

Justice Unbound

Planetary Ethics in an Interconnected World

by

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Table of Contents

Chapter One: Overview of the Planetary Ethics Conceptual Framework	1
Advantages of Planetary Ethics	3
The Overarching Principle of Justice	7
Moral Status and Moral Standing	11
The Background Conditions of Justice	13
Chapter Two: The Rationale for Moral Status and the Overarching Justice Principle of Planetary Ethics	21
The Basis of Moral Status	21
Problems with Intrinsic Value	25
Taylor on Moral Status.....	36
Korsgaard on the Moral Status of Humans	49
Korsgaard on the Moral Status of Animals.....	56
An Alternative Justificatory Strategy for Granting Moral Status to Living Beings	64
Advantages of the Proposed Alternative Justificatory Strategy....	71
Chapter Three: Justifying the Levels of Moral Status	91
Differential Moral Standing	92
The Partiality Problem	96
Levels of Moral Status.....	100
The Transitive Ordinal Relation Between Levels of Moral Status.....	101
Justifying the Levels of Moral Status	103
Humans and the Criteria for Moral Concern and Status.....	109
Complex Sentient Animals and the Criteria for Moral Concern and Status	118

Simple Sentient Animals and the Criteria for Moral Concern and Status	130
Rights and Moral Status.....	138
Objections to Levels of Moral Status.....	139
Chapter Four: Three Kinds of Obligation-Generating Relationships.....	
Relationships.....	152
Species-Specific Features, Normative Relationships, and Justice Obligations	153
Three Kinds of Normative Relationships in the Domains of Justice	159
Ecological Relationships	160
Political Relationships.....	166
Associative Relationships.....	169
Moral Standing and the Three Obligation-Generating Relationships	194
Rights and Moral Standing	197
Chapter Five: The International Domain of Justice	
Justice in the International Domain	208
The Earth as Our Common Resource Base	209
The Egalitarian Access to Natural Resources Principle.....	214
The Principle of Ecological Integrity.....	236
The Principle of Fair Economic Cooperation.....	243
The Principle of Nondomination.....	245
The Principle of Fair Economic Cooperation.....	250
The Just Migration Principle	256
The Corporate Responsibility Principle.....	263
The Principle of Justice for Animals and Plants	266
Chapter Six: The National Justice Domain	
Ecological Obligations in the National Domain.....	278
Political Obligations in the National Domain.....	281
Associative Obligations in the Domestic Domain.....	284
Associative Obligations in the Domestic Domain.....	305

Chapter Seven: Justice Obligations in the Natural Domain	314
Theoretical Tools of the Planetary Ethics Framework.....	319
Wilderness Animals	324
Domesticated Animals.....	350
Liminal Animals	370
Obligations to Plants	385
Chapter Eight: Justice Obligations in the Intergenerational Domain	398
The Non-Identity Problem	401
Standards of Intergenerational Justice.....	403
Ordered Sufficiency.....	408
Obligations to Future Animals and Plants.....	417
Additional Obligations to Future People	426
Conclusion	436
Reference List.....	437
Planetary Ethics Chart	454
Index	454

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Index link is correct.**

CHAPTER ONE

Overview of the Planetary Ethics Conceptual Framework

There is a fundamentally important but insufficiently discussed problem in justice theory, namely, that we do not know if the theories of justice proposed in the philosophical literature can deal adequately with *all* our justice obligations. What we currently have are fragmentary theories that deal with delimited areas of justice, and even though these theories may provide plausible accounts of the justice issues they address, it is often questionable whether they can resolve moral dilemmas in other domains of justice. For instance, Rawls's greatly influential *A Theory of Justice* provides a plausible account of justice for compatriots as fairness, understood as nonpartisan agreement for mutual advantage among rational individuals.¹ However, it is doubtful whether this theoretical perspective can deal adequately with our justice obligations to animals, who do not have the rational capacities to participate in deliberations regarding the basic normative structure of society. Establishing the overarching consistency and coherence of all our justice obligations is very important, since presumably we do not want our justice obligations in one area of justice to conflict with or undermine our obligations in other areas. Moreover, we want to know how justice obligations in one area of justice may reinforce, delimit, or otherwise qualify justice obligations in other areas.

The planetary ethics conceptual framework is a ground-breaking perspective that addresses the problem of fragmentary and limited theories of justice by providing theoretical tools to identify and justify

in a theoretically coherent manner our justice obligations in the four domains of justice, which include obligations to our compatriots, to individuals in other countries, to future and past generations, and to animals and plants. It is more appropriate to conceive of planetary ethics as a conceptual framework than an ethical theory, for it provides a *meta-theoretical template* for articulating and defending our justice obligations to all beings with moral status in a holistic and conceptually integrated manner. In this chapter I provide a summary of the most important features of the planetary ethics framework and point out the theoretical importance of these features. This will provide the reader with an overview of the complex and extensive conceptual terrain covered by planetary ethics.

A distinctive attribute of the planetary ethics framework is its encompassing and integrated character. This conceptual framework can not only articulate our justice obligations in all the domains in which such obligations arise, it can also systematically elucidate the connections between the justice obligations in these domains. In particular, it explains the ways in which the demands of justice in one domain can constrain, extend, or otherwise qualify justice obligations in other domains. This perspective has the important function of facilitating the identification of interconnections between justice obligations in different domains. Given the interconnectedness of the contemporary world and the global scale of our collective problems, it is imperative to understand the nature and scope of justice obligations beyond the boundaries of our own national community, our own species, and our own era if we want an adequate understanding of our obligations to all those beings who merit moral concern for their own sake. Planetary ethics also seeks to explicate the nature and justification of interpersonal *agent-specific* obligations, for the associative relationships in which such obligations arise involve some of the most important dilemmas in the moral lives of most

people. This framework thus facilitates articulating the connections between our general and particularistic justice obligations. In short, planetary ethics aspires to provide conceptual resources to understand our universal and interpersonal particularistic obligations in the major contexts in which these obligations arise.

Advantages of Planetary Ethics

There are four primary advantages that the planetary ethics conceptual framework provides for understanding justice obligations. First, to determine the adequacy of theories of justice dealing with obligations in a particular domain, it is important to identify the interconnections between these obligations and those in the other domains. Without knowing how a theory of justice obligations in one domain relates to our justice obligations in the other domains, we will not know whether that theory would be consistent with or cohere with our obligations in the other domains of justice. Establishing the overarching consistency and coherence of our justice obligations is important, since presumably we do not want our justice obligations in one domain of justice to conflict with or undermine our obligations in the other domains. For instance, we should avoid developing a global theory of distributive justice of natural resources for human beings without considering our obligations to animals concerning the use of natural resources they need for their survival and flourishing. Since the capacity of animals to satisfy their basic material needs is in general negatively affected by human appropriation and exclusive use of natural resources like land, forests, and bodies of water, we would have to significantly revise and likely reject central features of a theory of global distributive justice concerning natural resources that took only human interests into account.

Second, identifying the domains of justice brings much needed attention to the real-world background conditions of justice that

condition and qualify our understanding of our justice obligations in each domain. If we do not recognize, for example, the normative significance of ecological limitations or the pre-existing institutional constraints that affect our obligations in the domains of justice—such as the increasing scarcity of planetary natural resources or the continued existence of self-governing territorialized political bodies with pre-existing commitments to their members—the way we conceptualize justice obligations will likely be excessively idealized and fail to apply to the world as it actually exists. The current severe scarcity of natural resources, for instance, has important normative implications for schemes of natural resource distributive justice involving humans and animals. Scarcity, in other words, conditions in important ways our obligations to human and nonhuman beings, for it forces us to morally prioritize the use of natural resources in addressing their needs. In a similar fashion, our cosmopolitan obligations are significantly qualified by the reasonable long-term social welfare commitments that states have already made to their citizens. Our obligations to people in other countries, in other words, are arguably limited by the existing commitments we have to our own citizens. I will maintain that if philosophers want their theories of justice obligations to be applicable to the real world, they need to be more mindful of the existing and historical conditions in the relevant domains of justice that have normative significance for their theorizing about the obligations in these domains. If we discuss moral obligations at a purely abstract or theoretical level that does not include a recognition of the concrete factors that affect real-world moral decision making, our ethical theories will be significantly limited in their potential impact.

Third, developing a holistic and conceptually integrated framework for articulating justice obligations will help us be more aware of the metatheoretical assumptions we make when we theorize about justice

obligations. As we shall see at various points in this extensive work, the metatheoretical decisions we make can have a great impact on our subsequent theorizing. For instance, when articulating the obligation-generating relationships in the domains of justice, we will see that categorizing political relationships to compatriots as associative relationships rather than *sui generis* normative relationships creates unnecessary difficulties in justifying at a general level the moral bases for associative obligations. Given that justice obligations are so extensive, complex, and interconnected, it is important to be aware of any metatheoretical assumptions we may be making that hinder the attainment of our overarching theoretical objectives. The planetary ethics conceptual framework, by placing a metatheoretical focus on the conceptual mechanisms we need to adequately identify and justify our varied and multiple justice obligations in the different domains of justice, will help us see more clearly the trans-domain consequences of adopting particular theoretical strategies and mechanisms for analyzing ethical dilemmas.

Fourth, at a more concrete and practical level, a central feature of planetary ethics is its potential for elucidating the role of our justice obligations in supporting the survival and flourishing of human and nonhuman species. It is a tenet of planetary ethics that justice promotes the survival and flourishing of life forms while injustice undermines the capacity of human and nonhuman species to survive and flourish. The just treatment of animals, for example, involves the elimination or radical transformation of the animal food and product industry, which plays a major role in greenhouse-gas emissions, loss of species diversity, destruction of rainforests, water pollution, and the inefficient use of agricultural land. The latter are factors that undermine ecological sustainability and human and animal flourishing. I maintain that, broadly speaking, what is just coincides at a general level with what promotes sustainable ecological

flourishing for entities with moral status. The plausibility of this claim will become increasingly clear as I discuss the justice obligations in the different domains of justice and show how they promote sustainable flourishing in natural and sociopolitical contexts.

As we shall see shortly, in planetary ethics, beings with moral status have different levels of moral status. These differences in levels of moral status are relevant both for identifying our justice obligations to these beings and for determining the relative strength of these obligations. I will argue that it is extremely implausible and morally unjustifiable to grant equal moral status to all living beings or all sentient beings. I will propose an innovative taxonomy of levels of moral status that is based not on the greater moral worth or value of some beings relative to others, but on the greater vulnerabilities, greater losses incurred from death or irreparable harm, and greater developmental and nurturance needs of more cognitively, emotionally, socially, and psychologically complex beings. In my taxonomy, it is not greater moral worth or dignity that justifies a higher level of moral status, but greater vulnerabilities and needs. My taxonomy of levels of moral status thus avoids the traditional objections faced by theories that propose degrees or levels of moral status based on the greater moral worth or superiority of some beings over others. In the planetary ethics conceptual framework, knowing a being's level of moral status is important, for it provides much needed guidance for formulating policies regarding the prioritizing of resources and labor that are morally appropriate for safeguarding that being's welfare relative to that of other beings. Given pervasive and inevitable conflicts in safeguarding the interests of the multiple kinds of beings granted moral status in planetary ethics—or any similarly broad-based moral framework—it is crucial to be able to prioritize the use of our limited resources and labor in a morally principled way. It is not feasible and is morally counter-intuitive, I will argue, to try to

employ the same quantity of resources and labor to protect the interests of toads and crickets, for example, as those of dolphins, bonobos, and humans.²

The Overarching Principle of Justice

At the most general level, justice obligations in planetary ethics are understood in terms of an overarching principle of justice, according to which we should *safeguard the capacity of beings with moral status for sustainable ecological flourishing within the constraints imposed by the applicable background conditions of justice*. The background conditions of justice include the levels of moral status of the beings involved, the obligation-generating relationships we have to beings with moral status in the domains of justice, the empirical, institutional, and historical constraints of the sociopolitical and ecological settings of the domains of justice, and the competing justice obligations we may have to beings with moral status in other relevant domains. As we shall see, the background conditions of justice may delimit, strengthen, or otherwise qualify our justice obligations to beings with moral status in each domain due to a variety of normatively relevant factors. In this overarching justice principle, sustainable ecological flourishing refers to the viable processes through which organisms develop and exercise their species-specific capacities in ecological and institutional contexts. I will at different points rely on this overarching justice principle of planetary ethics to articulate more precisely the nature of our justice obligations in the different domains. It will serve as the general guiding principle to start identifying the specific obligations we have to beings with moral status in the domains of justice.

I maintain that in each domain of justice there are specific justice obligations to beings with moral status that emerge from three kinds of obligation-generating relationships. There are ecological, political, and associative relationships in each domain of justice that generate

justice obligations.³ As we shall see, some of these relationships have greater or lesser moral significance in some domains than in others, so they may play a differential role in determining our justice obligations in some domains. An important normative constraint on these relationships is that the obligations generated by these relationships should promote the sustainable ecological flourishing of beings in that domain as well as other domains. The overarching principle of justice will help us determine, for each of the three kinds of obligation-generating relationships, the appropriate kinds of justice obligations that arise from these relationships in each domain. In other words, in each domain of justice we can ask whether the way we conceptualize ecological, political, and associative relationships in that domain generate obligations which are such that they promote the sustainable ecological flourishing of beings in that domain, while not undermining our justice obligations in the other domains or disregarding the other factors in the background conditions of justice. The overarching principle of justice will function as a minimal normative standard that should be satisfied by the three obligation-generating relationships in each domain.

In brief, according to the overarching justice principle of the planetary ethics conceptual framework, justice obligations should be understood in terms of the positive obligation to safeguard the capacity for ecological flourishing of beings with moral status while taking into account the background conditions of justice, which include: (1) the level of moral status of the beings in question, (2) the obligation-generating relationships we have to these beings in the domains of justice, (3) the normatively relevant ecological, institutional, and historical conditions and constraints in the applicable domains, and (4) the other justice obligations we have to beings with moral status in the domain(s) of justice under consideration. I will maintain that existing theories of justice

disregard one or more of these four background conditions of justice in articulating our justice obligations, and that this is a serious theoretical limitation of these theories. In what follows I will provide a fuller explanation of these background conditions of justice.

From the outset, planetary ethics insists that, in articulating the relationships that generate justice obligations in a particular domain, we should take into account the constraints imposed by the normatively relevant empirical, historical, and institutional background conditions of the domain in question. For instance, in the domestic or national domain, sharing living-spaces with other people and with animals in a politically circumscribed territory is an ecological relationship that generates distinctive obligations regarding the fair access of these beings to natural resources in mixed human-animal communities as well as national animal wilderness regions. Similarly, in the international domain the fact that all living beings have a mutual ecological, i.e., biophysical, dependence on a common resource base, namely, the planet earth, has normative implications for the responsibility of states, for example, to safeguard the earth's ecological integrity, protect its wilderness regions, and develop the international institutional structures that regulate the use of the global commons, such as the oceans. In like fashion, our shared membership in a national political community gives rise to civic obligations we have to one another that are based on our status as compatriots, i.e., the political relationship of common citizenship is an obligation-generating relationship insofar as it gives rise to distinctive political justice obligations, which we do not have to nonmembers, to fellow members of our political community. Analogously, in the domestic domain the special parent-child relationship that binds me to my children generates distinctive associative obligations I have to them that I do not have to random children in my community. In brief, ecological, political, and associative relationships in the domains of

justice generate justice obligations appropriate to that domain. In evaluating the normative adequacy of ecological, political, and associative relationships in a domain of justice we can, as mentioned earlier, appeal to the overarching justice principle to see whether, at a minimum, the form that these relationships take in that domain reasonably safeguard sustainable ecological flourishing.

I will argue that there is an ordered moral priority to the three obligation-generating relationships, with the ecological being the most basic, followed by the political, and then the associative. Ecological relationships, for example, have pre-political moral legitimacy that delimits the systems of property rights that can be regarded as just by national political communities. Similarly, the obligations generated by the political relationship between compatriots to observe the legal statutes of the state morally trump, for example, a parent's decision to protect their son or daughter from criminal prosecution on the rationale that as a parent they have an associative obligation to protect their welfare.

The obligation-generating relationships in each domain help us identify the specific obligations we have to beings with moral status in that domain, and in this way help us operationalize and apply the overarching planetary ethics justice principle. These obligation-generating relationships, in other words, are among the factors that fill out the meaning of the notion of "safeguarding" ecological flourishing. I will argue that some of our justice obligations are not universal and nonconditional but are rather qualified and conditioned, among other factors, by institutional, empirical, normative, and historical considerations. One of the advantages of the planetary ethics conceptual framework is that it provides the theoretical tools to identify, disentangle, and prioritize the numerous and complex justice obligations in the contemporary world. The

background conditions of justice also include the institutional, historical, normative, biophysical, and interpersonal factors that determine, qualify, and in some cases delimit, our moral obligations within each domain.⁴ The planetary ethics framework, in contrast to most ethical perspectives, avoids examining justice obligations from an excessively abstract or universalistic perspective that disregards or fails to sufficiently appreciate the real-world ecological, political, and interpersonal contexts in which such obligations arise.

Moral Status and Moral Standing

To incorporate the latter insights, planetary ethics makes a fundamental distinction between *moral status and moral standing*. The concept of moral standing, which is a more expansive notion than that of moral status, is crucial for articulating our moral obligations, for in most cases it is not enough to know a being's moral status to determine our moral obligations to it. The notion of moral standing recognizes the other normative factors necessary for determining our moral obligations, such as the obligation-generating relationships that may hold between us and the rights-holder or the institutional context in which the moral agent and the rights-holder are situated. Despite this limitation of the concept of moral status, ethicists often do not articulate the factors necessary for knowing our obligations to particular beings in concrete settings. A being's moral standing in planetary ethics is determined through the application of the overarching principle of justice as it is conditioned by the background conditions of justice. As we have observed, an important component of these background conditions are the obligation-generating relationships, which can give rise to specific justice obligations that involve differential moral treatment *even when the entities under consideration have the same level of moral status*. This position conforms with the common moral views that, for example, we have stronger

obligations to our children than to random individuals, that our moral obligations are stronger to our adopted animal companions than to random animals of the same species, that we have stronger obligations to care for wilderness animals living within the jurisdictional boundaries of our territorialized political community than to wilderness animals under the jurisdiction of other territorialized political bodies, and that we have special obligations to our compatriots that we do not have (or do not have to the same degree) to the members of other national political bodies.

Thus, to determine whether we are treating a being justly, that is, whether we are observing the principle of safeguarding its capacity for sustainable ecological flourishing, we focus on how the background conditions of justice qualify our application of this principle, i.e., we focus on the being's level of moral status, the normative relationships that bind us to that being within and across the ecological, political, and associative contexts of the relevant domain of justice, the normatively relevant institutional, empirical, and historical constraints of the justice domain under consideration, and the possible competing moral obligations we may have to other beings. By focusing on this complex set of factors, planetary ethics provides a conceptual framework that is sufficiently powerful to articulate the numerous and varied justice obligations we have to beings with moral status while providing a normative rationale for these different obligations. And just as important, the planetary ethics framework allows us to see how our obligations in one domain are related to, and possibly conditioned by, our obligations in other domains.

Obligations to regulate our consumption patterns of animal protein in the national domain, for example, are arguably strengthened by our ecological obligations to the present and future generations of humans

and animals in other countries, which are concerns in the international and intergenerational justice domains. Since the national and international animal industries are a major source of greenhouse gases, a commitment to vegetarianism or veganism would lessen greatly the ecological harm to the planet and would contribute to the compliance of our obligations to safeguard the ecological flourishing of beings with moral status. In this case we can see that our ecological relationships and obligations cross the national, international, and intergenerational domains. In brief, planetary ethics delineates a normative framework within which we can provide a theoretically unified account of all our justice obligations to beings with differential moral status in a temporally extended earth community. The failure to provide a conceptually coherent and inclusive account of our justice obligations to all inhabitants of the earth community, understood in intergenerational terms, is a significant limitation of existing theories of justice.

The Background Conditions of Justice

Employing the concept of background conditions of justice raises the question of which considerations should count as legitimate normative qualifications or constraints on justice obligations. Some purported constraints, such as conventional societal expectations regarding gender-based social roles, should not simply be accepted at face value and taken as legitimate constraints when analyzing the fairness of existing gender roles. On the other hand, other constraints, such as the scarcity of natural resources such as potable water and arable land, are empirical givens that cannot be denied and should be taken into account in issues dealing with the just distribution of life-sustaining goods. Similarly, the likely continued existence of deeply entrenched territorialized self-governing national political bodies introduces institutional constraints into our moral deliberations that

cannot simply be ignored or normatively superseded by relying on merely hypothetical alternative forms of global political organization in which these self-governing bodies do not exist.

In articulating our justice obligations, the first kind of normative qualifying factor of the background conditions of justice, namely, a being's level of moral status, is clearly relevant for understanding our justice obligations to that being. Knowing a being's level of moral status provides guidance concerning the strength and nature of our obligations to that being and the priority that we should grant these obligations, since in the real world we will be faced with multiple and competing obligations, some of which we must prioritize given that we possess limited resources and human labor to address justice obligations. So to the extent that the taxonomy of levels of moral status that I will defend is sound, we can take this first kind of qualifying factor or constraint in the background conditions of justice to be normatively legitimate.

Regarding the second kind of qualifying factor, namely, the obligation-generating relationships that give rise to distinctive justice obligations in each domain, I will argue that these relationships are nondiscretionary, i.e., they are necessary given such considerations as the basic biophysical needs of living beings, problems of collective action that can only be resolved by coordinated human behavior, and social/psychological needs that are an important part of a flourishing life. These considerations correspond respectively to the ecological, political, and associative obligation-generating relationships. I will provide a rationale for considering these relationships as nondiscretionary and thus their status as legitimate normative factors shaping and qualifying our obligations in each domain will depend on the plausibility of this rationale. I will contend that the reasons supporting the nondiscretionary nature of these relationships are

sufficiently strong and compelling to justify considering these obligation-generating relationships as normatively relevant considerations determining and qualifying our justice obligations.

Concerning the third kind of normative qualifying factor of the background conditions of justice, namely, the morally relevant institutional, empirical, and historical factors of the domains of justice under consideration, I will argue that these factors should affect and shape our justice obligations in these domains. In some cases, historical developments such as colonialism and imperialism are normatively relevant for determining our present obligations, particularly in certain bilateral relations in the international domain. According to the planetary ethics conceptual framework, when articulating justice obligations in the international domain, for example, we should not assume that we are starting from an idealized initial position in which all countries can compete on equal terms in the global economy. Instead, we should recognize that in some cases the detrimental effects of colonialism and imperialism, as well as natural resource and geographical limiting factors, may affect the present capacity of some political bodies to function effectively in the global economy. An advantage of planetary ethics is that, in contrast to ideal theories of justice, it helps us identify and incorporate specific normative factors in the articulation of our justice obligations that are not recognized by idealized theories. In short, I will argue that the need to consider seriously the background conditions of justice means that ethical theorizing needs to become more mindful of empirical and historical factors.

Concerning the fourth kind of qualifying factor in the background conditions of justice, namely, competing justice obligations in the other domains, it is not difficult to see why this factor is relevant for knowing the priority and strength of justice obligations in a particular

domain. For example, when considering the obligations we have to provide human beings in the national and international domains with egalitarian access to the earth's life-sustaining biophysical resources, we also have to consider the obligations we have in the natural domain to provide animals and plants with fair access to these resources. We should not focus exclusively on human needs, as Thomas Pogge and Hillel Steiner do in their theories of just access to the earth's natural resources, for this would neglect our obligations to nonhuman beings with moral status.⁵ We will not succeed in articulating a morally acceptable theory of just distribution of the earth's natural resources if we disregard the biophysical needs of animals and plants.

Likewise, we will not succeed in articulating an acceptable theory of international economic obligations if we do not consider that states have limited resources and must observe the constraints imposed by the obligations they might have made to their citizens to provide for their social welfare needs in their old age. In short, state financial limitations and pre-existing obligations should be considered in arriving at a balanced account of cosmopolitan obligations. These constraints are particularly compelling regarding government programs that are funded by the financial contributions that citizens have made throughout their working lives. In general, I will argue that we should resist the philosophical temptation to start the analysis of ethical issues by granting abstract and "impartial" moral principles categorical priority while disregarding the complex empirical, institutional, and historical factors that are normatively relevant for understanding our moral obligations in the national domain.

In summary, I will not arbitrarily stipulate the conditions that should determine and qualify our justice obligations in each domain but will provide reasons to justify including particular considerations among

the background conditions of justice that we should consider in applying the overarching justice principle of planetary ethics. The normative relevance of the background conditions of justice should therefore not be seen as implicitly favoring the status quo. On the contrary, by identifying and justifying the specific considerations that qualify and limit our justice obligations, the background conditions of justice will help us identify the central assumptions that shape our theoretical analyses. As we will see, neglecting background conditions of justice is a major flaw in the contemporary ethical analyses of justice obligations. This neglect is a major reason why philosophical analyses are often overlooked in the real-world resolution of ethical problems.⁶

There is some justification in the common view that philosophers tend to deal with moral issues in an excessively abstract manner that does not grant sufficient consideration to the multiple constraints, both normative and empirical, faced by moral agents. The background conditions of justice will make ethical analysis far more applicable to real world situations and lead to more plausible and acceptable ethical positions. Any holistic ethical perspective like planetary ethics that grants moral status to a very wide range of beings needs to be mindful of the numerous and greatly variable situations that moral agents will face in their actual moral deliberations. The theoretical tools provided by planetary ethics, such as the taxonomy of levels of moral status and the obligation-generating relationships in the domains of justice, will enable moral agents to consider the complex and numerous normative factors crucial for morally principled decision-making. It is more likely that moral theories that recognize the factors included in the background conditions of justice will lead to balanced and feasible moral decisions.

This book provides a basic articulation of the major components of the planetary ethics framework. My primary goal here is to make a case

for the view that we can analyze all our justice obligations from a holistic and theoretically integrated perspective. Such a perspective will allow us to observe the interconnections between our diverse justice obligations in the different domains and will also enable us to see how our obligations in each domain are strengthened, limited, expanded, or otherwise conditioned by the background conditions of justice. The planetary ethics perspective will also accomplish a goal of major importance, namely, it will make it possible for us to see whether we can bring together the justice obligations in all the domains into a conceptually integrated theoretical framework. Given the broad scope of analysis in this work, my account of justice obligations in the different domains will be of a preliminary nature. At a practical level, it is inevitable that a work of this immense scope will gloss over some important figures in the domains of justice. My objective is not to provide a comprehensive account of the moral issues that arise in the domains of justice, but to articulate a *meta-theoretical template* within which more detailed analyses of justice issues can be carried out.

Chapter 2 develops the theoretical foundations of moral status and contains the most technically demanding portion of the book. Readers primarily interested in the broader argument may wish simply to skim it for its central claims. The third chapter deals with the justification of my taxonomy of moral status. I demonstrate how this taxonomy avoids the standard objections against recognizing differences or levels of moral status. In the fourth chapter I discuss the three obligation-generating relationships and show why they are important for identifying our obligations in the domains of justice. In the fifth chapter I examine the obligations that arise in the international domain and identify seven principles of international justice. The sixth chapter deals with our obligations in the national domain. In the seventh chapter I discuss our justice obligations to

animals and plants, while the eighth chapter deals with justice obligations in the intergenerational domain. In the Appendix, I include a planetary ethics chart that illustrates all the central components of the planetary ethics framework.

¹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999).

² For a fuller account of my novel taxonomy of levels of moral status, see Jorge M. Valadez, "Problems with Sentientist Politics," *Politics and Animals*, Vol. 9 (2023), available online.

³ I will use the term "associative relationships" to refer to the *agent-relative* obligation-generating interpersonal relationships that an individual has to specific others. In planetary ethics, political relationships between compatriots are seen as *sui generis* normative relationships and not as associative relationships. As I later explain, it is a category mistake to conceive of political relationships as associative relationships merely because both relationships are nonuniversal. Another important terminological clarification is that I understand political relationships in a broad sense to include what might sometimes be seen as social relationships, such as the relationships between individuals who regard themselves as self-identified members of particular ethnocultural groups. I will often use the term "sociopolitical" to refer to political relationships broadly conceived.

⁴ For example, if we take the moral units of analysis in cosmopolitan obligations to be institutionally unattached individuals, we will neglect the distinctive political and institutional relationships that compatriots in self-determining political communities have to one another, as well as the collective responsibilities that arise from these political relationships. I will argue that if we recognize that self-governance is a fundamental right of political communities, we must also recognize that compatriots will typically have especial responsibilities to one another that they will not have to nonmembers of their communities.

⁵ Thomas Pogge, "An Egalitarian Law of Peoples", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 23 (1994):195-224 and Hillel Steiner, "Just Taxation and International Redistribution", *Global Justice*, ed. I. Shapiro and L. Brilmayer, NOMOS XXXIX, (1999): 171-191.

⁶ A compelling case in point is the work of John Rawls. While Rawls has had an enormous influence in the philosophical scholarly literature on social justice, his second principle of justice, which encapsulates his conception of distributive fairness in a national social order, has had limited influence on actual social and economic policymaking.

CHAPTER TWO

The Rationale for Moral Status and the Overarching Justice Principle of Planetary Ethics

In this chapter I examine two foundational interrelated themes in planetary ethics, viz., the rationale for granting moral status to human and nonhuman living beings and the overarching principle of justice of planetary ethics. In examining these themes, I will show the important interconnections between them. As we shall see, the rationale for granting moral status that I defend not only conforms with the theoretical objectives of planetary ethics but also has significant implications for the nature of the foundational justice principle of planetary ethics. I also critically examine and reject the common view that we can rely on the concept of intrinsic value to justify granting moral status. In developing my position regarding these matters, I will examine the views of two philosophers whose ethical perspectives are particularly relevant for our purposes, Paul W. Taylor and Christine Korsgaard.

The Basis of Moral Status

In the planetary ethics framework, when a being has moral status, it deserves moral consideration for its own sake, and its interests should be considered when contemplating actions that affect its well-being. All the categories of beings with moral status in planetary ethics deserve moral consideration for their own sake. Of course, this does not mean that when there are irreconcilable conflicts the interests of some of these beings cannot be overridden for the sake of others, but

it does mean that these decisions should be grounded on a morally principled basis.

From the outset, we should note that the rationale for granting moral status should at a minimum meet three conditions for it to further the central theoretical purposes of planetary ethics. First, given the broad and inclusive scope of planetary ethics, theoretical consistency favors a conception of moral status that applies equally well to human and nonhuman beings. Traditional rationales for granting humans moral status, such as moral agency, autonomy, or dignity, are questionable from the planetary ethics perspective, for it is doubtful they can apply to all nonhuman beings. Second, the rationale for granting moral status to human and nonhuman beings should serve as the conceptual ground for the obligations that we have to these beings. I will argue that all living beings have a good of their own that they independently strive to achieve and that this good not only plays a central role in grounding their moral status but also determines what our obligations to these beings should be. Theoretical coherence is strengthened when obligations to beings with moral status are based on the rationale for granting them moral status in the first place. I will contend that we have positive duties or obligations to safeguard the ecological flourishing of beings with moral status, where this conception of flourishing is understood in terms of the sustainable development and free exercise of their species-specific capacities. Our obligations, however, will be significantly influenced by what I call the background conditions of justice, which are factors that can strongly delimit, strengthen, or otherwise qualify our obligations.

The central rationale for embracing the overarching justice principle of planetary ethics is that it protects the interests on the basis of which beings are granted moral status. As we shall see, since the flourishing of an organism plays a principal role in the rationale used to grant

moral status to human and nonhuman beings, the central justice principle of planetary ethics considers the safeguarding of this flourishing or good as its primary objective. More precisely, in this chapter I will argue that the central argument to justify granting moral status to human and nonhuman beings centers primarily on the idea that all living beings have a good or welfare of their own and that in the process of striving to attain their own flourishing or good, humans and other living beings take or reveal themselves as beings who are valuable in their own right. Safeguarding their capacity for flourishing will then constitute our core moral obligation to them, for it is the normatively significant pursuit of their own distinctive good or flourishing that underpins their status as beings who merit moral concern for their own sake.

Third, even though all beings with moral status should be granted moral consideration for their own sake, given the widely different kinds of beings granted moral status in planetary ethics and the different normative relationships we have with them, it would be highly implausible to maintain that our obligations or degrees of moral concern for them should be the same. Thus, the rationale for granting moral status must, on the one hand, incorporate moral respect for their own sake for all living beings and, on the other, allow for widely different obligations and degrees of moral concern to very diverse kinds of beings. In this chapter, I will show that such normative rationale can indeed be identified and defended.

Moreover, this rationale for granting moral status is based on the flourishing or final good of an organism, which in some cases includes having certain kinds of social relationships with conspecifics or members of other species. Thus, moral status is not always based solely on safeguarding the development and exercise of the species-specific capacities of individual living beings, but in some cases

requires, for some cognitively, emotionally, and socially complex animals, a functionally stable social environment. Further, even for simple organisms, the flourishing or realization of their good requires a sustainable biophysical environment, so the rationale for moral status must also take this into account. This is the main reason why the overarching planetary ethics justice principle emphasizes the notion of *ecological* flourishing, where this concept is understood both in terms of biophysical and social ecology. So we can see that the overarching justice principle of planetary ethics is based on a conception of the good or flourishing of an organism that has the conceptual flexibility for identifying the multiple factors, both internal and external, required for protecting the widely variable needs of different living beings.

A meta-theoretical advantage of embracing a holistic framework like that of planetary ethics is that from the outset we are clear about the adequacy criteria for central ethical notions like that of moral status. From the initial stages of our analyses, we aim to identify criteria for moral status that apply not only to humans but to the other beings included within the broad scope of the planetary ethics perspective. Rather than taking conceptions of moral status that were developed to apply only to human beings and attempt to extend them to animals and plants, the conceptual ideals guiding our analyses are oriented from the beginning to conform with the broad theoretical objectives of the planetary ethics framework.

I begin my analysis of moral status by criticizing a common strategy for granting moral status to humans and nonhuman beings. This strategy involves the claim that they possess intrinsic value or worth. I will not rely on this familiar strategy because I believe there are serious problems with the notion of intrinsic value, which I will discuss shortly. Since the goal of planetary ethics is to identify our