



Environmental Ethics

Wednesday May 28, 2025

Dharnish B.R., Jasmine C., Connor A.,
Anderson L., Emerson C.



Animal Welfare vs Rights

Animal Welfare

- Bentham: *"The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?"*
- Ought to prevent **"unnecessary suffering"** of animals.
- Doesn't speak of their rights
 - Only 'right' is to not suffer 'unnecessarily' at the hands of humans.
 - The 'necessity' in question determined by humans themselves- **or is it?**
- **Statutory protections granted (and rescindable) by legislatures**

Animal Rights

- Idea that nonhuman animals have rights like humans.
 - Those rights are *intrinsic* and *inalienable*.
 - States/authorities don't grant them, but they do have to protect them.
- Animals have intrinsic "moral worth" that is not determined by humans.
- **Constitutional rights free from legislative caprice**



Animal Welfare vs Rights

1. Can't it be said welfarists support ONE right of animals- the right to avoid "unnecessary suffering"?
 - a. Can "unnecessary suffering" be objectively defined, or is it always only defined by humans?
2. If animals do indeed have rights, what are they?
3. Are these two positions really diametrically opposed?
 - a. Why do "rightists" obsess over "animal rights" if not for their welfare?

Polcompballs

(Political-Compass Balls)



*if i can't dance, i don't
want to be in your
revolution.*





Deep vs Shallow Ecology


- Arne Næss (1912-2009) - Norwegian philosopher
- **Shallow** Ecology: a fight against pollution and resource depletion whose main objective is **the health and affluence of people in developed countries**
- **Deep** Ecology: a contrasting orientation to the natural world inspired by both our **experience of being humans** and by our newly **acquired ecological knowledge**

Næss draws a line between anthropocentric concern vs ecological concern



Land Ethics - Biodiversity

- Why is biodiversity important?
- Benefits agriculture, human health, air purity, scientific & recreational interest, natural beauty, and the stability of ecosystems
- Arguably these are all shallow - all of these reasons are in human interest



Land Ethics - Sustainability

- Why is sustainability important?
- Sustainability: Harvest as much as the forest can renew itself
- Immediate vs long term availability of resources
- Also arguably shallow - in human interest to have resources for a longer period of time



Wilderness & Natural Beauty

“Land Ethics” : Biodiversity, Sustainability, Natural Beauty

- Biodiversity and Sustainability are arguably anthropocentric
- What about Natural Beauty?
 - The preservation of wilderness



Wilderness & Natural Beauty

Wilderness : any area of Earth that is currently free of human use for habitation, production, or recreation

- “Wilderness is a resource which can shrink but not grow” (Leopold)
- Once there is an established human presence, wilderness has lost something of the wild beauty that makes it what it is
- **Why should humans forfeit valuable resources and benefits in order to preserve wilderness?**



Wilderness & Natural Beauty

Wilderness's 3 Unique Values : "Wilderness for Recreation", "Wilderness for Science", "Wilderness for Wildlife" (Leopold)

- "Wilderness for Recreation" and "Wilderness for Science" are inherently things that matter to *only human beings*
- "Wilderness for Wildlife" mixes both human and nonhuman points of view



Gaia Hypothesis

- Formulated by James Lovelock (1979) - English Scientist and Environmentalist
- Stated Earth is a Physiological system
 - “Unconscious goal of regulating the climate and chemistry at a comfortable state for life” (Lovelock, 2006: 15, pg. 130).
 - Have the **“Change of heart and mind”** and see the Earth as a living system
 - If ignored, Earth will always adapt to the changes and may result in **eliminating the source of destruction** due to its power of **self-regulation** and **recovery**.

Note: According to Lovelock, this was a Scientific Hypothesis and still is an undergoing investigation (2010)



Gaia as deep ecology

- Sustainability, natural beauty, etc
 - All grounded in human subjectivity and what we want to *extract* from the environment
 - Shallow ecology
- How are “respect for gaia” & the “promethean fear” characterized differently?
 - Primal fear/respect, not anthropocentric
 - Values for specific actions are *produced by* the environment, in terms of possibility for retribution.
- Objection from Graham: if everything's ultimately grounded in human subjectivity, isn't this just shallow ecology?
 - Reid: morality as a system is based in practicality around human actions
 - But, Lovelock seems to place Gaia's importance over humanity's. Is Graham even right?



Gaia Hypothesis Question

Do you believe in today's state, the world has been
“respecting” Earth? Why or Why Not?

What are other ideas you have to create a safer and more
sustainable climate? How do you know it will work?