



Toward a Plant Advocacy Movement



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Report Overview

There is not currently an identifiable movement that advocates on behalf of plants. Serious consideration of ethical treatment of plants, plant rights, and plant personhood remains on the margins of academic thought and popular understanding. However, there are many disconnected components of what could potentially constitute such a movement. This report presents reasons why such a movement is timely, outlines challenges that such a movement would face, considers what can be learned from the animal advocacy movement, and suggests potential approaches that could be useful for operationalizing a plant advocacy movement.

Introduction

Plants are for the most part treated in the dominant culture merely as passive resources available for human use. Plant lives are typically not considered to possess intrinsic value. Consideration of ethical treatment of plants, plant rights, and plant personhood remains on the margins of popular awareness and acceptance.

What is missing in order to change the ways in which the dominant culture relates to plants is an operational framework that encourages the incorporation of ethically-based ways of understanding, using, and being with plants – a plant advocacy movement. Such a movement would be based upon respect for plant lives and would recognize their intrinsic value. Social movements are important and effective vehicles for creating change in societal attitudes and behavior (Leahy 2021; Meyer 2003). This report presents the rationale, direction, and opportunity for a plant advocacy movement whose time has arguably arrived.

Trends Supporting a Plant Advocacy Movement

A number of trends are encouraging the development of a plant advocacy movement, with the following being of particular importance.

• Scientific Findings about Plants Percolating into Public Consciousness

Despite nearly century-old research on nerve-like functions in plants (Bose [1926] 2015), as well as earlier work by Darwin and Darwin (1897) on plant movement, it wasn't until recent decades that a critical mass of scientific research has emerged describing the complex nature of plants as intelligent biological beings. Numerous studies now recognize plants' highly developed capabilities, including forms of sentience, communication, learning, and memory. The functional similarities between plants and animals are remarkable (Bouteau et al. 2021) and scientific findings raise questions about the rigidly perceived separation between plants and animals, particularly in light of their common ancestry and genetic similarities (Chamovitz 2017). A growing number of scientists are communicating to the broader scientific community and the public about advanced plant capacities

and agency (Calvo and Lawrence 2022; Chamovitz 2017; Gagliano 2018; Karban 2015; Mancuso 2017; Simard 2021; Trewavas 2014; Wohlleben 2016). Non-scientists have also written for the public about this topic (Tompkins and Bird [1973] 2002; Pollan 2013).

• **Growing Focus on Plants in Philosophy and Environmental Ethics**

Philosophical speculation about the nature of plants has been recorded as early as classical Greece in the writings of Aristotle, Plato, and Theophrastus (Hall 2011), and consideration of plant rights, even though satirical, occupies a chapter (27) in Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* ([1872] 1968). In the past two decades, scholars in the humanities, and philosophers in particular, have been increasingly considering ethical issues related to plants. Some notable examples are Matthew Hall's foundational *Plants as Persons* (2011), which argues for a deeper and more respectful human relationship with plants based on a range of philosophical, historical and cultural perspectives. Thomas Puleo (2019) also makes a case for extending personhood to plants. Michael Marder's influential *Plant-Thinking* (2013a) calls for greater integration of plants into philosophical thought and recalibrating their position in the world. Chauncey Maher (2017) argues for considering that plants have minds, raising ethical issues about how to relate to plants. *Plant Ethics* (Kallhoff, Di Paola, and Schörghener 2018) presents a broad range of ethical thought relating to plants.

• **Broader Acceptance of Animal Rights and the Rights of Nature Movement**

The animal liberation and rights movements have attracted large numbers of people to their causes. This suggests that there is also an opportunity for a movement with a plant-oriented focus. A plant advocacy movement can be considered to resonate with the animal liberation and rights movements (Beers 2006; Jasper and Nelkin 1992) in its efforts to advance the status of a certain group of non-human beings. Advocating for plants is also consistent with a total liberation approach (Pellow, 2014) which challenges all lines and boundaries across which vulnerable groups can be oppressed. The animal liberation movement introduced the concept of speciesism as popularized by Singer (1975), which presents “species” as a socially constructed category. Liberation is seen by some animal advocate scholars (Nibert 2002; Pellow 2014; Singer 1975) as a needed response to this oppression.

On a parallel track to animal advocacy, the growing Rights of Nature movement uses a legal, rights-based approach for protecting non-human interests. It has always been inclusive of plants, and as early as the first edition in 1974 of Christopher Stone's *Should Trees Have Standing?* (Stone 2020), plants have been considered worthy of legal protection. The evolution and structure of the Rights of Nature movement has been recently studied and summarized by Kauffman and Martin (2021). Some national, local, and tribal governments have taken steps to respect the rights of plants through constitutions, laws, or ordinances. One example is the recognition by the White Earth Band of Ojibwe and the 1855 Treaty Authority of the rights of manoomin (wild rice), and their bringing a lawsuit against the state of Minnesota on the plants' behalf with manoomin as the lead plaintiff (Whalen 2022).

• **Greater Openness to Indigenous and Other Alternative Ways of Thinking**

Indigenous perspectives about plants are increasingly being taken seriously and accorded respect in the dominant culture. Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013) is a widely read Indigenous description of the human relationship with plants. Other Indigenous scholars have discussed the human connection with plants, including Wendy Makoons Geniusz (2009) and Keewaydinoquay Peschel (2013). Vine Deloria's writings, such as *Spirit & Reason* (1999), have helped to introduce the broader public to Indigenous thought about the connection with other beings, including plants. Gregory Cajete's *Native Science* (2000) presents Indigenous approaches to understanding the world. Indigenous perspectives have also been relayed to the public by other scholars (Sepie 2017; Warber, Fetters, and Kaufman 2003). Graham Harvey's *Animism* (2006) has helped to revitalize and to increase respect for the animist worldview. Increased attention to intuitive interspecies communication with plants (Abbott 2021; Conroy and Alexander 2011; Corby 2019; Gagliano 2018; Holden 2009; Roads 1987; Sepie 2017) also has led to greater appreciation of the human ability in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures to use intuitive communication to make personal connections with plants, potentially increasing peoples' sense of empathy and support for plants.

• **Urgency of Coping With the Anthropocene and the Biodiversity Crisis**

It is foundational in biological science that plants play a critically important role in maintaining Earth's ecosystems (Raven, Evert, and Eichhorn 2005). Because of plants' crucial role in maintaining planetary well-being, threats to plant biodiversity, forests, and habitats in the face of mounting human demands (Smil 2013) are leading to rising concerns about plant survival. In parallel, as the destructive impacts of the Anthropocene epoch continue to unfold, many people within the dominant culture are looking to the natural world, and to plants in particular, for solutions – whether through carbon sequestration through reforestation, healthier food sources, psychotropic or medicinal purposes, alternatives to fossil fuels, or for a sense of positive connection and support to help cope with an increasingly stressful time. This growing awareness of the importance of plants places plants, and potentially their interests, in a more positive light with an increasing number of people.

• **Increased Recognition of Biophilia as Contributor to Human Health and Well-Being**

Biophilia can be understood as a desire to connect with other forms of life which is innate in humans (Wilson 1984, 85). Connection with nature, including plants, has been increasingly recognized as contributing to human health and well-being (Jiminez et al. 2021; Louv 2005). This understanding predisposes people toward positive attitudes towards plants, and potentially a willingness to advocate for them.

Challenges Facing the Plant Advocacy Movement

Despite the supportive factors described above, the development of a plant advocacy movement faces significant obstacles, including the following.

• **Lack of Agreement on Definitions and Approach**

This movement's goals and definitions have not yet been set forward in a coordinated way, and there is no consensus among those who might become part of the movement about needed next steps. Many unexplored and unanswered questions exist that this movement will need to grapple with as it evolves. For example, are plants to be advocated for because they are sentient or conscious, or because they are living beings, all of whom deserve respect? Is it more important to set aside plants so that they are protected from human use, or to adopt ways of using plants so that both plant and human goals can be met? What does it mean to respect plants? Is it a more effective goal to work toward plant liberation (elevating the intrinsic status and standing of plants in their connection with humans), to try to increase plant welfare (using plants in more "humane" ways), or a mix of both? Should plants be seen as possessing specific rights? Can plants be understood to be able to directly communicate their own needs to humans, or are we not able to know what plants want or prefer? These and other complex and strategic questions will need to be considered and debated.

• **Disconnected Components of the Movement**

Although a plant advocacy movement does not exist as a coherent entity at this point, there are many unlinked components that could potentially constitute such a movement. These include a wide variety of organizations and entities that are in some fashion working on behalf of plants, although their work is not necessarily based upon a sense of respect for plants' intrinsic value. Some examples are provided below. Although most of the organizations listed in this section are based in the United States, these categories apply internationally.

Organizations active in these areas could potentially collaborate and join forces on large scale campaigns on behalf of plants, such as has occurred with the Endangered Species Coalition consisting of hundreds of member groups. However, the vast majority of organizations which in some ways benefit plants don't currently consider themselves as being part of a broader plant advocacy movement and they have not to date sought to collaborate for this purpose.

○ Organizations Protecting Trees and Forests

A robust movement exists that works on behalf of trees. This includes organizations focusing on protecting large ancient trees such as Save the Redwoods League and Sempervirens Fund, as well as other organizations that act on behalf of ancient trees like Archangel Ancient Tree Archive. Organizations such as Dogwood Alliance, Old-Growth Forest Network, and Wilderness Committee advocate on behalf of trees in a broader sense, and are not focused only on larger "charismatic" trees. There are also many organizations that, as part of their general efforts to protect the environment, aim to protect and preserve forests, such as Earthjustice, Greenpeace, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, and Stand.earth. Yet other organizations focus on advocating for urban trees, including American Forests, Arbor Day Foundation, Tree People, and Trees Forever. Additional organizations

work for tree planting on a large scale basis, such as the Green Belt Movement, International Tree Foundation, Trees for the Future, TreeSisters, and Trees, Water and People.

- Organizations Protecting Native Plants and Rare or Endangered Plant Species

Many groups help to protect plant biodiversity. These include Center for Biological Diversity, Center for Plant Conservation, Flora and Fauna International, Institute for Applied Ecology, The Nature Conservancy, PlantLife, Re:wild, and WildEarth Guardians. There are also many organizations working to increase appreciation for native plants, such as Wild Ones and a large number of local native plant societies. Additional organizations work to preserve certain categories of plants, such as Native Seeds/SEARCH (Native Americans' seeds), Seed Savers Exchange (heirloom seeds), and United Plant Savers (medicinal plants).

- Indigenous Peoples Organizations and Those Supporting Indigenous Peoples

Organizations working to protect Indigenous land and culture often directly or indirectly contribute to protecting plants, given the critical importance of Indigenous peoples and their lands for preserving Earth's biodiversity (Toledo 2013). These include Indigenous peoples organizations such as Amah Mutsun Land Trust, Honor the Earth, Indigenous Environmental Network, and Intertribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council, as well as other organizations supporting Indigenous people and the ecosystems within which they live, such as Amazon Frontlines, Amazon Watch, Pachamama Alliance, Rainforest Action Network, Rainforest Information Centre, Rainforest Rescue, and Survival International.

- Organizations Advocating for Animals or Promoting Vegetarianism or Veganism

These groups seek to improve treatment of animals and/or to reduce or eliminate human consumption of animal products. Food derived from animals is often produced at great expense of plant lives, as well as habitat available for wild plants. For these reasons, groups promoting vegetarianism and veganism indirectly reduce consumption of plants, even though this is not usually a stated goal for these organizations. Plant-centered diets avoid the inefficient process of feeding plants to animals for later human consumption of meat and other animal-based foods. Some of the many organizations in this category include Animal Equality, Animal Place, Farm Sanctuary, Friends of Animals, Mercy for Animals, United Poultry Concerns, and The Vegan Society.

- Organizations Advancing Agroecological Approaches

Alternative agricultural approaches such as permaculture, organic, regenerative, and sustainable agriculture can increase the quality of crop plant lives. This is not typically a stated goal of groups

promoting alternative agriculture, however, which typically tout other environment, economic, and human health benefits of these practices. Nonprofit and for-profit organizations involved with alternative agriculture include Acres U.S.A., Biodynamic Demeter Alliance, the Land Institute, Land Stewardship Project, Permaculture Institute, Permaculture Research Institute, and Rodale Institute, as well as many members of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

- Organizations that Purchase Land to Protect it from Development and Exploitation

Although these organizations do not have plant protection as their primary goal, the impact of their work increases the availability of land serving as habitat for wild plants. These groups include the wide range of land trusts affiliated with the Land Trust Alliance which purchase and protect land as well as other organizations that include land preservation in their missions.

- Organizations Working for the Rights of Nature

Plants fall clearly within the scope of the growing Rights of Nature movement. Leading organizations working in this area include Australian Earth Laws Alliance, Center for Democratic and Environmental Rights, Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, Earth Law Center, Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature, and Women's Earth and Climate Action Network International. These groups advocate for respecting the rights of plants either as an important component of landscapes and ecological communities or sometimes on plants' own behalf. The United Nation's Harmony with Nature Programme has also played an active role in advancing Rights of Nature worldwide.

- Organizations Working to Build Spiritual Connections with Trees and Plants

Some organizations incorporate a spiritual connection in their work on behalf of nature and plants. These include Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs, Friends of the Trees, and Organization of Nature Evolutionaries.

- Organizations that Work on Behalf of Plant Pollinators

Organizations that advance the interests of plant pollinators also benefit plants, since pollinators are critical to the ongoing survival of many plants. These include the National Wildlife Federation, Pollinator Partnership, and Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation.

- **"Plant Blindness" and Ecophobia**

It is problematic for a plant advocacy movement that plants are typically viewed in the dominant culture as low-status beings designated by custom and biology to be exploited by humans. These are symptoms of “plant blindness” which contributes to plants’ invisibility and perceived inferiority. Plant blindness, as described by Wandersee and Schussler (2001), and later renamed “plant awareness disparity” (Parsley 2020), is a phenomenon in which plants are generally considered to be of secondary importance to animals and of low importance and interest overall. This mindset presents an impediment to plant advocacy being taken seriously, as the broad subject of plants and their interests is generally considered to be unimportant. Ecophobia (Estok 2018) operates more broadly than plant blindness and represents a fear or phobia of the entire natural world. This has become increasingly widespread as people become disconnected from nature through spending more time indoors and interacting with the world through technology. Plant advocacy needs to recognize and address both of these phenomena.

- **Inherent Conflicts of Interest Regarding Use of Plants**

The fact that humans need to kill plants either directly or indirectly to be able to live makes it more challenging for people to argue on plants’ behalf, since it’s not possible to advocate for complete protection of plants in the same way that one can advocate for animals. The dependence of our economies and societies on plant products also introduces serious conflicts of interest into the human connection with plants, further reducing the incentive for people to perceive plants through an ethical lens.

- **Incipient Opponents of the Movement**

Some individuals actively oppose or mock the idea of a plant advocacy movement, even though it arguably does not yet exist. These include strong defenders of anthropocentrism (Smith 2014) as well as those perceiving plant advocacy as a threat to animal advocacy (Francione 2021). In addition, those who dismiss animal rights or environmentalist goals, typically for political, economic, or religious reasons, can also be expected to attempt to stifle efforts for plant advocacy which they may find contrary to their interests.

- **Lack of Implementation-Oriented Direction of Ways Forward**

There has been little attempt to consider from an operational perspective how plant ethics can actually be applied in societal activities. A few notable exceptions are the analysis of the tourism industry by Cohen and Fennell (2019) in which the authors explore this commercial sector’s connection with plants; Warber, Feters, and Kaufman (2003) who consider this from a medical ethics perspective; and Hiernaux (2021) and Lammerts Van Bueren and Struik (2005) who offer options for agriculture. Similar analyses are also needed for other economic and social sectors.

What Can be Learned from the Animal Advocacy Movement

Approaches utilized by the animal advocacy movement can also be useful for plant advocacy.

• **Contesting Speciesism**

One important argument for animal rights and animal liberation relates to the notion that “species” is a socially constructed term and can be therefore justifiably contested as a legitimate basis for discrimination. Speciesism has important parallels with interhuman oppression through sexism, racism, ableism, ageism, and homophobia in that species identity can be considered as yet another inappropriate pretext for discrimination. Contesting speciesism can be a useful approach for the plant advocacy movement to utilize in making its arguments.

• **Using Multiple Approaches**

The animal advocacy movement has achieved incremental change on behalf of animals by using multiple approaches, including animal welfare and animal liberation. For example, animal welfare seeks to change laws, policies, or procedures so that animals that are used by humans for food, experimentation, or entertainment will receive better treatment (Beers 2006). It has resulted in improved conditions for animals in some cases, although it does not challenge the human prerogative of using animals in ways harmful to animals. Alternatively, animal liberation or rights (Singer 1975) approaches do not presume continued use of animals for human purposes. These have worked successfully to help eliminate entire classes of oppressive behavior toward animals, such as for experimentation of their use for certain types of foods. Employing a range of gradualist as well as more radical approaches can be useful for plant advocacy as well.

• **Importance of Emotional Connection**

The animal advocacy movement has been successful in attracting large numbers of followers partially through building on peoples’ emotional connections to individual animals or entire species through the power of story and through fostering the development of empathy for animals. Although there can be many blind spots and inconsistencies in animal advocacy (in which people care about certain types of animals but continue to treat others poorly), emotion can create an entry point for heightened connection and sensitivity to animals and their issues. Emotion can also assist with plant advocacy, particularly with “charismatic” plants such as large or ancient trees. Individuating animals, a strategy of many animal advocates, also contributes to building emotional connections and ethical consideration of animals. This approach can be effective for certain plants as well.

• **Need to Avoid Boundaries of Ethical Concern**

While the animal rights movement appropriately challenges the line between humans and other animals in terms of the way animals are treated ethically, it unfortunately polices another

boundary between animals and other beings (Alessio 2008) such as plants, or even types of animals who don't meet certain desired qualifications, such as sentience. So although animal advocacy offers much that can serve as a model for plant advocacy, plant advocates should avoid their animal counterparts' tendency to place boundaries around those who are worthy of ethical concern, since this discounts and disappears those who are excluded. Plant advocates should work to increase respect for all forms of life, including animals as well as fungi and microorganisms, since all beings strive for a good life for themselves in their own ways.

How can Plant Ethics be Operationalized?

Important recent thought considering the ethical aspects of the human-plant connection can be found in the *Plant Ethics* edited collection (Kallhoff, Di Paola, and Schörghenheimer 2018). This joins a range of other scholarship related to plant ethics in recent years (Aloi 2019; Arbor 1986; Attfield 1981; Dossey 2001; Federal Ethics Committee on Non-Human Biotechnology 2008; Findly 2008; Goodpaster 1978; Hall 2011; Head, Atchison, and Phillips 2014; Gaard 2017; Gagliano 2018; Hiernaux 2021; Houle 2015; Kallhoff 2014; Koechlin 2005, 2009, 2015; Lammerts van Bueren and Struik 2005; Lawrence 2022; Marder 2013a, 2013b; Myers 2018; Nealon 2016; Pelizzon and Gagliano 2015; Pouteau 2014; Sandilands 2016; Smith 2016; Stone 2010). I will not attempt to summarize this growing literature here but rather highlight some of the basic principles and approaches which seem especially promising as foundations for a practical ethical relationship with plants.

A compelling ethical framework can be an important contributor to supporting the plant advocacy movement's ability to improve the way plants are treated. Basic and easy-to-understand ethical principles, as well as clear sets of guidelines for interacting with plants, can help to build a workable foundation for those wishing to relate to plants ethically, with each used in appropriate contexts. In addition to these intellectually based approaches, the motivating and energizing roles of story and emotion are also critically important for fueling this movement.

- **Simple to Understand Principles**

Using principles that are simple to understand and communicate, such as those outlined below, can help the plant advocacy movement to advance its work.

- **Biocentrism and Equivalence of All Life**

One can argue for respectful treatment of plants using a biocentric ethics that holds that each living being has intrinsic value (Goodpaster 1978) and which recognizes equality of species in moral consideration (Taylor 2011; Sterba 1998). This approach builds upon acceptance of the essentialist point that plants, like all other living organisms, have an intrinsic goal of flourishing (Kallhoff 2014; Gremmen and Blok 2018), and that they deserve to be treated with dignity (Koechlin 2009), care (Schörghenheimer 2018), and respect (Kimmerer 2013). This is consistent with an understanding of biological life in which all organisms seek a full life for themselves (Weber 2019).

• **The Golden Rule**

An alternative approach is to base ethical treatment of plants on a simple to understand principle such as the Golden Rule, as is proposed by Bekoff (2007) for relating to all living beings. The Golden Rule is an intuitive and universal principle that exists in almost every cultural tradition (Blackburn 2021, 51), with its essence being that one should act toward others as one would wish to be treated (and not to act toward others ways that one would not want to be treated). One can use one's moral imagination (Donovan 2006) to consider how a plant would want to be related to. It is intuitive that plants would prefer not to be harmed or injured, deprived of adequate water or nutrients, or exposed to damaging pests. The Golden Rule could then be applied accordingly.

• **The Precautionary Principle**

Bekoff (2007) also advocates for using the precautionary principle in operationalizing ethics. This approach does not demand certainty, but asks us to act, in light of unknowns that could have a negative consequence for other beings, to prevent these negative outcomes even if we don't know for sure that they will occur. For example, the precautionary principle could be used to justify treating plants as if they feel pain and discomfort, even if it has not been (or cannot be) proven that this is the case.

• **Approaches Based on Relationality, Reverence and Respect**

Other well-known basic ethical approaches can also be applied in relating to plants. Albert Schweitzer's concept of Reverence for Life (Schweitzer [1933] 1963, 124), St. Francis of Assisi's deep affection for all living beings including flowers and trees (Sorrell 1988), and Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic (Leopold [1949] 1966) each recognize the connection and commonality between humans and all other living beings and the need to treat other beings with respect. Considering plants in a relational way flattens the generally vertical and hierarchical way in which plants are typically viewed and replaces it with a more horizontal and relationship-based approach. This view of other beings is also typically associated with Indigenous peoples who consider plants to be relatives. Warber, Feters and Kaufman (2003, 102) suggests an approach based upon Indigenous ethnobotanist and scholar Keewaydinoquay Peschel's principles for gathering natural plant materials which are based in respect. As further distilled by WeTah Lee Boisvert, one of Keewaydinoquay's students, it all comes down to the desire of all beings for love (Peschel 2013). Relating to plants as respected fellow beings does allow for using plants for human purposes, but insists on treating plants decently and not overusing or abusing them.

Using Rational Guidelines and Frameworks to Advance Plant Ethics

In addition to applying basic ethical principles such as those above, several sets of guidelines have been developed for operationalizing an ethical relationship with plants. Koechlin (2009, 2015) discusses the concept of dignity of plants and presents the Rheinauer Theses on the Rights of Plants (Koechlin et al. 2009). These are 29 specific theses ending in a list of 6 rights of plants which include reproductive rights, right to independence, right to evolution, right to survival as a species, right to respectful research and development, and the right not to be patented (Koechlin 2015, location 749 – 825). Singh (2020) summarizes some of the arguments in favor of plant rights, noting that a collaboration of Venezuelan groups has proposed a Universal Declaration of Plant Rights with 22 points in 2004 (Nehlen 2004).

Some frameworks for relating ethically specifically to crop plants have been developed based upon concepts of integrity (Lammerts van Bueren and Struik 2005) and flourishing (Hiernaux 2021). Lammerts van Bueren and Struik (2005, 490) categorize four types of plant integrity – the right to accomplish its natural aim and to be treated as an autonomous being expressing self-regulation, the right to potentially complete its life cycle and to reproduce in a plant-worthy way, the right to co-evolve with respect for its natural reproductive barriers and its species-specific genetic variation, and the right to be treated/nurtured in a way that is consistent with the plant's nature. Hiernaux (2021, 19) describes four dimensions of plant flourishing – plant vitality, completion of its life cycle, typical characteristics of the species, and fulfilling their ecological roles. These guidelines can be applied more broadly to other plants as well.

Importance of Story and Emotions in Fueling this Movement

Part of the success of the animal advocacy movement has been due to its ability to tap into its participants' emotions as has been discussed above. A plant advocacy movement will also need to deepen and draw upon peoples' emotional connections with plants. Individuating plants can help to build these connections, as can opening the door to intuitive communication with plants which allows for plants to express their own perspectives as perceived by human partners' intuition. Plant advocacy based only on science or philosophical ethics will not be as likely to achieve the reach and popular appeal needed for an effective movement as would one that also incorporates a sense of genuine and heartfelt relationality.

Final Thoughts

Even though humans must harm plants in order to survive, as moral beings we nevertheless are called upon to live with our plant relatives ethically. The human relationship with plants does not need to be an adversarial or oppressive one, even though it necessarily will incorporate instrumental elements.

Our goal should be to deepen our connection to plants in a way that allows us to use them when needed, but with ethical guardrails in place to avoid unwarranted destruction or degradation of plant lives. Natasha Myers (2019) offers inspiration in *How to Grow Livable Worlds: Ten Not-So-Easy Steps* as to how humans must learn to partner with plants in a joint struggles against the toxic changes of the Anthropocene.

There is a clear need for organizational infrastructure for the plant advocacy movement, a role which the nonprofit The Plant Initiative is seeking to help support through its grantmaking, education and partnership building efforts. However, it will only be through broad collaboration, well beyond the capacity of any one organization, that such a movement will be able to take shape.

I believe that the plants themselves will help us, if we engage with them respectfully and in partnership, to move in a direction that will lead to improvements in plants' lives as well as our own. While a plant advocacy movement has not yet arisen, there is now a growing readiness among many in the dominant culture to increase collaboration in directions that can benefit plants. The time is ripe for moving forward.

About the author

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About The Plant Initiative

The Plant Initiative is a US-based nonprofit organization that works internationally to increase respectful treatment of plants and to advance an effective plant advocacy movement through encouraging policy, law, and activism on behalf of plants. The Initiative works with others to build partnerships and strengthen networks on behalf of plants through financial assistance, fostering information exchange, and encouraging interdisciplinary and cross-movement collaboration. It also seeks to increase appreciation of plants and their special qualities through providing widely accessible educational programs and materials, including building understanding of plant intelligence, plant sentience, and plant consciousness.

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