

Do People Value Plants Over Non-Living Entities? Moral Considerations in Adults and Young Children

Lizette Pizza

Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States

Ashley Thomas

Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States

Abstract

Is it more wrong to harm a plant than a rock? Little is known about the development of our moral consideration for plants—alive but not typically seen as having human-like minds. This study examined whether adults (N=153) and young children (pilot N=17) tend to value plants over non-living things. Participants watched a video of a plant restorer caring for a plant but knocking down a bucket and a plant harmer caring for a bucket but knocking down a plant. The proportion of adults who disliked or distrusted the plant harmer, and identified them as the bad guy—compared to the plant restorer—was significantly greater than chance ($p < .001$). Additionally, participants judged harming the plant more severely than harming the bucket ($p < .001$). Although children judged harming the plant and bucket as similarly wrong, 65% of them liked the plant restorer more. After completing data collection, we will examine developmental differences.