



Rain forest before and after preparation for palm oil planting.

“The benefits of the oil palm are difficult for Indonesia to ignore. Once planted, the tropical tree can produce fruit for more than 30 years, providing much-needed employment for poor rural communities. And its oil is highly lucrative, due largely to the fact that the plant yields more oil per hectare than any major oilseed crop [palm oil is found in about half of consumer products]. ... Oil palm plantations often replace tropical forests, killing endangered species [e.g. orangutans likely to go extinct within 10 years, Sumatran tigers within 5], uprooting local communities, and contributing to the release of climate-warming gases. Due mostly to oil palm production, Indonesia emits more greenhouse gases than any country besides China and the United States [greenhouse gases are released when the forests are destroyed].”

<http://www.worldwatch.org/node/6059>

Claudia Card's theory of evil

If morally wrong act produces foreseeable intolerable harm, then that act is evil; and:

- If an act is not wrong, then it is not evil.
- If an act does not produce intolerable harm (even if it is wrong), then it is not evil.
- If the harm brought about by wrongdoing is not foreseeable, then the wrongdoing is not evil.

An argument that plants cannot be intolerably harmed

“We are each of us the experiencing subject of a life, a conscious creature having an individual welfare that has importance to us whatever our usefulness to others. We want and prefer things, believe and feel things, recall and expect things. And all these dimensions of our life, including our pleasure and pain, our enjoyment and suffering, our satisfaction and frustration, our continued existence or our untimely death - all make a difference to the quality of our life as lived, as experienced, by us as individuals. As the same is true of those animals that concern us (the ones that are eaten and trapped, for example), they too must be viewed as the experiencing subjects of a life, with inherent value of their own.”

1. If something is not experienced by being B, then it cannot be harmful to B’s interests.
2. Plants cannot have experiences.
3. Thus, nothing can be harmful to plants.

A pro-plant view

Humans are a species of intelligent animals that lives on Earth. The Leilons are a species of intelligent animals that lives on Leilonia (Betelgeuse 4). Leilons always die when their children are born, although humans often live for decades after their children are born. Leilons are telepathic, and engage in a variety of interactions that non-telepaths can’t even imagine; no human is telepathic or has any knowledge of telepathy.

Claim A: It is an important part of human welfare for human parents and children to have good relationships – it is not just instrumentally but also intrinsically valuable. Even so, this is not true for Leilons; their lives are not any less good than human lives just because parents and children never have relationships.

Claim B: It is an important part of Leilon welfare to develop their telepathic abilities – this is not just instrumentally but also intrinsically valuable. Even so, this is not true for humans; their lives are not any less good than those of Leilons just because they are not telepathic.

- 1a. *Claim A* and *Claim B* show that to flourish is to move towards being excellent as the sort of being one is (or “towards living life that is a good life for the sort of being one is”).
- 2a. If a being can flourish, then it has welfare / interests.
- 3a. Plants can be better or worse as plants (or “can live better or worse plant lives”).
- 4a. Thus, plants have welfare / interests.
- 5a. If a being has welfare / interests, then it can be intolerably harmed.
- 6a. Thus, plants can be intolerably harmed.