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Sommario	<p>The Possibility and Legitimacy of Environmental Ethics. A Critical Survey Several environmental problems are currently seriously undermining the traditional belief that the moral community should be restricted to human beings only. New scientific theories, especially in the fields of biology, ethology, and ecology, together with recent scientific discoveries demonstrating how human activities are jeopardizing ecosystem services urge for a paradigmatic change in our moral convictions. Environmental ethics has taken up the challenge and opened an extremely urgent and inspiring call for philosophical research. This is the call for extending moral values and moral status to non-human and non-paradigmatic entities, regarding them as moral patients. I accepted this call with great enthusiasm and with a strong personal commitment to issues of extreme relevance for the global agenda. Moral value and moral standing express a variety of meanings and refer to different fields of study. This means that the two concepts pose different questions. Regarding the former notion – the value of nature – we should thoroughly answer three questions at least: ‘what is value?’, ‘what is the origin of value?’, and ‘what is of value?’. In reference to the latter – the moral status of nature – we should ask: ‘which entities should we consider?’, ‘what should we consider about these entities?’ and ‘how much weight should we give to these considerations?’. Most arguments on environmental ethics still conflate the two concepts</p>

and their relative questions. I claim that providing separate answers to the different questions behind the two concepts is a required step toward the rethinking of the way in which we should relate with nature, as well as the way we should handle matters of policy regulations concerning nature. Indeed, this is the only way to reserve to natural entities the same respect we owe to moral patients. The main aim of my research is to analyze the possibility and the legitimacy of a non-anthropocentric environmental ethic. In pursuing this aim, I primarily demonstrate the possibility and need to extend the status of moral patient beyond the ideal paradigmatic human being. I also provide an original categorization of several theoretical projects that have been proposed in the last few decades. In this perspective, I demonstrate the originality and relevance of environmental ethics in the broader contemporary philosophical debate. While its originality consists in the decentering of ethical reflection from an exclusively human scope, its relevance is based mainly on its questioning of the notions of moral value and moral status when applied to new categories of moral patients, thus leaving open the possibility to construct ethical systems able to respect them. Secondly, my study comprises a constructive critique of the most significant moral theories debated in the field and outlines a personal theoretical proposal for a new environmental ethic. My claim is that the refusal of ethical and ontological supremacy of human beings is not only necessary, but also sufficient to set the foundation for a formally and materially valid ethical system. Even without abandoning the most accepted forms of moral epistemology, it is nonetheless possible to admit the need to respect different kinds of non-human and non-paradigmatic moral patients. It is necessary in this perspective to keep a clear distinction between the moral values and the moral status of these entities: even if it is imperative to admit the existence of bearers of intrinsic value that are not humans, this would not necessarily give them a moral status similar to ours. My main thesis is that, if compared to other environmental ethics examined here, such a theoretical proposal is not only more in agreement with Western philosophical tradition – as it can overcome anthropocentrism without going against humanism – but also able to both uphold the necessity to extend the moral community beyond humanity and guarantee the protection of the environment. In my research concerning the extension of the notion of moral patient beyond space, time, and human scope, I divided this main question into three additional problems: the possibility, the formal legitimacy, and the material legitimacy of a non-anthropocentric ethic able to extend its normative discourse to the whole of nature. It is along these three research paths that my study proceeds and I consequently organized my work into three parts. With regard to the content, the first part is mainly descriptive, the second one expositive, and the third one critical. However, from a methodological point of view, in all three parts I endorse an analytic perspective to advance concrete proposals. My effort throughout the study is to demonstrate the philosophical possibility and the ethical necessity to argue for the need to respect the non-human parts of the natural world using arguments that do not rely on definitions of the good of humanity.