ways but not others. So, if cattle have ethical standing, then we should consider their well-being when deliberating about whether to consume beef or dairy products, for example. Presumably, cows' ethical standing, in this case, gives us a *pro tanto* reason for not consuming beef or dairy products.

Callicott extends this notion of ethical standing to biotic communities in his argument that what is good are normal rates and scales of disturbance, while anything else is bad (2001, 214-

6). In addition, in the extended passage cited above, Callicott argues that natural biological diversity has ethical standing, since actions that tend to reduce such diversity are morally wrong on his account.

Similarly, according to Andrew Brennan, we have moral obligations to nonliving things that are free to develop according to their own (functionless) natures: ‘the claim that rivers, mountains, and wildernesses can be “tamed” is an implicit acknowledgement that they have, so to speak, their own wild, free way of existing.’ Brennan argues that, because nonliving things can be free in this sense, they have ethical standing, on the analogy that *our* capacity for being free supports our having freedom (54-6).<sup>18</sup>

This moral obligation to nonliving things is also part of the land ethic tradition, to which Callicott belongs. That is, limiting the land ethic only to living things and purely biotic communities would miss the point, which is that the nonliving and living are both part of what Leopold calls ‘land’ (Leopold 171). The key to understanding how these various elements fit together, I think, lies in evolution and natural history, through which living and nonliving things evolve in tandem, each influencing and responding to changes in the other. That is, biological evolution is part of natural history more broadly, and the land ethic values both biological and non-biological evolution in that things (e.g., actions) are generally right when they (more-or-less) go along with whatever the ‘natural’ course is or *would be* (free from human intervention), as applied to both the living and nonliving things on earth.

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<sup>18</sup> Brennan argues that our obligations to ‘tamed’ or domesticated things (e.g., domesticated strains of cattle or ornamental plants) stems from this original obligation to free things *of the same natural kind* (which just happened not to undergo human-selective breeding) (46-7).

Last, note that although overall nature, or the universe, encompasses human beings, we can conceptually separate humans and our effects from nature and its effects. (Indeed, by ‘nature’ I typically mean the more restricted notion in this paper, and I have presupposed this conceptual distinction between nature overall [i.e., the universe] and humanity, e.g., in §1.) It is still nature’s intrinsic properties that make the non-human part of nature non-instrumentally good, though, since the relation between humanity and the rest of nature is not what makes nature good (often this relation is held to be overall bad, after all).<sup>19</sup> Thus our previous conclusion that, applied to nature as a whole, the non-instrumental sense of intrinsic good depends on the non-extrinsic sense of intrinsic good (as the good following only from something’s intrinsic, not extrinsic, properties) also obtains for nature divorced from humanity (i.e., the usual understanding of nature).

#### IV. ii. *Does nature have intrinsic moral value?*

In §4.1, we saw that many philosophers ascribe intrinsic value to nature in some way. I argued that the sense of intrinsic value at issue here is both non-instrumental and non-extrinsic and includes some notion of ethical, or moral, standing. Whether nature has intrinsic value crucially depends on whether nature’s intrinsic properties are morally good, bad, or neutral, then, since nature is non-extrinsically good if and only if nature has good intrinsic properties. Thus nature has intrinsic value if and only if its intrinsic properties are good.

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<sup>19</sup> There are in fact two relations here: one going from humanity to nature, and the other from nature to humanity. The first of these is clearly not good on typical accounts in environmental ethics, while the second is largely responsible for any instrumental value that nature has. Since instrumental value is not what we are after here, it seems reasonable to claim that the humanity-nature relations are overall bad.

In §4.2, I argue first that we have reason to doubt that nature's intrinsic properties are morally good. In fact, they are probably morally neutral overall. I do not take this argument to be conclusive. I then argue that if we believe that something (in particular, life) has intrinsic value just because it is natural, then it must have value just to the extent that it can exist naturally (i.e., without human aid, broadly construed). Here I (contentiously) assume that if nature has intrinsic value, then something must have intrinsic value just because it is natural. I then introduce a thought experiment meant to show that we do not in fact value anything just because it is natural. This thought experiment suggests that we do not hold nature to have intrinsic value and gives us good reason to doubt that nature has intrinsic value just because it is natural. My argument here targets just the defenses of nature's intrinsic value that presuppose that something is intrinsically valuable just because it is natural.<sup>20</sup>

Are nature's intrinsic properties good, bad, or morally neutral? I argue that they are morally neutral. Of course nature simply is what it is and follows no moral inclinations, but we can still judge whether the outcomes and processes of nature are good or not. It is important to distinguish nature's outcomes from its processes, I think, because although we might judge current outcomes (earth's biosphere, for example) good, these outcomes are the wholly fortuitous result of processes that, if the laws of nature are deterministic, could have yielded very different outcomes, some bad, given just slightly different initial conditions (or, if the laws of nature are

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<sup>20</sup> Thanks to Stan Husi for pressing the argument that one might defend nature's intrinsic value without relying on the assumption that nature has value just because it is natural. For instance, one could argue that nature's organic unity or complexity supports its having intrinsic value. (Other arguments could be deployed against this defense, though, since we could dispute that organic unity or complexity are adequate support for something's having intrinsic value. Further, one could argue that artifacts can have organic unity or complexity, and thus that we could not defend *nature's* specific intrinsic value thus. Thanks to Blain Neufeld for making this point in conversation.)

not deterministic, could have been different given even the same initial conditions).<sup>21</sup> In addition, over the entire history of nature, including its future, the good aspects of nature will gradually disappear, by the second law of thermodynamics, until nature is downright bad (because incapable of supporting anything that we might deem to be good, like life or variety). Since these processes (which will eventually erase everything good about nature) are at work now, nature is *not* intrinsically good after all. Without getting into a debate about what nature's intrinsic properties really are, we can see that there are serious difficulties with attributing intrinsic goodness to nature. Because arguments about nature's non-instrumental moral value turn on nature's non-extrinsic goodness, as we have seen, these arguments are suspect.

This argument is not conclusive. First, one might object that just because something is somewhat *fortuitous*, it is not thereby and to that degree *bad*. For instance, it is highly fortuitous that any particular human beings exist. It does not seem to follow that no particular human beings are good. This objection is mistaken, though, because the above argument does not presume to show that the *outcomes* of any stochastic processes are bad, but rather that the processes themselves are somewhat bad because they are stochastic and sometimes lead to bad results. Still, the objector might reply, the fact that the human reproductive process is highly stochastic does not mean that that process is bad. I disagree: the fact that the human reproductive process can lead to bad results *does*, to that degree, make it bad. But I believe there can be rational disagreement about this matter and have no conclusive arguments to support my position.

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<sup>21</sup> I am assuming here that the laws of nature are not altered. I also assume that anything wholly fortuitous is not intrinsically good.

Second, one might object that just because nature includes so much death, decay, and squander, nature is not bad. For instance, the fact that circumstances arbitrarily shorten and diminish our lives does not diminish our lives' goodness. I disagree: if disease, frailty, and so on did not arbitrarily shorten and diminish our lives, then they would be, holding all else equal, better. But I grant that there is some reason to believe that transience can in fact make things *more*, not less, valuable. Certainly rarity can increase the value of some things, and transience is just an instance of temporal rarity. So, I do not take the argument to be definitive, but I do think it gives us good reason to doubt that nature has intrinsic value. The defender of nature's intrinsic value needs to address the concerns that the above argument highlights.

Moreover, it might seem that we could hold some restricted part of nature (say, earth's biosphere or all living organisms) to have intrinsic value separate from the rest of nature. But nature is wholly interconnected, so that valuing some part *as natural* (while also not valuing the rest) is ultimately incoherent. Suppose that we hold living things to have intrinsic value specifically insofar as living things are natural entities, but we do not recognize that living things can only exist naturally within a finite span of time. That is, we do not see that valuing life as natural is inconsistent with valuing life as something that should (ideally) exist always. (I do not believe that anybody has seriously taken this position, but it is worth exploring for the sake of argument.) Our values then become inconsistent when nature itself precludes the existence of life long after all stars and other energy sources have been depleted. At that time, we either no longer value life as something that should always exist, or we no longer value life *as natural*, since life can no longer exist naturally. We are thus forced to hold that either life or nature ultimately has value.

But suppose that we instead hold life, strictly as it is part of nature, to have intrinsic value just within the timespan that life exists *naturally* (i.e., excluding all intervention by humans or other rational beings). This is almost certainly not what anyone means by valuing life (or the biosphere). For suppose that some natural calamity or condition were to threaten the entire biosphere. Now, it would probably be in humanity's interest to stop that threat, or at least minimize its effects. But if we intervene, then whatever life we save from perishing is no longer natural by the definition of nature we are using. If we suppose that life has at least some intrinsic value just insofar as it is part of nature, then whatever living things we save lose some of their intrinsic value and thus become, to that extent, valuable only instrumentally, based on our interest in their continued existence. If this scenario were to play out, however, nobody would suppose the intrinsic value of life or the biosphere to have decreased by any amount. Hence it does not appear as though life lost whatever initial intrinsic value it got just from being natural. It seems, therefore, that we value parts of nature (like the biosphere) by some other criterion than their simply being natural.

In this section I have argued that if nature has intrinsic value, then nature's intrinsic properties must be good overall. But we have reason to suspect that nature's properties are not good overall, since natural processes, which arguably make nature what it is, are as much bad as good. Thus we have reason to suspect that nature lacks intrinsic value.

I then argued that we have good reason to doubt that parts of nature have value separate from the rest. Doing that would go against the interdependence of everything in nature and potentially result in contradiction. In addition, intervening to protect the parts of nature we value from destructive natural processes would probably not diminish any intrinsic value that we hold

the protected parts of nature to have. For this reason, it seems unlikely that we in fact hold anything to have intrinsic value just because it is natural. And if we do not hold anything to have intrinsic value just because it is natural, then we do not hold nature itself to have intrinsic value just because it is natural. That some things have intrinsic value just because they are natural seems to lie behind Callicott's land ethic, and it is present in Brennan's work, as well.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, not all environmental philosophers would likely agree that anything has value *just because it is natural*. Hence, my argument here, unlike my general doubts about the intrinsic goodness of nature, do not target all arguments for nature's intrinsic value.<sup>23</sup> But if we do not hold nature itself to have intrinsic value, then it would be inconsistent to care about nature solely in response to its intrinsic value, and I have shown that we have good reason to doubt that we hold nature to have intrinsic value, after all.

Fortunately, people have other reasons to support their care about nature. In the following sections, I argue that these other reasons derive from the ways that people come to care about nature. Specifically, these reasons derive from the three etiologies of care about nature: care about the natural dimensions of particular places, care directed at the informational content of natural history, and care originating in biophilia. Since the three etiologies are rationally defensible, as I argue, so is care about nature, if care about nature comprises them.

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<sup>22</sup> See Brennan (1984), p. 55.

<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, we have reason to suspect that if nature has intrinsic value, then it has value just because it is natural, since there is little else that all of nature has in common aside from its being natural.

## V. *The three etiologies of care about nature*

In this section, I examine each of the three etiologies of care about nature (i.e., care about the natural dimensions of particular places, care directed at the informational content of natural history, and care originating in biophilia) as potential sources of rationally defensible care about nature. I argue that each of the three etiologies of care about nature is promising but individually inadequate as a substitute for rationally defensible care about nature.

(1) One of the most common ways people come to care about nature is through caring about the natural dimensions, or aspects, of particular places. (I say that people care about the *natural dimensions* of places because we have good reason to suspect that there are no wholly natural places.<sup>24</sup>) As I understand the phrase, which is not clearly defined in the literature, ‘natural dimensions of places’ typically refers to large, relatively natural landscapes but could potentially refer to any aspect of a place not directly affected by human influence, from the natural growth of planted trees in a city park to the crumbling of a derelict building.<sup>25</sup>

Two of the most important and best studied psychological mechanisms by which people come to care about places are place attachment and place identity. I follow the definitions of place attachment and identity given by Hernandez et al. (2007). Place attachment, they say, is ‘an affective bond that people establish with specific areas where they prefer to remain and where they feel comfortable and safe.’ They go on to state that ‘[p]lace identity, however, has been defined as a component of personal identity, a process by which, through interaction with places, people describe themselves in terms of belonging to a specific place’ (310). Hence place

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<sup>24</sup> For example, anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions affect the ecology of every place on earth. Also see Mitchell & Melnick (2012) for evidence that many seemingly-natural places have long histories of human influence.

<sup>25</sup> For a definition and use of ‘dimension of place,’ see Scannell and Gifford (2010b) and Knez (2005).

attachment is an emotional bond that people develop toward particular places through their experiential familiarity, while place identity is more cognitive, involving how people describe themselves.<sup>26</sup> Further, both place attachment and place identity fit the model of care I presented above, since place attachment causes people to become emotionally invested in places (in that they come to take on the interests of places they care about as their own),<sup>27</sup> while place identity connects places to our personal identities (which we generally care about).

Place attachment to and identification with the natural dimensions of places often occur, but alone they do not provide a sound basis for rationally defensible care about nature because they are highly contingent on personal and subjective factors. First, their formation depends on our experiential familiarity with specific places.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, findings show that some groups are more (or less) likely to be place attached than others: women in general (who are more likely to be place-attached) (Hidalgo and Hernandez 2001, 280) and natives versus transplants to a place (Hernandez et al. 2007, 317). Last, place attachment to and identification with places' social dimensions (like the presence of a community one belongs to) are more common than place attachment to and identification with any of the physical dimensions of places (Hidalgo and Hernandez 2001, 279).

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<sup>26</sup> Not all researchers in environmental psychology use this distinction (see Scannell and Gifford 2010a for an example). Whether or not the distinction between place attachment and place identity really exists is not important for us in this paper, but it is worth noting that there might be such a distinction.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, Scannell and Gifford (2010a) note that disaster survivors have been observed to recreate their communities as they were rather than correct planning flaws, thereby manifesting their normative attachment to the places as they were (4). Moreover, to the extent that places facilitate activities important to us (what Brown and Raymond 2007 [p. 90] and Wynveen, Kyle, and Sutton 2012 call 'place dependence'), we come to value those places (6). Further, there is a lot of evidence that people act to protect the places they care about. See, for example, Devine-Wright and Howes (2010), which argues that there are strong correlations between the ways in which the specific physical and perceived qualities of a place (its openness or its 'restorative' aspect, for instance) are valued and oppositional behavior to offshore wind energy projects that are thought to harm those qualities (277-8).

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Knez (2005), 216; Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001); Hernandez et al. (2007); Scannell and Gifford (2010a); and Tuan (1975 and 1977).

Although some people might not develop place attachments for assorted reasons, it does appear that human beings have innate tendencies toward place attachment and identity. Given the right circumstances, people are predisposed to becoming place-attached and to incorporating places as part of their personal identities.<sup>29</sup> Again, however, place attachment and identity are only likely to develop given the right circumstances, and place attachment and identification with the specifically natural dimensions of a place require distinct circumstances for their development.

Further, if place attachment and identity lead to care about particular places but not nature in general, then they are surely not a basis for care about nature. There seems to be a strong connection, however, between concern for the natural environment in general and place attachment to and identification with the natural dimensions of specific places. For example, people who care about nature are usually emotionally bonded to and identify with some more-or-less natural landscapes and the natural dimensions of places. The writing of many nature writers and environmentalists could be used to illustrate this point. Much of Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, for instance, celebrates a particular place to which Leopold was place-attached and with which he identified.

Moreover, although people might conceivably become place-attached to or identify with the natural dimensions of places only *after* they have developed concern for nature at large, we have reason to suspect that place attachment and identity come first, before appreciation of nature in general. For instance, if people have no access to natural beauty but always experience

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Morgan 2010, which discusses place attachment and identity in relation to caregiver (especially parental) attachment.

totally human-dominated places, then they might, for good reason, never grow to have any genuine, or non-instrumental, concern for nature. (Perhaps even the city parks near them are poorly maintained, unsafe, or ugly, for example.) I am drawing a link here between beauty and attachment to places' natural dimensions because I think that appreciation of natural beauty, broadly understood, is the most common way that people come to care about places' natural dimensions.<sup>30</sup>

Last, care about nature need not begin with place attachment or place identity. We can come to have some concern for places after we have developed one of the other two etiologies of care about nature (i.e., care about the information content of natural history and care about life in general). For example, somebody who cares about particular endangered animals or plants will typically come to care about their habitats, and thereby come to care about some relatively natural places. Further, care about the earth (a reasonable care) rationally commits us to caring, at least somewhat, about the places on its surface. Some people might conceivably care about the earth without being place attached to or identifying with any specific places. Whether they also exhibit place attachment or identity is not crucial in this case, though, since place attachment and identity are likely not the only ways that people might care about places.

(2) Place attachment to and identification with the natural dimensions of places only partly explain why people who are attached to and identify with the natural dimensions of places might come to care about nature more generally. There are distinctive features of nature itself that lead people who care about nature to identify it, but not many of the other possible dimensions

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<sup>30</sup> See Miller (2005) for an argument that public access to high-quality, biodiverse habitats, especially in cities, is important for public support of biodiversity conservation.

of places, as particularly significant. I think the primary special feature that leads people to care about nature for its own sake is the *information content of natural history*, which contains the traces of our own evolution and evidence of the universe's overall causal order. For instance, we might maintain that prehistoric fossils and biological species of particular taxonomic interest are worth preserving insofar as we care about earth's distant past. Such care appears to be fairly widespread. Moreover, many places contain invaluable information about natural history that would be lost if not for conservation.<sup>31</sup> This fact alone can give us good reason to conserve such places, thereby preventing massive anthropogenic changes to their hydrology, landform, and ecology.

But caring about the special information content of nature alone is inadequate for caring about nature because care about nature is not just care about the facts of nature's history. For instance, if we could capture all the information content of natural history (or at least the bit of it that might be of interest to us now and in the future), then our care directed at natural history's information content would not give us reason to prevent significant harm to nature (say, by allowing the extinction of instrumentally-useless species that we had extensively studied). Care about nature *does* give us reason to prevent significant harm to nature, however, so care about natural history's information content is not the same as care about nature. Yet care about natural history's information content is an important aspect of care about nature, since the information

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<sup>31</sup> E. O. Wilson gives a nice example: 'In Cuba, on June 25, 1953, a month before Fidel Castro's assault on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba, I arrived on a far more modest mission in a jeep at a place called Blanco's Woods, near Cienfuegos. The tract was owned by a wealthy family who lived in Spain and declined to develop the land. All the surrounding forest had been cut down and converted into pasture and agricultural fields, leaving Blanco's Woods a rare refuge of native plants and animals of the coastal lowlands. To walk into that otherwise unprepossessing woodlot was to travel back into Cuba's geologic past, into the Pleistocene age before the coming of man – all thanks to what some would rightfully call the selfish actions of one family' (1983, p. 124). He goes on to note that Blanco's Woods has since been cut down (125).

content of natural history is unique and seemingly invaluable, even when it is not of much practical use.

(3) Biophilia is another significant etiology of care about nature. E. O. Wilson, who popularized the term, defines biophilia as ‘the particular way we affiliate with other organisms. They are the matrix in which the human mind originated and is permanently rooted, and they offer the challenge and freedom innately sought’ (1983, p. 139). Biophilia is a sort of care extended toward nonhuman living things in general, be they wild or domesticated (natural or unnatural), and to the diversity of biological kinds. More specifically, biophilia is care directed at the distinctive sort of *autonomy* that all nonhuman living things share, in virtue of having (to put the point succinctly) interests and capacities entirely separate from our own interests and capacities.<sup>32</sup> Biophilia is related to our desires for the healthy, free development and life of pet animals or plants, but biophilia also includes humans’ seemingly innate tendency to care about the diversity of living things and their behaviors.<sup>33</sup>

Although biophilia might be widespread and does give reason for caring about the natural environment in which much nonhuman life exists, alone it is inadequate as a basis for rationally defensible care about nature because life (even earth’s specific life) does not necessarily have to exist on earth. For example, if we safely moved all the living things on earth to another planet, our care about living things would no longer lead us to care about the earth, now devoid of life.

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<sup>32</sup> I use the term ‘autonomy’ here in the sense that Andrew Brennan (1984) uses it. Brennan develops this notion of autonomy in relation to what he calls an ‘intrinsic lack of function’ (44). He applies autonomy to nonliving things, as well, in that he thinks wildernesses, for instance, can evolve freely (or not) according to their own functionless natures (55).

<sup>33</sup> Fear of and repulsion directed at certain kinds of living things (e.g., snakes, spiders, certain rodents, some insects, etc.) present an interesting problem case for biophilia. It seems to me (though I have not considered the issue in depth) that such fears and repulsions do not directly negate any general tendency to care about nonhuman living things, so that there might be room for both biophilia and our fears and repulsions. See also note 24.

Care about nature intuitively requires care about earth itself in some way, and so we need a better way of caring about the natural environment than simply caring about its life. Nevertheless, biophilia is an important route by which many people may come to care about nature generally.

## VI. *Why we should care about nature*

In this section, I argue that these three etiologies of care about nature (care about the natural dimensions of places, care about nature's information content, and biophilia) together lead to rationally defensible care about nature. I also argue that care about nature rationally commits the carer to having the three etiologies. The relationship between the three etiologies and rationally defensible care about nature is not straightforward, however, because the intentional objects of the three etiologies can include things that do not appear to be part of nature (like domesticated animals). Moreover, the three etiologies can conflict with one another, while care about nature cannot conflict with itself. Nevertheless, I argue, we cannot untangle rationally defensible care about nature from the three etiologies because we cannot rationally care about the natural dimensions of some places but not others, about some parts of natural history but not others, or about some living things (as autonomous entities) but not others. That is, the three etiologies rationally commit one to caring about nature even though they are in conflict, and care about nature rationally commits one to having the three etiologies, even though they go beyond care about nature. Last, I summarize the argument that having all three etiologies is necessary and sufficient for having rationally defensible care about nature.

To support the claim that that the three etiologies together lead to rationally defensible care about nature, we might first observe that care about nature does not seem to arise independently of the other three cares: we expect people who care about these other things to care about nature as well. In fact, the connection seems close enough to say that the three intentional objects (i.e., the natural dimensions of all earthly places, the information content of natural history, and nonhuman living things in general) of the three etiologies partly constitute the common, pre-theoretical understanding of what 'nature' refers to. That is, care about nature is not care about some indefinite entity lurking behind appearances and never immediately apparent, but care that people often understand in terms of care about the natural dimensions of places and the earth in general, about the information content of natural history, and about life in general. This conclusion suggests that having the three etiologies rationally commits the carer to caring about nature, as well.

We can draw further evidence that the three etiologies together rationally commit one to caring about nature by finding that care about nature rationally requires having the three etiologies, at least to some extent. (For if it is necessary to have the three etiologies in order to rationally care about nature, then having them at least puts the carer on the right track toward caring about nature in a rationally defensible way.)

Let us examine the link between care about nature and each etiology in turn. First, we need to care about the natural dimensions of the earth (e.g., the biosphere) to care about nature because care about nature intuitively requires care about the earth's natural environment. Earth itself is not typically considered a place (though we can conceive of it that way), but to rationally care about the natural dimensions of the earth, we must care about the natural dimensions of at

least some places on its surface. Thus care about nature rationally commits the carer to caring about the natural dimensions of at least some places. Second, caring about nature rationally commits one to having some degree of care about natural history, since nature is what it is because of its causal history. This care about natural history manifests in the carer as concern for nature as a unique source of knowledge. Third, we must care about (at least some) nonhuman life to care about nature. This concern for nonhuman life is distinct from care about nature's information content (since it is the life itself, not just the information it contains, that we care about) and from care about places (because, for one, we care about particular living things not just as inhabitants of a particular place but as members of a taxonomic group).

Hence care about nature rationally requires the carer to have the three etiologies, at least to some extent. If, as I have argued, the three etiologies encompass all that people typically mean by care about nature, and if care about nature rationally requires the carer to have the three etiologies to some extent, then it might appear that the three etiologies constitute care about nature. That is, it might seem that care about nature is equivalent to a combination of the three etiologies.

But care about nature is distinct from the other three cares. For example, we might care about the natural dimension of some copper cladding that is beautifully oxidizing or about pure-bred dogs. Neither of these specific cares, I take it, falls under what we might typically mean by care about nature, and yet the first might be part of our attachment to the natural dimensions of a particular place, while the second might be part of our more general biophilia.<sup>34</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>34</sup> Whether these examples fit my argument depends on how we determine what exactly are care about nature, about the natural dimensions of places, and about life in general. I cannot go into that in depth here. These precise examples do not matter, however. Biophilia, for example, should extend to all living things, even if they are

the three etiologies of care about nature can conflict with each other (whereas care about nature cannot conflict with itself): our interest in the information content of natural history might conflict with our care about the living things in a particular place, for instance, if research harms some of the animals and plants there. These points show that care about nature does *not* require the three etiologies of care in their entirety, nor are they equivalent to care about nature.

Nevertheless, we cannot untangle rationally defensible care about nature from care about the natural dimensions of particular places (and the earth), the information content of natural history, or living things in general. It is conceivable that people might *irrationally* care about nature without caring about these other things (perhaps they care about nature because they believe that nature has mystical or otherwise dubious properties), but to have *rationally defensible* care about nature, we must care about these other things. As we saw above, care about nature rationally requires having the three etiologies to some extent. Below, I argue that we cannot have the three etiologies only to a limited extent but must, for example, care about the natural dimensions of all places (on earth) if we care about those of any.

First, if we unreflectively care about the natural dimensions of some but not all the places on earth, then on reflection we should come to care about the natural dimensions of *all* places on earth, at least to a minimal degree, since places' natural dimensions are inherently interdependent. That is, we cannot rationally care about the natural dimensions of one place and not have any concern for those of another. Consider, for example, that many initially localized environmental conditions have global consequences, as when air currents carry Saharan sand grains

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'created' more directly by human involvement: GMOs or novel species made in a lab are also proper objects of biophilia.

across the Atlantic Ocean to South America and East Asian air pollution across the Pacific Ocean to North America. Hence care about the natural dimensions of any particular place requires caring about what happens to the natural dimensions of distant places, at least to a minimal degree.

Second, we should care about all (and not just a part) of natural history, at least minimally, for a similar reason: every part of natural history is linked to every other. This claim might seem absurd at first, but suppose that some people, improbably, only care about a tiny bit of natural history. That bit is what it is because of causal links going deep into the past and, through widespread natural processes, reaching to distant places. So, even if they do not come to care about *all* of natural history, they at least have good reason to care about a great deal of it: we would find it surprising, for example, that people might not care at all about how the one bit of natural history they do care about is connected to the rest. After all, that one bit of history causally connects to another is essential to its being a bit of history.

Third, we should care about all living things because all living things, including those highly modified by humans, share a distinctive sort of autonomy, in that all living things have interests and capacities entirely separate from our own. Recognizing that all living things are autonomous in this way gives us at least a defeasible reason to care about all of them.<sup>35</sup>

Last, just because care about nature probably conflicts with the other three cares (which also conflict with each other), it does not follow that it is irrational to hold all four cares, since there are many conflicts among cares to which we are rationally committed. For instance, care

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<sup>35</sup> I say that we have a defeasible reason because some organisms, like mosquitoes, are pests, and one's care about them as autonomous living things might be outweighed by one's dislike of them. Similarly with human parasites and diseases, though I suspect that care about microscopic life develops differently from care about other life.

about getting enough exercise can sometimes conflict with care about work or school-related success, and just because these cares conflict, it is not irrational to have both of them.

We have seen that caring about nature rationally requires one to have three other cares, the etiologies, to some extent: care about the natural dimensions of particular places (and the earth), the information content of natural history, and living things in general. Moreover, the intentional objects of these three cares seem to constitute the commonplace understanding of what nature, or the natural environment, is. But the relationship between the three etiologies and care about nature is not straightforward, since the objects of the three etiologies encompass more than what is part of nature. Nevertheless, it is irrational to care about the natural dimensions of only some places rather than others, only some part of natural history rather than another, or only some living things (as autonomous entities) instead of others. Thus caring about nature rationally commits one to caring about the intentional objects of the three etiologies in full, despite the tensions between what is natural and what falls under the three etiologies.

Last, having the three etiologies rationally commits us to caring about nature, or the natural environment. In particular, we should care about earth's natural environment because it contains the natural dimensions of every place that matters to us, a great deal of the information about natural history that we can presently acquire, and all living things (that we know of). This list might seem anthropocentric in a bad way, but it is not, since the boundaries of nature (in the sense I use in this paper) follow the contours of human influence. More generally, the objects of the three etiologies partly compose what people ordinarily think of as nature. Further, having the three etiologies is rationally defensible, and it is rationally required that we have the three etiologies in full if we have them in part. We should care about nature, then, if we care about

the earth (and the natural dimensions of the places on it), the information content of natural history, and living things in general.

## VII. *Concluding remarks*

In this section, I first lay out the overall argument of this paper before identifying some outstanding questions and directions for further research on this topic. Last, I briefly recap why the topic and this paper are important.

The main conclusion of my paper is that people should care about nature to the extent that they have three other, rationally defensible cares, i.e., the three etiologies: (1) care about the natural dimensions of particular places, (2) care directed at the informational content of natural history, and (3) care originating in biophilia. To argue for that conclusion, I first showed that we have good reason to doubt that two other ways philosophers might be inclined to find support for rationally defensible care about nature are adequate: namely, care about nature for instrumental reasons and care about nature in virtue of recognizing its intrinsic value. I then described the three etiologies and showed why they lead to rationally defensible care about nature and why care about nature requires them. I concluded that someone who cares about nature is rationally committed to having the three etiologies, while having the three etiologies rationally commits one to caring about nature.

In §1, we discussed care and care about nature. Care, I argued, essentially involves a set of emotional and volitional dispositions to, for example, protect the interests of what one cares about. One meaning of ‘nature,’ I claimed, is (roughly) everything not influenced by humans. In fact, this is the more typical meaning of ‘nature,’ and it is the primary one I employed in the

paper. I then argued that although care about nature is directed at the part of the universe not influenced by humans (but potentially affected by us), it does not usually originate in such a broad concern. Rather, it begins with concern for the effects humans have on parts of nature that are experientially familiar to us.

§2 tied the main topic of this paper, namely whether and how care about nature might be rationally defensible, to the broader question with which I introduced the paper: that is, how people who currently care about nature might rationally persuade those who do not currently have such concern. I argued that not only is care about nature's rational defensibility required to address the broader question, but also that care about other people plausibly helps extend care about nature well beyond the primary carers, those who do not care about nature in virtue of anyone else's care. Thus if care about nature is not morally or rationally required, it might still be prevalent.

In §3, I argued that we have good reason to doubt that caring about nature for instrumental reasons is adequate for having rationally defensible care about nature because care about nature for instrumental reasons is in fact just care about human interests, not nature. I then showed that care about nature can come apart from care about human interests in theory and practice.

In §4, I argued that we also have good reason to doubt that care about nature in response to nature's intrinsic goodness is adequate for having rationally defensible care about nature. In §4.1, I discussed what it means to say that nature has intrinsic value, and we looked at some ways that philosophers have argued for nature's intrinsic value. Then, in §4.2 I argued that we have reason to doubt that nature is intrinsically good. Further, we have reason to suspect that we do

not in fact hold nature to have intrinsic value because if we did hold nature to have intrinsic value, then we would believe some of the intrinsic value of natural entities to diminish were we to save those entities from natural destruction. But we would probably not believe that, so we probably do not in fact hold anything to have intrinsic value just because it is natural, and so we do not hold nature itself to have intrinsic value just because it is natural. Hence care about nature in response to its intrinsic value might be unfounded, since prominent defenses of nature's intrinsic value seem to rely on nature's being intrinsically valuable just because it is natural.

In §5, I presented the three etiologies of care about nature and showed why they are individually inadequate for having care about nature. I argued that care about the natural dimensions of particular places alone is inadequate mainly because the mechanisms by which such care likely develops independent of other cares (namely, place attachment and place identity) are highly subjective and contingent on personal experiences to a greater degree than care about nature is. It is thus hard to see how care about nature founded only on place attachment and place identity could be rationally defensible. I also argued that place attachment and identity are an inadequate basis for rationally defensible care about nature because they fail to explain why people who care about nature identify nature (and not the other dimensions of places) as particularly significant. Second, I argued that care directed at the informational content of natural history would not give us reason to protect nature if all the information content of natural history were somehow collected. Last, I argued that care originating in biophilia would not give us reason to care about the earth if all living things on earth were safely transported elsewhere.

In §6, I argued for the overall conclusion of this paper that having the three etiologies is necessary and sufficient for having care about nature. Probably the most interesting development in this section was the finding that we must care about the natural dimensions of all places (on earth) if we care about those of any, all (or at least a substantial portion) of natural history if we care about any of it, and all living things if we care about any. So, if my arguments are correct, then care about nature is not rationally defensible unless people care about things like highly domesticated animals that might not be part of nature, strictly speaking.

Several outstanding issues and questions remain. Perhaps most significantly, I have not examined all the alternative etiologies of care about nature to see why they do not lead to care about nature. The main reason for this lacuna is that I cannot think of any alternatives not addressed in the paper, but perhaps after further research, more will come to light. Similarly, I have not argued extensively for the separateness of the three etiologies. I have not defined them or care about nature exhaustively. One might argue that until these steps are taken, the account is incomplete (though I have shown, I think, that my account is promising).

There also remains the issue of whether my arguments, granting that they are correct, defuse the worries raised in §1 that an account of environmental ethics based on care is ultimately not intersubjectively valid and that focusing on the notion of care improperly directs environmental ethics away from the subject matter of ethics proper (i.e., moral value) toward the subject matter of metaethics (how things might have moral value). I think the first worry is mistaken because while care is by nature personal and subjective, some cares are widespread and rationally defensible to others, as I have shown. The second worry, on the other hand, is mis-

taken because, if my arguments and suggestions (especially in §§3 and 4) are sound, environmental ethics has little choice but to consider how cares, in particular, might have moral value. I have not argued extensively for these conclusions, though, and someone might press that I have not shown that my account adequately responds to these two worries. That is a fair criticism, but I do not think that it seriously threatens my main conclusion that having the three etiologies is necessary and sufficient for having rationally defensible care about nature.

In §2, I briefly mentioned that I do not believe care about nature to be rationally required, unless one already has the three etiologies to some degree. This is also an outstanding issue. To adequately address it, I would need to say something about what it takes for a care to be rationally required. I will not do that here. Nevertheless, whatever it takes for a care to be rationally required, the three etiologies seem to lack it, since they are cares toward things that cannot reciprocate care and that sometimes act against our interests. That is, care about nature is one-sided but also not always in our best interest (however that is defined), and it seems rather misguided to believe that we could be rationally required to care about something that cannot reciprocate care toward us and that sometimes is not objectively good for us to care about. (Of course, care about human interests is also one-sided, but it is in our best interest, collectively, to care about our interests. Care about nature is not always in our best interest, overall, because we must sometimes sacrifice some of our collective interests to act in accordance with care about nature. That is, incorporating care about nature weights humanity's interests differently than they would be weighted without it, and so care about nature goes against a more direct tabulation of human interests.) I leave this topic as a possible direction for future research.

Last, I have not addressed whether how strongly we care about nature depends on how strongly we have any of these other cares. For instance, it might turn out (though I doubt it does) that care about nature is only as strong as the *weakest* of the three cares one happens to have. I think this is an interesting issue that points to more general questions about how cares might be related to one another, but I do not have the space to adequately address it here.

So, there are gaps in my account, and they would require a good deal of further work to close. Nevertheless, I have demonstrated the viability of my approach toward addressing the question of how people who currently care about nature might rationally persuade those who do not currently have such concern. In our time of divisive opinions about all matters related to public policy, including environmental protections, this question is an important one for those who care at all about nature. I have shown that care about nature based on the three etiologies is rationally defensible, at least in a weak sense, even if I have not closed all the lacunae in my account. Since showing that care about nature is rationally defensible is required for demonstrating how people who do not care about nature might be rationally persuaded to do so, this paper has at least helped address that broader question. Further, this project has raised many interesting issues in the philosophy of care and value theory more broadly that are worth considering in greater depth. All in all, I think the topic of care about nature in general offers much for philosophers interested in the natural environment to ponder, and I think this paper makes a genuine contribution both to the study of care about nature and to environmental ethics.

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