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Personalism, Sentientism, Biocentrism

Boundary Problems within non-human Bioethics

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Summary:

This paper looks at some essential aspects in non-human bioethics, especially as they pertain to animals and plants, in order to discuss the problems of the boundaries in ethical personalism, sentientism and biocentrism. It investigates first the applicability of the different concepts of the 'person' whose consciousness acts as the carrier of interests (utilitarianism) as defined in the 'Great Ape Project' initiated by Cavalieri/Singer (1993). Secondly the paper analyses the problem of the 'boundary of sentience' in the ethical sentientism, especially in respect to plants. Thirdly the concept of 'life' in biocentric ethics is considered. One result is, that basic ethical terms, i.e. person, sentience and life, used in this context, are not sufficient to characterize the moral status of great apes, animals and plants; they lack clearly defined ranges and boundaries. Finally discussed is whether 'speciesism' is not only a historical phenomenon in traditional concepts of ethical personalism but also a systematical problem in modern versions of mentalism, sentientism and biocentrism.

Key words: Singer, Kant, animal ethics, 'Great Ape Project', speciesism.