

COULD PAUL TAYLOR'S BIOCENTRISM BE INTERPRETED AS A RAWLSIAN THEORY OF JUSTICE?

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Abstract: *In his „A Theory of Justice” Rawls accepts that „a conception of justice is but one part of a moral view”, that „it is wrong to be cruel to animals and the destruction of a whole species can be a great evil”, and that there are moral duties regarding animals, species and nature, but „they are outside the scope of the theory of justice, and it does not seem possible to extend the contract doctrine so as to include them in a natural way”. However, Rawls mention a way to find an answer to this challenge: „A correct conception of our relations to animals and to nature would seem to depend upon a theory of the natural order and our place in it. One of the tasks of metaphysics is to work out a view of the world which is suited for this purpose; it should identify and systematize the truths decisive for these questions.” (Rawls, „A Theory of Justice”, 1999, p. 512). My aim in this paper is to argue that Environmental Ethics tried to offer exactly this requested theory of natural order so that it become possible to talk in terms of justice about an extended moral community, the so-called biotic community or community of life. I claim that biocentrism is a theory which is able to fulfill this task. Paul W. Taylor, in his „The Ethics of Respect for Nature” (1981) develops a theory based on the concepts of respect for nature, good of a being and inherent worth. If Rawls (See his „Justice as Fairness”, *Philosophical Review*, 1958, 67, p. 183) describes the rules of the duties of human morality (fidelity, gratitude, honesty and fidelity) as „forms of conduct in which recognition of others as persons is manifested”, Taylor considers that „the rules of duty governing our treatment of the natural world and its inhabitants are forms of conduct in which the attitude of respect for nature is manifested.” (1981) I will argue that the extension of moral community is possible using Rawls’ conceptual framework. Therefore, a new theory of natural order can be derived step by step so as the contract doctrine will be extended without any prejudices to Rawlsian initial presuppositions. My aim is to offer a reconstruction of this extension. Then I shall return to Taylor and his biocentrism.*

Keywords: *Ethical theory, distributive justice, justice as fairness, environmental ethics, biocentrism, inherent worth, rules of the duties of human morality.*

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Setting the stake for a theoretical challenge

In his *A Theory of Justice* Rawls accepts that „a conception of justice is but one part of a moral view”, that „it is wrong to be cruel to animals and the destruction of a whole species can be a great evil”, that there are moral duties regarding animals, species and nature, but „they are outside the scope of the theory of justice, and it does not seem possible to extend the contract doctrine so as to include them in a natural way”². In other words, the contractualist doctrine cannot be extended outside the human community because, as the basic notions of a contractualist theory are defined, the sphere of morality coincides with the extension of the human community.

However, Rawls mentions the possibility of finding a way to extend the realm of morality beyond the confines of the human community by taking on the metaphysical task of reconfiguring the natural order of the world by rethinking the relationship between humans and other living beings and their position in this world: „A correct conception of our relations to animals and to nature would seem to depend upon a theory of the natural order and our place in it. One of the tasks of metaphysics is to work out a view of the world which is suited for this purpose; it should identify and systematize the truths decisive for these questions.”³ In his *Theory of Justice* Rawls does not assume such a metaphysical task, but I believe that this mention of its principal possibility should not be ignored.⁴

My aim is to argue that Environmental Ethics tried to offer exactly this requested theory of natural order so that it become possible to talk in terms of justice about an extended moral community, the so-called biotic

² Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 512.

³ *Idem.*

⁴ In a previous paper I have outlined Rawls' argument in this way:

1. A theory of justice is limited to the community of human beings because just them have a capacity to grasp a sense of justice.
2. But this doesn't mean that our relations with other beings didn't have a moral content. (It is wrong to be cruel to animals)
3. Therefore, we have some duties to those forms of life which have the capacity for feelings of pleasure and pain.
4. But we can't extend the contract so that to include the other beings in the moral community in a natural way.
5. It is the task of metaphysics to change our vision and to propose a new theory of natural order. (Stoenescu, "The Biocultural Ethics...", 9).

community or community of life. I claim that biocentrism is a theory which is able to fulfill this task.

Paul W. Taylor, in his „The Ethics of Respect for Nature”, develops a theory based on the concepts of *respect for nature*, *good of a being* and *inherent worth*. If Rawls describes the rules of the duties of human morality (fidelity, gratitude, honesty and fidelity) as „forms of conduct in which recognition of others as persons is manifested”⁵, Taylor considers that „the rules of duty governing our treatment of the natural world and its inhabitants are forms of conduct in which the attitude of respect for nature is manifested.”⁶

My theoretical aim is to argue that the extension of moral community is possible using Rawls’ conceptual framework. Therefore, a new theory of natural order can be derived step by step so as the contractualist doctrine will be extended without any prejudices to Rawlsian initial presuppositions. My aim is to offer a reconstruction of this extension. Then I shall return to Taylor’s biocentrism.

A possible reconstruction of Rawls’ theory

I think that the indisputable goal of Rawls’ project is to develop a theory based on the concept of justice and to make a conceptual analysis which is put into the theoretical framework of social contract. His goal is to argue that the fundamental idea meaningfully associated with the concept of justice is fairness. I have to mention from the beginning that this framework bounded the definition of ethical community according to a possible contractual community made from persons as parts of a network based, first of all, on reciprocity. The main concepts that are used by Rawls in this framework and that allow the openness to the environmental ethics are those of *practices and rules*, *interests*, *moral principles*, *public reason*, *the duty of civility*.

Therefore, I propose a conceptual cut that is selectively guided by the goal of identifying a theoretical convergence between Rawls’ theory of justice and the environmentalist theories. This means that I do not claim to be faced with a question of truth, but I only make certain choices. Other interpretations are possible in relation to other theoretical preferences.

The main direction of extending or applying Rawls’ theory to environment was related to the concepts of intergenerational justice and fair-

⁵ Rawls, “Justice as Fairness”, 183.

⁶ Taylor, “The Ethics of Respect for Nature”, 205.

ness, and to the savings principle, and the result was the configuration of a theory of sustainability (see Manning, 1981; Barry, 1997; Dobson, 1999; Attfield, 2009). On the contrary, Schraume (2006) shows that the conceptual schema used in *A Theory of Justice* depends on an assumption that conflicts the goal to protect the environment and the natural resources. The problem would be that all the parties implied in the original position want to use as many resources as it is possible and that under scarcity a Rawlsian maximising strategy is the only rational alternative and it is bad for environment. The conclusion would be that the Rawlsian way to sustainability, based on the savings principle, should be rejected. My proposition, however, is to use Rawlsian concepts to form an isomorphic theory of the environment with a theory of justice, as I believe is, as I will show, the case of Taylor's biocentrism. I argue that by developing his conceptual network Rawls advances step by step and opens his theory to its applicability to environmental issues.

In "Justice as Fairness" justice is considered a virtue of social institutions, but also of practices. Rawls mentions in a footnote that the word "practice" is used "as a sort of technical term, meaning any form of activity specified by a system of rules which defines offices, roles, moves, penalties, defences, and so on, and which gives the activity its structure. As examples one may think of games and rituals, trials and parliaments, markets and systems of property."⁷ Rawls clearly claimed that the basic sense is of "justice as applied to practices."⁸ But some practices involve a relationship with the environment. For example, practicing agriculture, hunting and fishing, or, much more, changing a landscape in order to exploit natural resources. As a consequence, it is fair to take into account not only the relationships between people in this process, but also the relationships with the environment. This is the first step towards an environmental ethics.

But certain interests are involved in any practice. Rawls agrees that justice as a virtue is related with practices which express some interests. As a rule, in any community there are competing interests, with the probable exception of "an association of saints".⁹ Therefore, some of the interests

⁷ Rawls, "Justice as Fairness", 164. I have to mention that the relation between the notion of practice and the notion of rule was analysed before by Rawls in "Two Concepts of Rules".

⁸ Rawls, "Justice as Fairness", 165.

⁹ Rawls, "Justice as Fairness", 175.

related with the practices mentioned before will be focused on nature and environment. But also is a valuable idea to speak about a common interest or about the interests of the other entities. Let's put aside the idea of interest as the second step towards the environmental ethics.

It is a consensual view that Rawls proposed a normative project for political philosophy. My attempt is to continue this kind of normative project for the case of environmental ethics. I think that the conceptual analysis proposed by Rawls leads step by step to an implicit acceptance of the presuppositions that make possible to extend the field of morality beyond the limits of human community.

The third step consists of the two principles of justice proposed by Rawls since his first paper about justice as fairness: "First, each person participating in a practice, or affected by it, has an equal right to the most extensive liberty compatible with a like liberty for all; and second, inequalities are arbitrary unless it is reasonable to expect that they will work out for everyone's advantage, and provided the positions and offices to which they attach, or from which may be gained, are open to all."¹⁰ The first is the Liberty Principle, the second was named "the Difference Principle" and both of them can be reinterpreted within the specific conceptual framework of environmental ethics.

Rawls developed the argument of "original position" (this concept is similar to the idea of "state of nature" used in the philosophical tradition of social contract by Hobbes, Rousseau and Locke) as a thought experiment. The problem is that of the principles that should be fundamental for a society (social structure/social order) based on solidarity. In the original position, when we have to choose these principles, we have no prior knowledge of the social consequences for us of the choices which were made, we don't know anything about our later position in that society. A "veil of ignorance" prevent us to know how our original position (social status, ethnicity, gender) lead us to a good life. As a consequence, the people are forced to choice the principles of impartiality and rationality.

The citizens in the original position are mainly concerned with the primary social goods, namely, how to share rights and advantages. Social equality is the maximum for the original position.

In a later book, *Justice as Fairness: A restatement* (2001), Rawls adds something new, the idea of public reason, which is related with the argu-

¹⁰ Rawls, "Justice as Fairness", 165.

ment for the two principles of original position and the veil of ignorance. Moral duty (the duty to justify a political decision) is understood as a duty of civility. Moreover, in “Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical” (1985), Rawls agrees that the concept of fairness is based on the intuitive idea of society as a fair system of cooperation between free and equal parts.

Rawls’s doctrine of public reason is permissive regarding the bounds of civility. The citizens are free to decide what is within or without these bounds. Rawls suggests some extensions inside the human community and they could be considered as a model for an extension outside it.

I think that the ideas of public reason and the interpretation of moral duty as a duty of civility allow us to talk about environment as a domain which is affected by our decisions. In “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited” (1997), Rawls mentions the relation between the public reason and the deliberative democracy and recognize that our own life as such is affected by the decisions which are taken. Rawls doesn’t say anything about the deliberation focused on problems regarding environment because he remains at a theoretical normative level, but this doesn’t mean that these principles can’t be applied to a deliberation which is related with the environment. On the contrary, the model of deliberative democracy is fully adequate for decision-making on environmental issues.

Last but not least we have to consider Rawls’ *The Law of People* where he explicitly recognizes the fact that nature is a necessary condition for the human development and well-ordered societies. Rawls talks about the resources of a territory which sustain the people, the capacity of the natural world to sustain the human population¹¹ and about the responsibility to maintain the environmental integrity¹².

All these theoretical categories are sufficient for an application of Rawls theory of justice, even without presupposing a new natural order, to the problems generated by the anthropic effects of human actions on the environment. I think that the best example is the reconsideration of the natural resources from the perspective of the concepts listed above to which we add, as Manning (1981) did, another Rawlsian concept, that of intergenerational justice. Rawls’ theory can be applied to justify the prudential use of natural resources in two in two horizons of time, that of immediate use and that of consequences for future generations. In the first case we deal

¹¹ Rawls, *The Law of the People*, 107.

¹² Rawls, *The Law of the People*, 8.

with the environmental impact on our health and opportunities related with the primary goods, in the second we consider the right of future generations to use natural resources in conditions similar to those of the current generations because the generation to which a person belongs is just a contingency and not a reason to exclude that person from the original contract of society.

A quasi-Rawlsian extension of moral community

The task to extend the morality sphere beyond the boundaries of human community has been assumed by environmentalists as a radical change of our perspective on the world.¹³ The sphere of morality is traditionally bounded starting from the moral community. Therefore, the extension strategy is to find cases of individuals who belong in fact to the accepted moral community but are excluded from the morality sphere on some reasons, and to revise these arbitrary criteria. From a Rawlsian traditional perspective based on a certain preconception about the natural order we'll have the right to include into this sphere just the human beings who are able to be responsible parts of a contract. The problem can be clarified by redrawing the natural order starting from properties that allow the configuration of an extended community. For example, the animals feel the pain, they are able to suffer and to make the difference between bad and good environmental conditions.

The second characteristic element of the extension consists in redefining the idea of prejudice in agreement with the naturalized community. Routley (1973), Goodpaster (1978) and Attfield (1981, 1987) have proposed a similar argument and Routley and Attfield have developed an imaginary experiment. Let's suppose that on the Earth survive only one person and that person cuts the last tree from one species. Although the person didn't produce any prejudice to another person, we are tempted to say that on the basis of our common moral intuitions we have to condemn that fact as an immoral one. The tree could save its own species from extinction. Moreover, we can assign some interests to that tree. Generally speaking, the environmentalists assert that all forms of organic life have a moral statute or are morally considerable, regardless their psychological capacities. This means

¹³ See Stoenescu, "The Extension of Moral Community in Environmental Ethics..." for a detailed approach.

that to cut a tree is equal in human terms with the death of that tree and that this fact is morally significant.

T. M. Scanlon, beginning with his “Contractualism and Utilitarianism” (1977), revised the contractualist theory and he accepted the living beings that could be prejudiced as parts with a moral statute in a contract. To be able to be prejudiced means to feel the pain, to feel a frustration or to feel something similar in some circumstances. This means that it is possible to speak about moral wrongness in a broader sense than that which is taken into account in a theory of morality exclusive to human beings. We can identify forms of conduct which are open to moral objections. Scanlon mentions the human action that causes a sentient being to feel pain and he goes even further to admit that in the case of injuring a non-human animal something is wrong “in a sense that goes beyond the idea that pain is a bad thing: it is something for which we should feel guilty to the animal itself, just as we can feel guilty to a human being”¹⁴.

Scanlon describes five possible characterizations of the set of beings that can be morally wronged:¹⁵

- (1) The beings (or entities) for which things can go better or worse.
- (2) The beings in the first group who are conscious.
- (3) The beings in the second group who are capable of judging things as better or worse and are capable of forming “judgment-sensitive attitudes”.
- (4) The beings in the third group capable of making specifically moral judgments.
- (5) The beings in the fourth group with whom it is to our advantage to enter into a relation of mutual restraint and cooperation.

But, according to Scanlon, not all beings in group (1) can be covered by the morality of right and wrong because this group includes everything from fully rational human to any other entity, such as a fragile ecosystem, for which one state of affairs may be better or wrong for its health, integrity or equilibrium. We might try to find a bridge between humans and nonhumans by taking into account a feature of contractualism, namely, the interest for a neutral position in decision making process. Such an approach would be consistent with Rawls's contractualism and his idea about the so-

¹⁴ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 182.

¹⁵ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 179. See also Talbert, “Contractualism and Our Duties to Nonhuman Animals”, for the comment about the relation with Rawls position.

called "original position". In *A Theory of Justice* Rawls argues that the fairness of the basic organizational principles of human society is ensured if the choosers of these principles are unsure of the position that they will occupy in that society. This neutral procedure neutralizes the luck of some choosers and it put all of them in the same acceptable position to share together the same world. Even if it is easier for a human being to put himself into positions of other humans than of nonhumans animals and, starting from this difference, we may try to treat differently the humans and the nonhumans animals, the others, humans and nonhumans, will remain parts with a moral statute as members of the enlarged biotic community.

This natural order which corresponds to the biotic community is enlarged by Brennan (1986) following six steps:

1. The biotic community consists of animals and plants in mutual relations, as would be the food chain.
2. Any biotic community is inevitably in relationship with other communities, so that we can extend the notion of community up to the entire biosphere.
3. Every community tends to get to a final state of equilibrium and diversity.
4. No biotic community can stand without abiotic resources because it needs to process some inorganic resources into organic components.
5. The global ecosystem can be conceived as a system composed from all the biotic communities and the abiotic environment.
6. The biosphere as a whole tends to stability, equilibrium and diversity.

This extension of moral community produces a tension between inclusion (based on the principles of equality, liberty and impartiality) and hierarchy (based on the principle of difference). First of all, the inclusion is regulated by the principle of impartiality which means that the members of moral community have the same advantages and support equally the costs. The inclusion in the moral community may not grant any privileges and the costs or prejudices have to be supported equally. Moreover, the extension of moral community must not create opportunities for someone to have some benefits with the price to prejudice others. The members of moral community will have the possibility to use their liberty according to their capacities in order to develop themselves and to create their own biological niches. Therefore, the differences between the members of the enlarged moral community are inevitable and they will be expressed by different interests and needs.

The principle of inclusiveness, proposed by Ralph Barton Perry (1926), has been reworded by Gary Varner in these terms: "it is always better to satisfy all the interests in a given set rather than any proper subset of that same set."¹⁶ Varner adds two strong assumptions to it:

"1. The satisfaction of any interest is considered in and of itself, a good thing (and the dissatisfaction of any interest is, in and of itself, a bad thing), and

2. Only the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of interests matters from the moral point of view."¹⁷

But inclusion must be balanced by building a hierarchy, and the best way forward is to take into account the interests of the moral community members in the form of relational and action priorities described as needs and preferences. The following hierarchical principles result:¹⁸

1. The satisfaction of human basic needs takes priority over the satisfaction of all the other human needs.
2. The satisfaction of human needs takes priority over the satisfaction of all the other human preferences.
3. The lives of all creatures, actual and possible, are of equal value.
4. When the needs of a more complex creature are in conflict with the needs of a less complex creature, the first have priority.
5. When the needs of a sentient creature are in conflict with the secondary preferences of a more complex creature, the first have priority.
6. The good of insentient animals and plants have a slight moral significance if their welfare isn't in conflict with the basic needs of other more complex beings.

Taylor's biocentrism as a Rawlsian perspective

Taylor (1981) mentions some categories derived from the principle of priority, such as self-defence, proportionality, distributive justice, minimum wrong, and restitutive justice, which assure the harmony of biotic community and the balance between human values and the well-being of animals and plants in natural ecosystems.

According to Taylor (1986) the biocentric order of nature is based on these principles:

¹⁶ Varner, *In Nature's Interests?...*, 84.

¹⁷ Idem.

¹⁸ Attfield, *A Theory of Value and Obligation*, 88-89.

1. All human beings, like all the other living beings, belong to the biotic community of terrestrial life.
2. The human species, like all the other species of living beings, is integrated in an ecosystem of interdependences in which the survival of every living being depends on the environment as a whole and on the relations with all the other members of the biotic community.
3. All the organisms are teleological vital centers following their own good, each in their own way.
4. The human beings aren't superior to all the other living beings, neither regard their merits, nor their intrinsic value.

The next step is to derive the moral rules, principles or duties which govern the life inside the biotic community so that to assure the inherent worth for every entity. I think that two paths can be followed in introducing these rules, principles or rules of moral biocentrism.

The first is identify the moral hard core of biocentrism starting from two general negative duties and one general rule which are necessary and together sufficient:

1. Non-maleficence. We have the duty to don't harm the living beings.
2. Non-interference. We have the duty to don't interfere in living beings life. We have to let the nature to follow its own course.
3. The rule of loyalty. The moral agents have the duty to be loyal to the nature.

The second strategy is to structure the network of priority principles and to order them starting from their force. This means that the first principle has priority over the others and so on. They also can be considered as formal conditions for the validity of any set of rules or as principles of fairness or moral conduct in environmental ethics.

Here they are:

1. The Principle of Self-defence. Any moral agent is allowed to defend himself against any threat in some unsafe and dangerous circumstances. If we apply this principle with impartiality, taking into account the inherent worth of all living beings, then the consequence is that just as is moral for humans to defence against dangerous nonhumans so it is moral for some nonhumans to defence against other nonhumans who treat them. In terms of species, we will consider that each species builds its own biological niche by defending itself, attacking other species or cooperating. Probably, judging by the effects it has on nature, the human species is the most ferocious predator. But, according to the biocentric moral norms of the respect for

nature, the humans have the duty to do all the reasonable efforts to avoid such consequences which are justified in the name of self-defence.

2. The Principle of Proportionality. If the basic interest of nonhuman living beings enters into a clash with the non-basic interest of humans, then the first will be considered more important and intrinsically compatible with the respect for nature. The exploitation of nature (for example, the use of depletable natural resources) and a harmful attitude (for example, killing wild mammals) are intrinsically incompatible with the respect for nature. Also, other activities that are the expression of non-basic interests of humans can harm nature, such as replacing a rain native forest with plantations or damming a river for a hydroelectric power plant, but they are acceptable in some circumstances.

3. The Principle of Minimum Wrong. This principle is related with the previous one and it is symmetrically derived from the acceptable circumstances mentioned above. There are some circumstances where non-basic human interests that are intrinsically compatible with the respect for nature do not clash with the basic interests of non-human living beings. If the wrong done is a minimal one, then it is reasonable to permit it. The cases invoked are those in which we do not have an alternative to the minimum prejudice of nature to achieve goals related to the core of human civilization and those in which the human good is considered a priority. In this sense, it is discussed about the inevitability of habitat destruction in order to expand the infrastructure or urbanization or about the inevitability of environmental pollution as a result of the development of industrial technologies.

4. The Principle of Distributive Justice. We have to assure the equilibrium of justice in the extended moral community for those cases of conflict situations where the interests of all the parts, humans and nonhuman living beings, are basic interests and express basic needs. If there is a unique natural source of good for all the parts of biotic community, then we have to treat them equally and to allow their equal use of it. The goal is to conceive and to create a community of life based on an equal distribution of justice for all the parts so that the nonhuman living beings to be able to follow their own good. Taylor mentions four methods to fulfil the requests of this principle:

- Permanent habitat allocation: some natural areas are permanently allocated to the wild living beings even if this enters into as conflict with some local human basic interests.

- Common conservation: fair, mutual and wise sharing and use of natural resources for the equal benefit of humans and nonhuman living beings.
- Environmental integration: careful planning and development of human habitat according to the preservation of the ecological integrity of natural places so that to avoid major disturbances or degradations of nature.
- Rotation: both humans and nonhumans have access to natural resources, but in turn, in succession, for time intervals, so that nature has time to restore its renewable resources.

These practices and rules would in principle ensure a fair distribution, but it does not represent absolute guarantees.

5. The Principle of Restitutive Justice. If some reparations or compensations are made without properly follow the principles of minimum wrong and distributive justice, then we need to apply the principle of restitutive justice and to restore the balance using amends and rewards. The idea is that the greater is the harm, the greater should be the amends or reward required, and the corollary is the rule that we have to pursue not the individual good, but the ecosystemic good, of the whole community of life.

This biocentric order of nature starts from human duality between biological nature and moral autonomy. The main question become this: "Is our biological nature at all relevant to the choices we must make as moral agents, and if it is, in what way it is relevant?"¹⁹ The humans, as biological beings and members of biotic community, have the interest to survive and to obtain their own good by transforming nature and adapting it to their needs. But "what is the ethical significance of our being members of the Earth's Community of Life?"²⁰

Taylor proposed the so-called Ethics of Bioculture as a system of institutions, practices, rules and values that regulate the interactions between humans and the controlled environment. The Ethics of Bioculture propose a new vision about the place of humans in the natural order: "Just as our power over other living things does not absolve us from all responsibilities regarding their welfare, so our lack of personal caring about them does not entail freedom from all moral constraints on how we treat them."²¹ Therefore, the Ethics of Bioculture became an ethics based on duties and responsibilities in the moral space of biotic community.

¹⁹ Taylor, *Respect for Nature...*, 48.

²⁰ Taylor, *Respect for Nature...*, 49.

²¹ Taylor, *Respect for Nature...*, 56.

Taylor proposed a list²² of the main social institutions and practices which express a Bioculture:

Agriculture, grain, vegetable and fruit farming

Raising and slaughtering animal food and clothing (chicken farming, sheep raising, pig farming, and cattle ranching)

Cultivated forests for timber production

Plant nurseries for raising garden flowers, shrubs and trees

Breeding and training animals for various tasks (work horses, racing horses, hunting dogs, watchdogs, circus animals)

The pet trade and all activities involved in the private ownership of pets

Raising, collecting and using animals and plants for scientific experiments

Zoos, animal exhibition, parks, aquariums, and "marineland" establishments

Sports that depend on the use of animals (horse racing and dog racing, rodeos horseback riding, bullfighting and cockfighting)

Some wildlife management practices aimed at the benefit of humans, not the good of the animals being "managed" (sport hunting and fishing)

All these institution and practices are subject to the rules and principles of the biotic community.

Concluding remarks. Ethical harmony of biotic community

The priority principles mentioned above do not close up themselves in a completely logical system that establishes everything that is allowed to the members of the biotic community, so as to exclude any conflict. But the natural order configured on their basis can ensure a dynamic balance and, ultimately, a harmony of the biotic community as a whole. This harmony is assured by the Ethics of Biculture as a new vision because it puts humans in a position of responsibility even if they, linked to an instrumental tradition, avoid caring about nature. Therefore, harmony is obtained just because the humans do their duties to nature and respect it.²³

I would argue that Taylor's biocentrism represents a development of the perspective proposed by Aldo Leopold through Land ethic understood both as an evolutionary possibility and as an ontological necessity. Leopold understands ecosystems as a community, his idea being a precursor to

²² See Taylor, *Respect for Nature...*, 54.

²³ See Stoenescu, "The Biocultural Ethics...", for a detailed analysis of an approach based on the concept of homogeneous development.

the concept of community of life. According to Leopold, those actions that preserve the stability, integrity and beauty of the ecosystem are morally correct.²⁴

As a result, it is assumed not only a vision of the natural order, but also a knowledge of the ecosystem of the dynamic whole with its own processes and states. Moral action, in the sense of one that seeks to achieve good, is thus based not only on values but also on scientific knowledge of nature, so that decisions have a nomologic foundations. In other words, our knowledge of the facts influences our choices, preferences, and moral attitudes insofar as we act as rational agents. Our system of opinions is restructured starting from the respect for nature. The concept of harmony doesn't mean anything that to preserve the balance between human values and culture (cultures) and the well being or the inherent good of the biotic community members. We can't talk about cooperation in a Rawlsian sense as an internal relation inside the biotic community, but environmental justice assures at least a harmonious natural order.

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²⁴ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 220.

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