Environmental Ethics
Introduction and Overview

Benjamin Hale
Assistant Professor
Philosophy Department and Environmental Studies Program
University of Colorado, Boulder

bhale@colorado.edu
http://www.practicalreason.com
Ethics

- **Descriptive Ethics**
  - Tells us how the world is
  - Anthropology
  - Sociology
  - Psychology

- **Normative Ethics**
  - Tells us how the world should be
  - Philosophy
  - Religion
Normative Ethics

- Philosophy
  - Appeals to reason
- Religion
  - Appeals to the supernatural
I'm not saying we should destroy the Earth. I'm saying, if we do, it won't be 'sad' since the idea of sadness exists only in the minds of humans.

Philosophers are no longer allowed at environmentalist conferences.
Normative Ethics

• Consequentialism
  – Emphasis on consequences
• Deontology
  – Emphasis on duties/obligations
• Virtue Ethics
  – Emphasis on character
Consequentialism

Principle of Utility:
“Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.”

John Stuart Mill
Consequentialism

- What should one do?
- Good over Right
- What are the ends?
- Should we maximize, minimize, optimize, or something else?
- What is the ‘good’?
- Actual versus expected

John Stuart Mill
Deontology

Categorical Imperative: FUL,

“Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law.”

Immanuel Kant
Deontology

- What should one do?
- Right over Good
- What are the duties?
- Which have priority?
- How are the duties derived?
- What if the consequences are really bad?

Immanuel Kant
Virtue Ethics

“One swallow does not make a summer, neither does one fine day; similarly one day or brief time of happiness does not make a person entirely happy.”

Aristotle
Virtue Ethics

- How should one live?
- What are the virtues?
- Who is to represent them?
- How are the virtues derived?
- What if the consequences are really bad?

Aristotle
Environmental Ethics

• Consequentialist approaches
  – Is the world made better? (Singer)

• Deontological approaches
  – Are we doing the right thing? (Sagoff)

• Environmental Virtue Ethics
  – Are we being virtuous? (Hill)
Questions?
Glen Canyon

Should we dam it?
Glen Canyon

- Colorado river runs through it.
- Home to many wetland areas, flora, fauna.
- Damming it could allow us to control water flow.
- Would allow us to generate electricity.
- Could generate growth and development.
- Would be irreversible.
Glen Canyon Dam

We dammed it. Were we right to do so?
Environmental Ethics

- **Anthropocentricism**
  (Commoner, Bookchin, Hardin...)

- **Biocentricism**
  (Schweitzer, Singer, Regan, Varner, Warren...)

- **Ecocentrism**
  (Sessions, Naess, Leopold, Callicott, Merchant...)

- **Pragmatism**
  (Light, Katz, Hickman, Weston, Norton...)
Anthropocentrism

- Social Ecology
- Environmental Economics
Anthropocentrism

- This was/wasn’t valuable to humans.
  - Lost research possibilities
  - Lost beautiful natural wonder
  - Lost a natural cathedral
  - Gained energy
  - Gained a new kind of recreational area
  - Gained control of the Colorado River, etc.
Biocentrism

- Schweitzer: Reverence for life
- Regan: Subject of a life
- Varner: Entities with Interests
Biocentrism

- Disrespectful/damaging to individual entities
  - Some animals and plants have rights or “considerability”
  - Some suffer
  - Zebra mussels (e.g.) and other invader species threaten current inhabitants
Biocentrism

- Disregards other considerations:
  - Like species
  - Ecosystems
  - Communities

- Raises concerns about equity arrangements between humans and non-humans.
Questions?
Trajectory of Env. Ethics

Expanding the Circle
The Struggle for Specialness

- Reason
- Communication
- Personhood
- Sentience
- Subject of a life
- Having a welfare

Individualist Theories
Species and Ecosystems

• “Expanding Balloon Theories” urge all-or-nothing inclusion or exclusion
• Ignore species
• Downplay the significance of land and ecosystems
But there are more all-encompassing views...
Ecocentrism

- Land Ethics
- Deep Ecology
The Land Ethic

“A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

Aldo Leopold
The Land Ethic

• Emphasizes stability, integrity, beauty and biotic community
• Based on evolutionary theory
• Urges harmony with, not domination of, nature
• Allows for species and ecosystems
• Obligations accord with onion-esque “accretions”
The Land Ethic

Problems

• **Too Naturalistic:** Where’s the ‘Ought’ in that ‘Is’?

• **Too Demanding:** What is permissible in this world? The Land Ethic as eco-Fascism.

• **Too Emotivistic:** Based in moral sentiments

• **Shaky Foundations:** Nature doesn’t sit still; It changes, and we have no clear way of knowing what it means to violate it.
Deep Ecology

“Every living being is connected intimately, and from this intimacy follows the capacity of identification and as its natural consequences, practice of non-violence ... Now is the time to share with all life on our maltreated earth through the deepening identification with life forms and the greater units, the ecosystems, and Gaia, the fabulous, old planet of ours.”

Arne Naess
Deep Ecology

- Seeks to overcome anthropocentrism
- Emphasizes interconnectedness
- Allows for species and ecosystems
Deep Ecology

Problems

• Too Relativistic: Where do we find our ‘oughts’?

• Too Demanding: What is permissible in this world? Deep Ecology as eco-Fascism.

• Too Spiritualistic: Based in supernatural connection to Gaia.
Questions?
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