



II - Environmental Ethics



Values and Biodiversity:

Why should we care?

Utilitarian Considerations

- Anthropocentric value of biodiversity can be placed into four categories: goods, services, information and psycho-spiritual.
- Goods: food sources, medicines, chemicals, fuel, wood, undiscovered products, recreation.
- Services: nutrient cycles (carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, phosphorus, decomposer food chains), ecosystem stability.
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Utilitarian Considerations (*continued*)

- **Information:** loss of genetic information and knowledge about unknown species.
- **Psycho-spiritual:** homocentric and humanistic views (loss of scientific knowledge is wrong). If this knowledge will help us survive we need to save it for our benefit.

Intrinsic Values of Biodiversity

- These are associated with non-anthropocentric ethics
- Some characteristics of living things that would be evidence of "intrinsic value": sentience, self-organization, self-direction.
- Norton argues that because of the convergence of anthropocentric utilitarian values and nonanthropocentric intrinsic values, conservations biologists do not need to promote the intrinsic values of biodiversity.

Economics and Biodiversity

- Market forces can be used to protect species if they can be removed from the "commons" and "enclosed".
- Certain species are not good candidates for economic exploitation. Why?
- Markets can value biodiversity in other ways than the actual price and potential goods that nature provides: visitor fees, government support, nonprofit support, travel costs, ecotourism, contingent evaluation ("shadow pricing").

Economics and Biodiversity (*continued*)

- Species (populations) are inseparable from the environments they live in. Any ethical treatment of biodiversity/environment must consider the ecological and ethical ramifications of the above observation.

Anthropocentric Ethics

- Traditionally, in Western philosophy, ethics is restricted to human beings.
- Conservation ethics can still be constructed within this framework to protect endangered species and the environment.
- Judeo-Christian Stewardship - humans are accountable to God for preserving biodiversity.
- Islam has evidenced a move toward conservation in recent times.

Non-anthropocentric Ethics

- The modern "deep ecology" movement from its beginnings in the work of Emerson and Thoreau was influenced by eastern thought (Hindu and Buddhist).
- Aboriginal spirituality has had a tremendous impact on the modern ethics but has not been generally recognized.

Non-anthropocentric Ethics (continued)

- Spirituality has been at the center of some of the most successful environmental movements in the world (Chipko movement in India; native American and Canadian Amerindians, aboriginal movements, Jainism in India, Dalai Lama in Tibet, etc).
- The modern environmental movement had its origins in philosophy not science. It has been strongly influenced by the ideas of Darwin and modern ecological theory.

Biocentrism

- The ethics of "animal rights" has had an impact on environmental ethics.
- The work of Singer, Regan and Goodpaster have sought to establish an ethical framework for the inclusion of living organisms other than humans into the realm of ethical consideration.

Biocentrism (*continued*)

- **A variety of non-anthropocentric philosophical perspectives have been introduced in the last century that have influenced Western thought about the moral status of living organisms.**
- **Most aboriginal belief systems extend moral standing to the earth, not just "living" organisms. This is far more "holistic" in perspective than most western perspectives.**

Ecocentrism: Interpreting Leopold?

- Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic
- Leopold was the "primordial" conservation biologist.
- Leopold's work, for the first time in western thought, bridged the gap between the spiritually driven preservation movement and modern ecological science.
- Leopold's work was essentially a restatement of what aboriginals had known for a long time; we are all a part of a "biotic community".

Ecocentrism: Interpreting Leopold? *(continued)*

- Environmental fascism? Does the Land Ethic lead to subordination of the rights of individuals, including humans, for the good of the whole (ecosystem)?
- A thing is right when it tends to disturb the biotic community only at normal spatial and temporal scales. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.