In *The Ethics of Respect for Nature*, Paul Taylor puts forth the idea that our current ways of thinking and acting are biased in our own favor and that we must change them to a "biocentric outlook on nature". He proposes that all living things have inherent worth and that we must adopt a "certain ultimate moral attitude toward the natural world" which he calls respect for nature. He holds that the "denial of human superiority is the single most important idea in establishing this concept of respect. There are four important components to the biocentric outlook. Paralleling the latter half of Taylor's essay, I will explain the first three and summarize why he believes that the first three require human superiority to be rejected.

1. *humans are thought of as members of the Earth's community of life, holding that membership on the same terms as apply to all nonhuman members*

Given what we know of the Earth's history and evolution, we are but one species in the grand scheme of things. We share the same genetic building blocks as all other living organisms and as a species we have gone through the same evolutionary process to create the beings that we are today. The fact that we are relative "newcomers" to the earth does not escape Taylor's notice and he effectively illustrates the fact that should history be represented by a football field, that human existence would occupy a mere six inches.

2. *the earth's natural ecosystem as a totality are seen as a complex web of interconnected elements with the sound biological functioning of each depending on the sound biological functioning of the others*

One of the first concepts learned in any basic ecology class is the interconnectedness of species. Through natural selection, species have not only adapted to the abiotic (non-living) factors in their environment but to the biotic (living) factors as well. This has created finely tuned ecosystems in which energy flows from autotrophs all the way through to carnivores. Because organisms are adapted to other organisms within their environment, the loss of a species can affect a large number of other organisms and if it is a keystone species, can potentially lead to the destruction of that entire ecosystem.

Humans are just as dependent upon the sound functioning of these ecosystems as the next species as we too rely on the upward flow of energy through these food webs. However as Taylor points out, while the loss of an ecosystem would be detrimental to us, the loss of our species would likely be beneficial to many other organisms.

3. *each individual organism is conceived of as a teleological center of life, pursuing its own good in its own way*

If we are able to step back and for a moment put ourselves in the "shoes" of other species, we will find that they are continually working with whatever facets they have available to them in order to benefit their or their offspring's survival. Just like us, every other living being is knowingly or unknowingly trying to do what is best for their well-being.

4. *whether we are concerned with standards of merit or with the concept of inherent worth, the claim that humans by their very nature are superior to other species is a groundless claim and in light of elements (1), (2) and (3) above must be rejected as nothing more than an irrational bias in our own favor.*

The first three components of Taylor's biocentric outlook show that from an ecological standpoint, humans are no different than any other organism belonging to an ecosystem. We are by no means ecologically superior and to claim that we are shows an arrogance that precludes any respect we may have for nature. To respect is to hold something in esteem or to see value and worth in that being. If, after understanding and accepting the first three components of Taylor's outlook, we continue to hold on to our feelings of superiority, then by the very definition of superiority we are maintaining feelings of greater value and even disdain that makes it impossible to have complete respect for other living beings.

Likely the strongest objection to Taylor's argument is the concept that our capacity for higher level thinking makes us superior to other living beings. It allows us to dominate,

manipulate, and control all other species, thereby making us superior to them. However, there are a couple of issues with this line of reasoning. Firstly, as Taylor points out, to label us as superior because we possess a specific trait that we deem valuable is problematic. We do not judge another human beings' inherent worth based on their merits, so why should we judge other living beings based on theirs? Not only this, but the labeling of the trait as valuable comes from a human perspective. Other traits, such as the speed of a cheetah or the ability of diving mammals to stay under water for long periods of time allowing their blood to bypass their lungs may be considered to be more valuable from another species standpoint. The only reason that we view higher level thinking as valuable is because we looking only from a human perspective.

Secondly the idea that we are the most superior living beings because we have a brain capable of higher level thinking is to make the huge assumption that the evolutionary machine is finished. That the earth has reached its pinnacle, its equilibrium state and that change will no longer occur. This is entirely untrue as evolution is driven by change in environments and the subsequent natural selection of the individuals. And since it is safe to say that there will always be environmental change, it is also safe to say that evolution is still occurring. Many evolutionary biologists believe that the human brain evolved over many millennia as we became more adapted to our environment and that we can actually "see" its evolution by looking at the brains of organisms "lower" on the evolutionary tree. If this is true, then would it not be possible for other organisms to eventually develop brains that could match or exceed ours in capability? And if you are doubtful that this is possible, take a step back 500,000 years and look at Homo erectus or even the early Homo sapiens. I doubt that at that time anyone would believe he would eventually lead to the modern day human. Yes, another organism evolving a brain to match our own would be far in the future as evolution is a slow process, but if other organisms even have the potential for this kind of development, does that not put them on the "same level" as humans and warrant them the same considerations as we currently give the human species?