‘Biodiversity’ as a Primarily Normative and Inseparable Thick Concept

Abstract

In this paper, I expand on Sarkar’s (2019) view that the term ‘biodiversity’ should be understood primarily as a normative concept with a descriptive component molded to the evaluation; hence, ‘biodiversity’ is a thick term. The idea of inseparability is advocated for by using Bernard William’s example of thick terms as context-oriented whilst taking issue with McDowell’s “anti-disentangling” argument and other contemporary arguments for separability. Compared to other papers in the area of environmental pragmatism, this paper argues that conservation scientists will achieve greater success in conservation efforts by framing ‘biodiversity’ as a primarily normative concept to the value system of the local community.

Keywords: Biodiversity, Bernard Williams, John McDowell, normative, Sahotra Sarkar, thick term

INTRODUCTION

 Although the field of conservation biology was established earlier than 1985, it was in 1985 that Michael Soulé aptly described the field as “crisis-oriented.” Conservation biologists must act without all the facts and make recommendations to solve ecological problems. One implication of conservation biology is the assumption that a *holistic* approach is needed to solve the multitude of conservation problems. The second implication of conservation biology is the strained chronological time scale to solve such problems. Practitioners give more weight to the long-term viability of ecosystems with less weight given to variables such as profitability, aesthetics, and maximum sustainable yield. In opting for conserving certain aspects of an ecosystem, conservationists share normative postulates such as diversity of organisms being beneficial, ecological complexity being beneficial, evolution is beneficial, and biotic diversity has intrinsic value.

Soulé was correct in his thought that conservation scientists have preconceived attitudes to judge which aspects of biotic diversity need conservation. We can even say that one can does not make a conscious decision to conserve ecosystem health without simultaneously making a value judgement[[1]](#footnote-1). Likewise, the term ‘biodiversity’ was coined in 1986, by Walter G. Rosen under the United States National Academy of Sciences and the Smithsonian Institute to emphasize the need to conserve the quickly disappearing biotic variety[[2]](#footnote-2).

This field of conservation biology, utilizing ‘biodiversity,’ communicates the term in a manner which has both descriptive and normative components. However, some conservationists mistakenly believe that ‘biodiversity’ is a thick term which primarily has an objective component with an added normative component. For this reason, I argue in this paper that ‘biodiversity’ must be realized as a thick term which is a primarily normative concept with a descriptive component molded to the evaluation[[3]](#footnote-3). Furthermore, I refute McDowell’s “anti-disentangling” argument which contends that terms like ‘biodiversity’ are not able to be understand without the receiver understanding the normative concept set by the speaker. Moreover, I refute why ‘biodiversity’ is not able to have an objective description even if the speaker communicates this term as having only a descriptive component as there are inherent normative values instilled by said speaker. Through ‘biodiversity’ acting as a primarily normative and inseparable thick concept, the term can be utilized for pragmatic success in community-oriented conservation efforts and, thus, lead to more robust conservation efforts by conservation scientists. The first part of this paper is dedicated to explaining how ‘biodiversity’ has the characteristics of an inseparable thick, normative concept whilst I argue against contemporary philosophers’ formulations of thick terms. The second part of the paper is dedicated to elucidating upon how treating ‘biodiversity’ in as a primarily normative concept leads to pragmatic success in local conservation efforts. The third part of this paper is dedicated to explaining misapplications of ‘biodiversity’ due to not framing the term as a primarily normative concept to the local community, and the last part of the paper serves as the conclusion to reiterate the main points.

THICK TERMS

In the umbrella of evaluative terms, there are both “thin” and “thick” concepts. Thin terms are judgements with only a normative component. Some examples of thin terms include ‘good,’ ‘bad,’ and ‘right.’ Thick terms are judgements which contain both normative and descriptive components. These terms have judgements that are “both action-guiding and world-guided.” In this case, “action-guiding” is the evaluative component of the thick term which seeks to describe an action as permissible or not permissible while “world-guided” is the descriptive factor of the term which seeks to describe in which way the term can be define universally[[4]](#footnote-4).

Some examples of thick terms include ‘lewd,’ ‘cruel,’ and ‘selfish.’ If we take the term ‘cruel,’ for example, the term not only has a set negative evaluation by the speaker but also has a descriptive component. If someone were to be described as cruel, he or she must be cruel in some specific way. We can apply the notion of cruelty to the person who deliberately withholds water from his or her child. In this example, the person is cruel due to having the descriptive component of withholding water from his or her child with a normative concept as we evaluate him/her as evil.

We primarily discuss thick terms for the purpose of epistemic authorities to communicate their evaluative outlook on a current situation. More specifically, I argue (later) that epistemic authorities must use biodiversity as an inseparable, but primarily normative thick term for pragmatic success in community-based conservation planning. These thick terms act as a “helpful advisor.” Authorities can view a certain situation and assess which concept the situation of a society falls under. Advocates of a moral outlook, however, do not need to have the proposed moral outlook as the crux of their argument. In fact, the moral outlook does not even need to be true to argue a point. For example, an authority might not know exactly why biodiversity must be preserved but is able to argue for this concept because even if the authority does not necessarily know a particular value system/moral outlook of a society to be true, his/her argument still stands[[5]](#footnote-5).

Nevertheless, there is a perceived notion that thick concepts might challenge the *is* and *ought* gap[[6]](#footnote-6). According to Hume’s law, “one cannot derive an *ought* from an *is*”[[7]](#footnote-7). Thick terms are thought to challenge this dichotomy between “facts” and “values” as the terms have a normative concept, the value, and the descriptive concept, the fact. The claim is that we are not able to derive a normative statement from a thick term which might have only a descriptive component in some sentences[[8]](#footnote-8). If thick terms in every sentence carry descriptive and normative components, these terms do not violate the *is*-*ought­* gap. This seems to be the case. When an authority is applying thick terms, he/she is conveying an obvious descriptive component with an evaluative component embedded in the term due to the context-specific nature of the conversation. The receiver is in the same context and does not necessarily have to reflect upon hearing such terms to understand its normative implication from the authority because the two individuals are in the same context.

Furthermore, it seems that thick terms do not violate this conceptual *is­*-*ought* gap if the normative values conveyed by the authority can be rejected by the receiver. If a thick term was deriving a normative statement from just a purely descriptive concept, then this would mean that the receiver would not be able to reject the resulting normative statement if the thick term itself only has a descriptive component. To successfully reject this normative statement conveyed by the authority, the receiver must realize there is an evaluative implication intertwined with the descriptive component of a thick term. Or, as I argue later, the evaluation holds a higher ontology than the descriptive component for the application of thick terms.

Moreover, as Bernard Williams describes it, “reflection in ethics can destroy knowledge.” In other words, if a society reflects upon a thick term and decides that the notion, they use is not true anymore, they will regard the concept’s terminology as used in previous times as not reflective of true knowledge in ethical matters. These societies lose a concept to express a set of beliefs. If these societies were not able to reflect on thick terms and destroy past knowledge, this would mean there is only a descriptive component in a thick term. This destruction of ethical knowledge must contain both a descriptive and normative component; otherwise, a homogenous society which employs a specific thick term is not allowed to reject the term[[9]](#footnote-9). Therefore, due to the nature of an evolving thick terms in a context-specific manner, thick terms are not defying the *is*-*ought­* law.

Some might argue that even if epistemic authorities apply a thick term in a reasonably homogenous society, this society will never understand the normative concept because the society will never grasp the subjective values conveyed by these authorities. Proponents of this view often cite John McDowell’s “disentangling argument” because it explains that to perfectly apply thick terms means being able to completely understand the evaluative orientation from the receiver. The argument can be summarized as follows:

(P1) If an evaluative concept E can be “disentangled” into a non-evaluative description D that is co-extensive with E and an evaluation that gives the evaluative orientation of E, then it would be possible to master the extension of E, and thus group together exactly the items to which competent users would apply E, without understanding its evaluative orientation.

(P2) It isn’t possible to anticipate the usage of E in a way required for mastering its extension without understanding the evaluative orientation of E.

(C) It isn’t possible to anticipate the usage of E in a way required for mastering its extension without understanding the evaluative orientation of E[[10]](#footnote-10).

McDowell’s “disentangling” argument, or rather properly called “anti-disentangling” argument, is thought to be the main counterargument to reductive views of thick concepts[[11]](#footnote-11). Although McDowell does not specifically state that his argument applies to thick terms, we interpret his argument as one that grapples with the phenomenon of thick terms combining an evaluative description and non-evaluative description[[12]](#footnote-12). His argument grapples with thick terms under the assumption of “descriptive equivalence.” The underlying assumption states that for every thick term, someone could reasonably find a non-evaluative description with the same extension as that thick term and apply it.

However, the primary issue with McDowell’s anti-disentangling argument is premise two. I argue that it is possible to perfectly apply a thick term without perfectly understanding the exact evaluative description set out by the authority. If in a reasonably homogenous society an authority uses thick term X, the receivers of course will never understand the exact evaluative experience and connotations held inside the speaker’s mind. Nevertheless, the receivers *can* perfectly apply the thick term because the receivers and speaker are in the same context or situation. The receivers do not need to immediately reflect on the speaker’s evaluative content when uttering a thick term because based on their inherent situation, both the speaker and receivers can connect on which evaluative content will be appropriate.

Furthermore, the second issue with McDowell’s argument is that it lies on the assumption of descriptive equivalence. If the assumption were true, this would mean that just a certain non-evaluative description would have the same effect and utilization as applying a thick term with both a non-evaluative description and evaluative description. This assumption, if true, entails that the evaluative component of a thick term makes no difference of how the term can be applied. The universal descriptive content would be enough to convey the normative assessment of the term. Needless to say, this assumption could not be further from the truth.

One argument given by Sreenivasan lets us imagine a completely alien ethical outlook utilizing the language of Q as to disprove the assumption of descriptive equivalence.

1. One does not comprehend Q.
2. There are many thick terms in Q with their own evaluative points.
3. There are no thick terms in one’s own language which has the same extension as those utilized in language Q.
4. The descriptive equivalence assumption is false[[13]](#footnote-13).

From this argument, we also reason that societies carry their own unique evaluative standpoints. These values are not static over time nor the same in different geographic regions[[14]](#footnote-14). Supposing that one universal descriptive content of a thick term could convey all necessary information across all societies would be a mistaken belief. Authorities are not able to blindly convey a solution or approach to a problem in a society if their use of thick terms in conveying an evaluative standpoint to the approach can be applied everywhere. Therefore, I argue that McDowell’s “anti-disentangling” argument is unsound, thick terms do not violate Hume’s *is-ought* law, and thick terms have inseparable descriptive and normative components which help convey evaluative standpoints in context.

Now that I have noted the conditions of a thick term by refuting McDowell and supporting Williams’ view, these last two paragraphs of the first section will now focus on refuting philosophers who argue that thick terms are separable. In contemporary literature, philosophers like Pekka Vayrynen argue that the evaluative component of thick terms is not an essential feature of thick terms[[15]](#footnote-15). This type of pragmatic thought is misguided in the notion that the descriptive and evaluative parts of a thick term are separable, when, in fact, the inseparability of thick terms and the greatest ontology of the evaluative content is how epistemic authorities can communicate an evaluative outlook towards a community.

Yet, in recent years some separabilists like Brent G. Kyle try resolve this dilemma of the failed argument of the unimportance of the evaluative content of a thick term by proposing the Expansion View of thick concepts in which thick concepts act mainly as thin concepts with an added descriptive component. Kyle correctly notes the failed attempts of previous separabilists (like Vayrynen) who must then concede that the evaluative component of a thick term makes no difference for its application. Furthermore, Kyle agrees with the notion that previous separabilist accounts fail on the grounds of the anti-disentangling argument in which an outsider could fully understand a thick term without understanding the evaluative content, which, as I have argued before, is incorrect. However, Kyle is incorrect in this new proposed separabilist theory through stating the descriptive component merely acts as a type of modifier to the evaluative component. In a relatively homogenous community, an epistemic authority tailors a thick term for, as we will see in the next section, conservation planning[[16]](#footnote-16). The authority must tailor the conservation around the normative values of the community. Therefore, if a community were to value certain life for its intrinsic properties, the descriptive component of conservation would take in the descriptive criteria of conservation directly based on the intrinsic value of life. The values directly influence the objective criterion for conservation; hence, inseparability is a necessity for thick terms like ‘biodiversity.’ As we will see, for pragmatic success in conservation efforts, using ‘biodiversity’ as a normative, thick term will allow for greater success through local community participation.

WHY ‘BIODIVERSITY’ SHOULD BE TREATED AS A PRIMARILY NORMATIVE CONCEPT

The field of conservation biology utilizes ‘biodiversity’ to house both a normative component and descriptive component, but the concept cannot be understood if the dual components are disentangled from each other. To be truly understood, ‘biodiversity,’ as a thick term, must wield both components for conservation scientists, the epistemic authorities, to put knowledge into action and choose aspects of nature to preserve. ‘Biodiversity’ was introduced in the evaluative frame that conservation of species and general ecosystem health is inherently good, so conservation scientists reflect on the current situation and assign the thin concept of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ to assess to criteria for conservation. For example, if the population of common grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) in an area is tremendously high, conservationists might decide to not push this bird species as part of their agenda to conserve birds. However, if it turns out years later through much deliberation that the grackle bird species should be conserved (through reevaluation), conservation scientists destroy their previous usage of the term ‘biodiversity’ and opt for this new usage to reflect their conservation efforts. Therefore, although ‘biodiversity’ contains both components, the evaluation takes precedence over the descriptive component.

Indeed, due to the great dependency on a thick term like ‘biodiversity’ for its normative emphasis, we should classify the term as a primarily normative concept with the descriptive concept serving an auxiliary role. Due to this inseparability of ‘biodiversity,’ we can combine knowledge with action as this field is extensively practiced for the aim of preserving biological diversity. Due to ‘biodiversity’ having a normative concept, the term appeals to different societies as their value systems differ. Conservationists should not rely on themselves as the final bearers of evaluating which biotic varieties need conservation – their decision should reflect their community’s value system.

Thus, we reach the importance of utilizing ‘biodiversity’ as an inseparable thick term for conservation scientists: to lead flourishing conservation projects communities which reflect unique evaluative outlooks. It has long been known that to lead a successful conservation effort, conservation biologists need to frame ‘biodiversity’ in a way to appeal to the values of a relatively cohesive community. The side that is successful in crafting an authoritative problem can influence the way the people of a community think and feel and, therefore, will determine the solution that will be taken[[17]](#footnote-17). However, what has not long been known is the correct usage of ‘biodiversity’ as a primarily normative concept. If conservation authorities do not bother in attempting to frame ‘biodiversity’ in a way which coincides with the community’s value system, the community might not acknowledge such efforts or even actively might try to hinder those efforts. For instance, the Tiger Project was started in India in 1973 to conserve the tiger population. In the level of the community, conservation efforts of building Tiger Reserves near populations have failed. These local communities, which have a negative attitude toward the project, have worked against the cause by, in some instances, helping tiger poachers to hunt tigers illegally. In this case, the communities’ attitudes were more so influenced by the fact that their perceived notion of this project was that it brought great peril onto the community itself. The communities near the Tiger Reserves were fearful for their own lives as tigers have been shown to hunt humans when faced with habitat degradation and when in proximity to humans[[18]](#footnote-18). Conservation authorities who took oversight of this project failed to frame ‘tiger biodiversity’ in an appealing manner which follows the communities’ value systems.

 Furthermore, it seems that thick terms like ‘biodiversity’ can not only have their evaluative component revised but also the descriptive component revised. We take the historical intervention of the wolf reintroduction project in Yellowstone National Park as an example. In 1926, the park removed all the wolves and cougars, the main predators to elks, in a deliberate fashion. The effects were predictable: the elk population rose substantially following the removal of their main predators. Soon, park managers realized there was extensive overgrazing of vegetation across the park. This effect led to the implementation of elk culls to stabilize the populations; however, these culls were dissolved under the authority of Senator Gale McGee of Wyoming in 1967. Under the consultation of management authorities, Yellowstone National Park then decided to adhere to “natural regulation” whereby the elks would starve under lack of vegetation in the winters. Finally, in 1995 park authorities reintroduced 31 wolves to the park to stabilize the food web. In just a few years, trophic cascades resulting from the addition of the apex predators, the wolves, led to increased spatial variation of vegetation such as willow (*Salix* spp.)and cottonwood (*Populus* spp.). The wolves predated the elks which forced the elks to avoid the wolves by grazing on vegetation for shorter intervals across varied spatial regions. The results were clear: trophic cascades following the wolves’ reintroduction led to homeostasis in the Yellowstone National Park food web[[19]](#footnote-19). In this sense, conservationists revised their evaluation of ‘biodiversity’ which affects the objective criteria under the term. This is, to reiterate, due to the inseparability of thick terms like ‘biodiversity.’

Now, we articulate how ‘biodiversity’ takes issue with premise two of McDowell’s anti-disentangling argument as a thick term:

(P2) It isn’t possible to anticipate the usage of E in a way required for mastering its extension without understanding the evaluative orientation of E[[20]](#footnote-20).

 This premise is particularly problematic because if the homogenous society had to reflect on the way ‘biodiversity’ was used every time, there would be no set beliefs or norms conveyed by the society which they can agree upon. Without these values, a homogenous society would not be able to be convinced or even understand the normative implication of why biotic diversity at all levels of life is important. This would in effect render efforts of conservation scientists null and the concept of ‘biodiversity’ unappealing for communities to advocate for.

‘Biodiversity’ needs to be value-laden to rouse communities up to action. Conservation scientists who might believe in this assumption might present preserving the ‘biodiversity’ of a region as merely a word with a non-evaluative description. Communities, at best, will be indifferent to these conservation efforts because the set of values these communities possess will either clash with the intentions of the conservation scientists or communities will find that their beliefs do not align with the goals of the conservation projects.

Therefore, we will now explore an example value system which conservationists can tailor their efforts to preserve biodiversity in a community. One such way is for authorities to frame their efforts as playing a role in sustaining life support systems. The United States Education, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) defines a life support system as one that “furthers the life of biosphere … [which] encompass natural environment systems as well as ancillary social systems …” In this evaluative frame, communities can readily understand the inherent relationship between humans and their “broader environmental context.” If the target communities care about the inherent value of living things, those not only including humans, then this framing could prove to be beneficial. However, there are disadvantages such as this normative appeal of ‘biodiversity’ could be interpreted by the community as this highlighting the notion that humans must use nature for their own selfish resource acquisition goals[[21]](#footnote-21). Accordingly, conservationists must frame the goal of biodiversity through a case-by-case basis. Even then, this view could advance conservation efforts in, for instance, a logging community. We imagine a local community comprised up of mostly lumberjacks. To receive their day’s wage, these lumberjacks must chop down an X number of trees to sustain their lifestyles. If conservation authorities now have the goal of conserving as many trees as possible in this community, these authorities could appeal to this resource-acquisition viewpoint and frame the goal of biodiversity with the message that if these lumberjacks continue to chop down the trees in a continuous rate, soon all trees would run out. This normative appeal of the protection of trees can elicit a more effective response across the lumberjack community as their lifestyle, which depends on tree availability, might soon come to a halt.

If a society were to value biotic diversity for resource acquisition, this society would already have the set context to evaluate ‘biodiversity.’ Meaning, there is no need for reflection for a member to understand this value system which they hold to be true. A goal of a conservation scientist is to not change the value system which this society holds true; instead, the conservation scientist would attach ‘biodiversity’ to the specific value system of this community. Of course, values of a community change over time and these values may not equally be shared by all so a conservation scientist would need to be continually cognizant of the norms expressed by the homogenous community. In this case, the outsider would be the conservation scientist which would be why the scientist himself/herself would be in a need for reflection of the community’s beliefs and values before orienting ‘biodiversity’ as an appealing topic for the community.

We further reason that biodiversity should be classified primarily as a normative thick concept because the conservationist’s duty is to appeal to the community’s value system foremost and then to describe the objective criteria to preserve. It is inconceivable to contain a descriptive concept without the normative concept being factored into ‘biodiversity.’ For example, the aforementioned lumberjack society has the normative concept of resource-acquisition being beneficial; therefore, the descriptive component of ‘biodiversity’ defines the term as that which follows along with the normative concept. The higher ontology of the two components belongs to normativity.

Of course, conservationists can understand how a society uses evaluative terms without existing in the same culture. The conservationist’s crusade of advocating for specific biotic variety in a community does not have to be totally uninformed of the community’s set of beliefs. In fact, the conservationist can impersonate a speaker of the community by immersing himself/herself in the same language that uses context-specific thick terms. We denote the language the conservationist uses as language L0 and the language the community speaks as L. The L0 speaker may converse with the Lspeakers and temporarily become indistinguishable from the speakers. This outsider now uses the thick terms in the same truthfulness value as L speakers. Therefore, conservationists can come to understand the community by using the thick terms *only* in the L language. However, the conservationist is not able to generate an ethnographic evaluative stance in his/her L0 language. This L speaker is not able to pick a thick term in L0 and regard that thick term as true in the L language. In one context, the game of tennis might be won by a player by beating an opponent. However, an outsider might believe it is correct to judge this winning player as the loser as the outsider is playing a game of ‘quennis.’ In this example, it is clear to see that an outsider is not able to judge a community’s thick term as true; therefore, conservationists must be cognizant of this fact to avoid creating personal judgements of a community’s set of beliefs about ‘biodiversity[[22]](#footnote-22).’

Due to conservationists now being able to understand the evaluative terms in a community, we can deal with the problem of values in a homogenous community not being equally shared. We consider the thought experiment of two boys torturing a cat. These boys inflict great pain and cause anguish in the cat. In a homogenous society, even with different value systems, the population will agree that torturing the cat was a treacherous act[[23]](#footnote-23). One person may agree that act is treacherous because an omniscient God would disapprove of this action while another person may agree that act is treacherous because torturing any living thing is inherently wrong. Whichever value, all can agree on the same moral outlook. This shared evaluative outlook in a homogenous society is due to a shared culture. This population generally has the same set of beliefs, experiences, and practices due to a shared culture which shapes a collective evaluative outlook. Therefore, even if a few individuals have a different set of beliefs from the whole, these individuals can recognize where these beliefs come from, that is from the same culture, and still support the conservation project affecting the population.

Secondly, we deal with the latter issue of values reflected by a homogenous population changing over time. One potential counterargument to adhering to a population’s value system would be that conservation scientists’ efforts would be in vain if a population reflects a different set of beliefs over time. The method of how cultures reject current values seems to be reflection. A population’s reflection on the use of a thick term *can,* not must, destroy previous usage of that term. The society loses the connection to describe their world through a certain class of beliefs. The society loses that concept and will regard previous usage of that term of now false[[24]](#footnote-24). However, there seems to be no actual problem because conservation scientists merely need to frame ‘biodiversity’ in the new appealing fashion. Therefore, these aspects contribute to the more effective usage of ‘biodiversity’ as a primarily normative, thick concept for conservation projects.

MISAPPLICATIONS OF ‘BIODIVERSITY’

Due to past misapplications of ‘biodiversity,’ there have been four formalized approaches to defining ‘biodiversity’: scientism, eliminativism, deflationism, and normativism[[25]](#footnote-25). It is generally accepted, though, that the normativism approach is the most correct to define ‘biodiversity.’ Likewise, we advocate for normativism which defines ‘biodiversity’ as primarily a normative concept. Of course, it must not be misunderstood that normativism seeks to bar scientific inferences but rather that normativism has these scientific inferences and objective data molded to the community’s desires.

Nevertheless, epistemic authorities who frame ‘biodiversity’ in the normativism framework can have impeded conservation efforts if the normative values are not influenced from the local communities where the conservation project takes place. This can be seen in the failure of conserving mangrove forests and lagoons in Indonesia where conservation scientists did not consider the local communities’ value system; instead, the conservationists solely defined ‘biodiversity’ based on national values. For some background, mangrove forests play an important role in ecological and economic function in Indonesia as these forests are critical for the continuation of coastal fisheries, indicate coastal change, and provide timber and non-timber products. The Indonesian Segara Anakan lagoon comprises the extensive lagoon-mangrove complex in Java. Conservation planning was prompted due to the increased sedimentation over the last few decades from increased urbanization and immigration. The Segara Anakan Conservation and Development Project (SACDP) was created with help of the Asia Development Bank (ADB) and the Indonesian government to preserve this lagoon-mangrove complex. The most important project in this plan was the Citanduy River diversion which aimed at diverting the flow of water from the river to the Indian Ocean. However, this project faced immense protests from grassroots activists and local communities who cited that the government should be more focused on reforestation and irrigation in the area than the entire upheaval of the ecosystem. Due to a failure of consideration of local values, governmental conservationists fashioned their planning in their ill-informed manner. Although these epistemic authorities treated ‘biodiversity’ as a primarily normative, inseparable concept, there were national values presupposed in this planning which clashed with local values due to no citizen participation[[26]](#footnote-26). Therefore, this misapplication of ‘biodiversity’ displays the necessity for normative values to be derived from the correct value system: the local communities.

Once we realize the misutilization of ‘biodiversity’ if conservation efforts are not focused on the values of the local communities, conservation projects will be more robust through conservation planning in the normativism framework. However, another potential misapplication of ‘biodiversity’ is if conservation scientists adhere to the proposition of moral realism in which preserving life is deemed beneficial in *all* circumstances. However, as explained before, conservation scientists must make judgement calls and specify which biotic variety to conserve[[27]](#footnote-27). If conservation scientists were to take a realist approach, there could be no plausible explanation of why one normative assessment of a species’ value triumphs another species’ value. In fact, this conservation scientist would be the least effective in conservation planning as trying to conserve all biotic life of all levels in a community is aimless. Taking this objective approach would be expressing facts such as “preserving X is good because of Y.” ‘Biodiversity’ is a primarily normative concept and trying to delegate the term to just a descriptive concept would lead the term to lose its evaluative power and run the risk of disengaging efforts of communities.

Now, due to the nature of ‘biodiversity’ which is utilized by different cultures with different value systems, we are not able to advocate for moral realism; instead, we advocate for moral relativism. In moral relativism, there is an understanding that certain evaluative outlooks that are deemed to be true in one community are not true in another. This outlook would provide the least conflicting approach to using ‘biodiversity’ across different contexts. The inseparability of ‘biodiversity’ holds due to required intertwined aspects of descriptive and evaluative concepts. These evaluative concepts, however, do change across communities and over time. Although it might seem that there could be the problem of certain communities deeming biodiversity to be unwanted, this is not the case. All communities rely on biotic diversity to function in their lives for inherently valuable, aesthetic, resource-driven, or other purposes. The challenge would be to locate the specific value system of the community, frame ‘biodiversity’ in an appealing manner, and decide which aspects of biotic variety would be the most beneficial to the target community[[28]](#footnote-28). In this way, moral relativism can account for the specific evaluation in which biodiversity can be advocated while preventing major normative conflicts.

CONCLUSION

Once conservation scientists realize that adhering ‘biodiversity’ to a community’s value system is the most crucial, communities will feel their beliefs reflected in the conservation projects. This inherent inseparability of ‘biodiversity’ is the best position to tailor conservation projects to a specific community. Of course, the term must be primarily treated as a normative concept for this tailoring of conservation efforts to take place in the local community. However, if a scientist were to try and advocate for a conservation project which runs contrary to a culture’s beliefs, the project will not have the support of the community. If, on the other hand, the conservation scientist frames ‘biodiversity’ in an appealing manner, such efforts will yield more desirable results. In this sense, the conservation scientists retain their epistemic authority whilst being guided by the specific values of a community to illuminate the grounds for undertaking the proposed projects.

Conserving biodiversity across multiple communities is anthropocentric and an outward reflection of communities’ value systems on the life that is deemed worthy of being preserved. This grand importance is such that humans are the only known animals capable of acknowledging their duties and preferences to keep certain lifeforms living on a large scale. ‘Biodiversity’ must be a primarily normative and inseparable thick concept for humans to express their subjective values onto nature. The scope for using ‘biodiversity’ over geographic locations, cultures, and time is widened if we accept that the term has a descriptive component molded to the evaluation. We dissolve many problems by doing so and thus more conservation efforts will be of a collective effort. Once conservation scientists realize that framing ‘biodiversity’ in this manner can fully influence the attitudes and actions of communities, more conservation projects will attain their set goals.

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