Art, Ethics and Environment

Art, Ethics and Environment
A Free Enquiry Into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature

Edited by

Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir and Ólafur Páll Jónsson

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PREFACE

I

Nature has been a recurrent theme in arts and philosophy for some decades now. Nature is experienced in variety of contexts; artists have been enacting with nature as phenomena, material, space, environment, or simply as a place or an idea. In philosophy this is evidenced by an increasing interest in environmental ethics and aesthetics, as well as in philosophy of biology and metaphysics. This trend marks, in a way, a recourse to past history; the concept of nature was one of the fundamental concepts in Greek philosophy and science, and remained so up through the Middle Ages. With the rise of empiricism and experimental science in the 17th century, when scientists such as Robert Boyle (1627–1691) and philosophers such as John Locke (1632–1704) and David Hume (1711–1776) laid the grounds for the times to come, the concept of nature as a philosophically explanatory concept was questioned. This is particularly clear in the following quote from a paper by Robert Boyle titled "A free enquiry into the vulgarly received notion of nature":

> On this occasion I can scarce forbear to tell you that I have often looked upon it as an unhappy thing, and prejudicial both to philosophy and physics, that the word nature hath been so frequently and yet so unskilfully employed, both in books and in discourse, by all sorts of men, learned and illiterate. For the very great ambiguity of this term, and the promiscuous use men are wont to make of it without sufficiently attending to its different significations, makes many of the expressions wherein they employ it (and think they do it well and truly) to be either not intelligible or not proper or not true [....][1]

Not everyone, however, was equally dismissive about the concept of nature. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), for instance, discussed nature as a source of aesthetic experience and a paradigm for art. But even though he attached considerable significance to nature, still, nature was not seen as an independent source of value, as it had been in Greek philosophy, but rather as external conditions for meaningful life. For Kant, the ground for ethical value was

[1] Robert Boyle, "A free enquiry into the vulgarly received notion of nature", *Selected Philosophical Papers of Robert Boyle*, M.A. Stewart (ed.), Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1991, p. 177.

rationality rather than human nature and aesthetic values were grounded in subjective feelings.

In the 1960s, new affinities between art and nature developed and became among the characteristics of contemporary art. Environmental approaches became essential and artists were engaging the public closely with social and physical spaces. Generating processes rather than creating objects, both in nature as well as in the urban landscape, artists reintroduced art into nature and nature into art. Joseph Beuys (1921–1986), Robert Smithson (1938–1973), Christo and Jeanne-Claude (b. 1935), and many others, opened up new ways of engaging environment, creating non-permanent artworks which produced a new understanding of creativity that following generations are still exploring. The distinction between art and nature became increasingly blurred at the same time as the ancient dichotomy of culture and nature became controversial. However, nature as such is rarely the object of discussion nor the subject of recent artworks. It is the interstices between various disciplines, such as philosophy, architecture, technology, history or sociology, that have generated the creativity of last decades.

At the same time as new attitudes towards nature and the environment as a whole, became of central importance for the arts, nature as such became an academic subject in philosophy. None of this happened in a sociological vacuum, various grass-root movements were extremely vocal in the 1960s campaigning against war and for civil rights, women's rights, animal rights and the environment to mention a few areas of particular significance. It was perhaps inevitable that the issues brought up by these movements would filter into academic philosophy. The beginning of environmental ethics, as an academic field, is often traced back to the year 1973 when three seminal papers appeared: "Animal liberation" by Peter Singer, "The shallow and the deep, long range ecology movement: A summary" by Arne Naess and "Is there a need for a new, an environmental, ethics?" by Richard Sylvan (then Routley).[2] With the rise of environmental ethics philosophers began discussing nature as an independent source of moral values, rather than a mere stage for moral life which, in the end, derived its value from relations among humans. It has both been suggested that nature might have independent moral value, much like persons are thought to have such value, or that nature can be an active participant in a morally virtuous life.

The contemporary interests in aesthetics of nature and ethics of nature were born independently, and have remained relatively independent of each other up

[2] See J. Baird Callicott, "Introduction" in *Environmental Philosphy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, third edition, M.E. Zimmerman, J.B. Callicott, G. Sessions, K.J. Warrenm and J. Clark (eds.) Prentice Hall 2001, p. 7.

to the present. Allen Carlsson and Arnold Berleant describe the situation in aesthetics of nature in the following way:

The renewed interest in the aesthetics of nature is in part a response to these two developments [i.e. (i) that analytic aesthetics had abandoned any remaining interest in the aesthetics of anything other than art, and (ii) individuals concerned about the natural environment were left with few theoretical resources other than the old neo-picturesque paradigm of distanced contemplation of scenic views]. This is evident in the title of the essay that almost single-handedly initiates the renewal: Ronald Hepburn's groundbreaking 1966 article, "Contemporary aesthetics and the neglect of natural beauty". Reacting to the treatment of the appreciation of nature within analytic aesthetics, Hepburn argues that those features that other philosophers have seen ass aesthetic deficiencies in the natural world and thus as reasons for deeming its appreciation subjective, superficial, and even non-aesthetic, are actually sources for a different kind of, and potentially very rich, aesthetic experience. He emphasize the fact that, since it is not constrained by things such as designing intellects, art historical traditions, and art critical practices, the natural world facilitates an open, engaging, and creative mode of appreciation.[3]

Both aesthetics of nature and environmental ethics have become established fields in contemporary philosophy with their distinct bibliography to draw on. But even if distinct, and properly so, these two new fields might be more closely related than often suggested. In a recent essay, the ethicist Rosalind Hursthouse takes on the task of drawing the outlines of what she calls environmental virtue ethics. One of the tasks that Hursthouse sets herself is to see whether there might be a virtue that is especially relevant for humans' relation to nature. Her starting point in searching for this new virtue are thoughts by Ronald Hepburn,

> R.W. Hepburn an aesthetician, has at least two important essays which find many echoes in environmental ethics literature. One explores "the enjoyment of natural beauty as tending towards an ideal of oneness with nature or as leading to the disclosure of unity in nature" and the other analyses the concept of an emotion, wonder, that, as he says "occupies in a paradigmatic way exactly that territory common to the aesthetic, moral and religious".[4]

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[3] Allen Carlsson and Arnold Berlleant (2004) "Introduction: The Aesthetics of Nature", in *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments*, A. Carlsson and A. Berleant (eds.), Peterborough: Broadview Press, p. 14. This volume collects important papers in contemporary asethetics of nature, including Hepburn's paper and papers by Emily Brady, Holmes Rolstson III and Thomas Heyd.

[4] Roslaind Hursthouse (forthcoming) "Environmental virtue ethics", in *Working Virtue*, P.J. Ivanhoe and R. Walke (eds.) Oxford: Oxford University Press. The references to Hepburn are taken from his *'Wonder' and Other Essay*s (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press) pp. 17 and 7 respectively.

A little later she says.

> The putative virtue of being disposed to feel the emotion of wonder the right way, towards the right objects, for the right reasons, to the right degree etc. is, I think, explicitly concerned with our relations to nature (who has written about wonder without talking about the wonders of nature?) and the exploration of this putative virtue, in that explicit connection, would probably form an instructive and inspiring part of an environmental virtue ethic.

It is interesting to see, in Hurstouse work, how aesthetics becomes part and parcel of ethics, and it is likewise interesting to see, in Roger Pouivet's paper in this volume, how ethics becomes part and parcel of aesthetics. It is, of course, debatable how deep these similarities go, but they should, at least, encourage a dialogue between the two fields.

II

Nature is a constantly changing process. So also are thoughts about nature. The aim of this collection is to bring together different trends in thinking about nature and value that are distinctive of these changing moods in art and philosophy and to juxtapose them with some other ways of thinking about these issues, such as economics and religion. The essays and artworks derive from a conference held in Selfoss, Iceland, on June 11th and 12th 2005, with the exception of Thomas Heyd's essay and the photographs by Ragna St. Ingadóttir.

Holmes Rolston III and Páll Skúlason both discuss the foundations of environmental ethics, concerned with values of life; the view humans have of nature; and consider questions of human duties towards animals. Roger Pouivet takes as his point of departure the claim by Peter Geach that man alone has a world, animals only have environment and examines the consequences of this for aesthetics, and especially for the aesthetics of nature. Emily Brady deals with the role of nature in contemporary art and analysis the ethical or non-ethical attitudes to the environment. Eric Palazzo brings into light the complex cultural symbolism of nature in the definition of the sacred space in Medieval Europe and the interacting symbolic relations between religious text and natural elements. Antje von Graevenitz analysis the work of the German artist Joseph Beuys (1921–1986), and his revolutionary way of thinking about society, art and nature.

Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir goes through antithetical approaches to the questions of preservation or exploitation of nature, that have been violently debated in Iceland over the last couple of years, and how these have been framed by problems of visual representations of nature. Mikael M. Karlsson examines landscape painting, in particular what makes a painting a landscape

painting and why landscape paintings are a distinct category in art. Brynhildur Davíðsdóttir explores the conception of a value in nature from the perspective of environmental economics. Thomas Heyd argues in the concluding essay, "that culture and nature need not be conceived in opposition to each other, and that it makes sense to speak of and pursue a *culture of nature*.".

III

The conference from which this collection derives was titled "Nature in the Kingdom of Ends". The title was a deliberate reference to the ethics of Immanuel Kant, though anyone familiar with his ethics will notice that his ideas are being turned on their head. Respecting others for what they are rather than treating them simply as instruments is one of the fundamentals of human morality. Kant expressed this in the following words: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means".[5] Kant maintained that this is a fundamental imperative of morality and referred to it simply as "the categorical imperative". Kant offered three formulation of the categorical imperative. The one above is the second one, the first one is this: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law". The third formulation derives from the second. Kant says:

> The concept of every rational being as one who must regard himself as legislating universal law by all his will's maxims, so that he may judge himself and his actions from this point of view, leads to another very fruitful concept, which depends on the aforementioned one, viz., that of a kingdom of ends.

And a little later Kant says:

> For all rational beings stand under the law that each of them should treat himself and all other never merely as means but always at the same time as an end in himself. Hereby arises a systematic union of rational being through common objective laws, i.e., a kingdom that may be called a kingdom of ends ...[6]

The title "Nature in the Kingdom of Ends" indicates that nature should also belong to the kingdom of ends, that it is always deserving of respect and that one should never consider it simply as a means but also as an end in itself.

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[5] Immanual Kant [1785], *Groundings for the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated into English by James W. Ellington, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company 1981, 429.
[6] Ibid, 433.

Kant wanted to lay down the principles governing moral action. The objective of the conference was wider in scope—not only how one should *act* towards others, whether humans, animals or nature in general, but also how one might *see* others, whether humans, animals or nature in general. The point indicated by the title of the conference (though, of course necessarily endorsed by all the speakers) is that nature can always be seen as an independent source of value, not merely as a means towards generation of value that are grounded in other things, say, human interests or subjective feeling.

However, the aim was not to bring forward or support a single voice but to open up a space, trigger off a multifaceted discussion and create a place from where new thoughts about nature and further exchanges could take off.

New series of academic exchanges inspired by this theme have already taken place in Reykjavik 2006 (www.sparten.hi.is) with further events developing. Iceland is a place in perpetual geological motion where nature is exceptionally present. Its geographical situation and its cultural atmosphere makes unexpected encounters possible. Creating links between different categories of human sciences, traditionally separated, was an individual and academic challenge. We are greatful for the generosity and support expressed through the here presented contributions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The conference Nature in the Kingdom of Ends was organised by the Southern Region Institute for Advanced Learning and took place in the Sudurland College, Selfoss, Iceland. The opening address of the conference was given by President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, who spoke about the tight relation between Icelandic nature and Icelandic poetry, literature and art. The closing address was given by Ms. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former President of Iceland and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Languages. She discussed erosion of languages, and argued, that nature might come to the rescue of the language. We are grateful to both of them for their participation.

But although the group of people that were in charge is small, the conference was a result of a generous collaboration among a large number of people. We would like to thank particularly Jón Hjartarsson and Örlygur Karlsson for their enthusiasm and valuable support, Frosti Jónsson was in charge of practical matters and publicity. Þorvarður Árnason was an invaluable source of information on potential speakers at an early stage. Last, but not least, we would like to thank our sponsors who generously made this international exploration possible: Arborg Municipality, Center for Research in the Humanities at the University of Iceland, Institute of Philosophy at the University of Iceland, Icelandair, The Ministry of Agriculture, The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, NatureWatch, Icelandic Nature Conservation Association, Reykjavík Arts Festival – Cultural City Fund, Soil Conservation Service of Iceland, Sudurland College, University of Akureyri, University of Iceland. This publication is sponsored by Glitnir.

Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir
Ólafur Páll Jónsson

CHAPTER ONE

INTRINSIC VALUES IN NATURE

HOLMES ROLSTON, III

Humans are helped or hurt by the condition of their environment; and, many argue, that is what environmental ethics is all about—protecting what people have at stake in the conservation of their life support systems, landscapes, and natural resources. Ethics is for people. People are both the subject and the object of ethics. Only humans are deliberative moral agents and humans have obligations only to other humans. Only people can be held responsible, and they can only be held responsible by and to other people.

Or so it might first appear. But this, I will argue, is only a half truth. Humans can and ought to be held responsible for what they are doing to their Earth—that is true enough. Only humans can be held so responsible—not wild animals, or plants, or species, or ecosystems. Nature is amoral. We are not responsible, of course, for Earth's being here past and present; we are late-comers in evolutionary history. But we are becoming increasingly responsible for Earth's future. In that sense, everything humans value is at stake in seeking sustainable development, a sustainable biosphere. If there are any duties at all, we must care for this surrounding world, since this is the home for us all. But—so this argument goes—these are duties owed by people to other people (as well as to themselves); caring for the planet is a means to this end.

Certainly, a great deal of the work of environmental ethics can be done mindful of our duties to other humans. Humans need to be healthy, for instance. Health is not simply a matter of biology from the skin-in. Environmental health, from the skin-out, is just as important. Humans too, like the animals and plants, need reasonably clean air and water. In agriculture, humans must grow their food in soil that is more or less unpolluted (use pesticides and herbicides though they may) and fertile (use fertilizers though they may). It is hard to have a healthy culture on a sick environment.

Nor is environmental health just minimal; think rather of a quality environment. Humans need natural commodities—timber, water, soil, natural resources; they enjoy natural amenities—wildlife and wildflowers, scenic views, places of

recreation and solitude. Environmental ethics, by this account, is founded on what we might call a human right to nature. There are duties to people concerning nature, but there are no duties directly to animals, or plants, or species, or ecosystems. Nature is instrumental to human goods.

But, I am arguing, that is a half truth. Environmental ethics is also about duties directly to and values intrinsic in the natural world. Broadly speaking, we can ask two questions of something, an *x*. (1) What is *x* good for? (2) What is *x*'s good? The first asks what good is there for me. The second asks what good is there in itself. The first question is about instrumental value. The second is about intrinsic value. Are there intrinsic values in nature, values that can command our appropriate respect, values that can count morally?

Maybe it will help to reframe this question in terms of biological conservation. (1) What good is conserving *x*? (2) What good is *x* conserving? The first is the up-front, current question about biodiversity, the reason we wish to conserve *x* instrumentally. But maybe that question cannot be correctly answered until we have also asked the second question, which goes deeper down, the more fundamental biological question what intrinsic conservation is taking place.

In this profound sense, biological conservation began when life began, three and a half billion years ago. Biological conservation is innate as every organism conserves, values its life. Biology without conservation is impossible, a contradiction in terms, a condition that can exist in the actual world only temporarily, since it will be self-defeating and selected against. Biology without conservation is death. What we need as a conservation strategy is appropriate respect for life, to get our human conservation biology an adapted fit with this perennial conservation biology.

Are there values conserved in non-human nature that humans can and ought appropriately respect? Ethics is for people, but is ethics only about people? What has ethics to say about the rest of life on our planet? The challenge for environmental philosophy is how to get people, who alone on the planet can be ethical, to care for a world that is our home planet and also the home for these other creatures.

1. Animals

There is no better evidence of nonhuman values and valuers than spontaneous wild life, born free and on its own. Animals hunt and howl, find shelter, seek out their habitats and mates, care for their young, flee from threats, grow hungry, thirsty, hot, tired, excited, sleepy. They suffer injury and lick their wounds. Here we are quite convinced that value is nonanthropocentric. These wild animals defend their own lives because they have a good of their own.

There is somebody there behind the fur or feathers. Our gaze is returned by an animal that itself has a concerned outlook. Here is value right before our eyes, right behind those eyes. Animals are value-able, able to value things in their world. They maintain a valued self-identity as they cope through the world. An animal values its own life for what it is in itself, intrinsically.

Humans have used animals for as long as anyone can recall, instrumentally. And in most of their moral traditions, they have also made place for duties concerning the animals for which they were responsible, domestic animals, or toward the wild animals which they hunted. We modern people are too wise, if we think that ethics is only for people. Animal lives command our appropriate respect for the intrinsic value present there. But this is only an ethic for mammals, perhaps for vertebrates, and this is only a fractional percentage of living things.

2. Organisms

Animals, yes, you may say–the higher, sentient animals. What about other living things, such as plants? Can they defend value, on their own? A plant is not a subject, but neither is it an inanimate object, like a stone. Plants, quite alive, are unified entities of the botanical though not of the zoological kind, that is, they are not unitary organisms highly integrated with centered neural control, but they are modular organisms, with a meristem that can repeatedly and indefinitely produce new vegetative modules, additional stem nodes and leaves when there is available space and resources, as well as new reproductive modules, fruits and seeds.

Plants make themselves; they repair injuries; they move water, nutrients, and photosynthate from cell to cell; they store sugars; they make toxins and regulate their levels in defense against grazers; they make nectars and emit pheromones to influence the behavior of pollinating insects and the responses of other plants; they emit allelopathic agents to suppress invaders; they make thorns, trap insects.

A plant, like any other organism, sentient or not, is a spontaneous, self-maintaining system, sustaining and reproducing itself, executing its program, making a way through the world, checking against performance by means of responsive capacities with which to measure success. On the basis of its genetic information, the organism distinguishes between what *is* and what *ought to be*. The organism is an axiological system, though not a moral system. So the tree grows, reproduces, repairs its wounds, and resists death. A life is defended for what it is in itself. Every organism has a *good-of-its-kind*; it defends its own kind as a *good kind*. The plant, as we were saying, is involved in conservation

biology. Does not that mean that the plant is valuable, able to value itself on its own?

But, comes the objection, even though plants have a good of their own, they are not able to value because they are not able to feel anything. Nothing matters to a plant. There is plant good, but not plant value. There is no valuer evaluating anything. Plants can do things that interest us, but the plants are not interested in what they are doing. They have only their merely functional goods.

But, though things do not matter *to* plants, things matter *for* them. We ask, of a failing plant: What's the matter *with* that plant? If it is lacking sunshine and soil nutrients, and we arrange for these, we say: The tree is benefiting from the sunshine and the soil nutrients; and *benefit* is—everywhere else we encounter it—a value word. Objectively, it is difficult to dissociate the idea of value from natural selection. Biologists regularly speak of the "survival value" of plant activities; thorns have survival value. These survival traits, though picked out by natural selection, are innate (= intrinsic) in the organism, that is, stored in its genes and expressed in structure and behavior.

But, it will be protested: Careful philosophers will put this kind of "value" in scare quotes. This is not really value at all, because there is no felt experience choosing from alternatives, no preferences being exercised. This so-called value is not a value of interest to people valuing nature because it is not a value with interest in itself.

But why is the organism not valuing what it is making resources of?—not consciously, but we do not want to presume that there is only conscious value or valuing. That is what we are debating, not assuming. The tree defending its good of its kind is an observation of value in nature with just as much certainty as the tree's metabolism is biological fact. Trees appear to be green, and perhaps we do not want to call the electromagnetic waves actually there "greenness." But trees photosynthesize with or without humans watching them. Matters can be better or worse for the tree, and this amounts to saying that the tree on its own has its goods and harms.

Some worry that we here commit what philosophers call the naturalistic fallacy. We find what biologically is in nature and conclude that something valuable is there, something which we may say we ought to protect. But does it not rather seem that the facts here are value facts, when we are describing what benefits the tree? Such value is pretty much fact of the matter. If we refuse to recognize such values as being objectively there, have we committed some fallacy? Rather, the danger is the other way round. We commit the subjectivist fallacy if we think all values lie in subjective experience, and, worse still, the anthropocentrist fallacy if we think all values lie in human options and preferences.

3. Species

Living organisms are on their own. They are also members of species lines. Humans are no doubt able to value biodiversity with instrumental uses, medically, agriculturally, industrially. But can there be intrinsic value at the species level? Can a species be value-able all by itself? That can seem puzzling. A species has no self defending its life. There is no analog to the nervous hookups or metabolisms that characterize individual organisms. So now we must ask whether singular somatic identity conserved is the only process that is valuable.

The species itself is a kind of particular, historic lineage. A species is another level of biological identity reasserted genetically over time. Identity need not attach solely to the centered or modular organism; it can persist as a discrete, vital pattern over time. The life that the organismic individual has is something passing through the individual as much as something it intrinsically possesses. The genetic set, in which is coded the *telos*, is as evidently the property of the species as of the individual through which it passes. Value is something dynamic to the specific form of life. The species is a bigger event than the individual with its interests or sentience. If the predators are removed, and the carrying capacity is exceeded, wildlife managers may have to benefit a species by culling its member individuals.

Ecosystems evolve organisms that attend to their immediate somatic needs (food, shelter, metabolism) and that reproduce themselves in the very next generation. In the birth-death-birth-death system a series of replacements is required. Reproduction is typically assumed to be a need of individuals, but since any particular individual can flourish somatically without reproducing at all, indeed may be put through duress and risk or spend much energy reproducing, by another logic we can interpret reproduction as the species staying in place by its replacements. In this sense a female jaguar does not bear cubs to be healthy herself. Rather, her cubs are *Panthera onca* recreating itself by continuous performance.

A female animal does not have mammary glands nor a male testicles because the function of these is to preserve its own life; these organs are defending the line of life bigger than the somatic individual. The locus of the value that is defended over generations is as much in the form of life, since the individuals are genetically impelled to sacrifice themselves in the interests of reproducing their kind. The individual is a receptacle of the form, and the receptacles are broken while the form survives, but the form cannot otherwise survive.

The species line is the *vital* living system, the whole, of which individual organisms are the essential parts. The species defends a particular form of life,

pursuing a pathway through the world, resisting death (extinction), by regeneration maintaining a normative identity over time. The value resides in the dynamic form; the individual inherits this, exemplifies it, and passes it on. If so, what prevents value existing at that level? The appropriate survival unit is the appropriate location of valuing.

Species as historical lines have a defended biological identity, though they do not have any subjective experience. Species are quite real; that there really is a jaguar-jaguar-jaguar sequence is about as certain as anything we believe about the empirical world. Species are lively and full of life; they are processes; they have a kind of unity and integrity. The species line too is value-able, able to conserve a biological identity. Indeed it is more real, more value-able than the individual, necessary though individuals are for the continuance of this lineage.

We said earlier that natural selection picks out whatever traits an organism has that are valuable to it, relative to its survival. But if we ask what is the essence of this value, it is not the somatic survival of the organismic individual; this value ability is the ability to reproduce. That locates value-ability innate or intrinsic within the organism, but it just as much locates the value-ability as the capacity to re-produce a next generation, and a next generation positioned to produce a next generation after that. Indeed, natural selection is rather careless with individuals; the test to which it puts them is whether they can pass on the historical lineage.

4. Ecosystems

Individuals do not exist, except as members of species. Species, in turn, do not exist, except in niches in ecosystems. Life takes place in community. So we have to continue our inquiry about value, now at the ecosystem scale. “A thing is right,” concluded Aldo Leopold, “when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise”[1]. Humans can value ecosystem communities instrumentally; they need sustainable ecosystems. But can ecosystems be the object of duty, because they are valuable all by themselves?

Again, there is a deeper worry, partly scientific and partly philosophical. Perhaps ecosystems exist in too loose a way to be valuers. They are nothing but aggregations of their more real members, like a forest is (some say) nothing more than a collection of trees. We can value collections, as of stamps, but this is just the aggregated value of individual stamps. Still, an ecosystem is rather different. Nothing in the stamp collection is alive; the collection is no community; it is neither self-generating nor self-maintaining.

[1] Leopold (1968), pp. 224-225

We need ecology to discover what biotic community means as an organizational mode. Then we can reflect philosophically to discover the values there. An ecosystem has no brain, no genome, no skin, no self-identification, no telos, no unified program. It does not defend itself against injury or death. It is not irritable. So it can sometimes seems as if an ecosystem is too low a level of organization to be the direct focus of concern. Ecosystems do not and cannot care; they have no interests about which they or we can care.

But this is to misunderstand ecosystems, to make a category mistake. To fault *communities* as though they ought to be organismic *individuals* is to look at one level for what is appropriate at another. One looks for selection pressures and adaptive fit, not for irritability or repair of injury, for speciation and life support, not for resisting death. We must think more systemically, and less organismically.

An ecosystem generates a spontaneous order that envelopes and produces the richness, beauty, integrity, and dynamic stability of the component parts. Though these organized interdependencies are loose in comparison with the tight connections within an organism, all these metabolisms are as vitally linked as are liver and heart. The equilibrating ecosystem is not merely push-pull forces. It is an equilibrating of values. The selective forces in ecosystems at once transcend and produce the lives of individual plants and animals.

Evolutionary ecosystems over geological time have increased the numbers of species on Earth from zero to five million or more. Superimposed on this, the quality of individual lives in the upper trophic rungs of ecological pyramids has risen. One-celled organisms evolved into many-celled, highly integrated organisms. Photosynthesis evolved and came to support locomotion—swimming, walking, running, flight. Stimulus-response mechanisms became complex instructive acts. Warm-blooded animals followed cold-blooded ones. Neural complexity, conditioned behavior, and learning emerged. Sentience appeared—sight, smell, hearing, taste, pleasure, pain. Brains evolved, coupled with hands. Consciousness and self-consciousness arose. Persons appeared with intense concentrated unity. The products are valuable, able to be valued by these humans; but why not say that the process is what is really value-able, able to produce these values?

The system is a kind of field with characteristics as vital for life as any property contained within particular organisms. Philosophers, sometimes encouraged by biologists, may think ecosystems are just epiphenomenal aggregations. This is a confusion. Any level is real if there is significant downward causation. Thus the atom is real because that pattern shapes the behavior of electrons; the cell because that pattern shapes the behavior of amino acids; the organism because that pattern coordinates the behavior of hearts and lungs; the community because the niche shapes the morphology and behavior of

the jaguars within it. Being real requires an organization that shapes the existence and the behavior of member/parts.

Axiologically, in the more comprehensive levels, the terms "instrumental" and "intrinsic" need now to be expanded. Ecosystems have "systemic value." But if we want to know what is value-able, able to create value, why not say that it is the productivity of such ecosystems bringing into existence these phenomena that, when we arrive, we humans are able to value as the biodiversity of our planet. Values are intrinsic, instrumental, and systemic, and all three are interwoven. It would be foolish to value the golden eggs and disvalue the goose that lays them. It would be a mistake to value the goose only instrumentally. A goose that lays golden eggs is systemically valuable. How much more so is an ecosystem that generates myriads of species; or even, as we next see, an Earth that produces billions of species, ourselves included.

5. Earth

Viewing Earthrise, Edgar Mitchell, was entranced, "Suddenly from behind the rim of the moon, in long, slow-motion moments of immense majesty, there emerges a sparkling blue and white jewel, a light, delicate sky-blue sphere laced with slowly swirling veils of white, rising gradually like a small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery. It takes more than a moment to fully realize this is Earth ... home"[2]. Michael Collins was earthstruck: "When I traveled to the Moon, it wasn't my proximity to that battered rockpile I remember so vividly, but rather what I saw when I looked back at my fragile home—a glistening, inviting beacon, delicate blue and white, a tiny outpost suspended in the black infinity. Earth is to be treasured and nurtured, something precious that *must* endure."[3]

Earth seen from space brings a moment of truth. This is the only biosphere, the only planet with an ecology. Earlier the challenge was to evaluate persons, animals, plants, species, ecosystems; but environmental valuing is not over until we have risen to the planetary level. Earth is really the relevant survival unit. Conservation biology requires conserving the biosphere. But valuing the whole Earth is unfamiliar and needs philosophical analysis. Can we have duties to our planet?

We may seem to be going to extremes. Earth is, after all, just earth. The belief that dirt could have intrinsic value is sometimes taken as a *reductio ad absurdum* in environmental philosophy. Dirt is vital to us but dirt is not the sort of thing that has value by itself. Put like that, we agree. An isolated clod defends no intrinsic value and it is difficult to say that it has much value in itself. But

[2] Kelley (1988), at photographs, pp. 42–45.
[3] Collins (1980), p. 6.

that is not the end of the matter, because a clod of dirt is integrated into an ecosystem; earth is a part, Earth the whole. Dirt is product and process in a systemic nature. We should try to get the global picture, and switch from a lump of dirt to the Earth system in which it has been created.

Earth is, some will insist, a big rockpile like the moon, only one on which the rocks are watered and illuminated in such way that they support life. So maybe it is really the life we value and not the Earth, except as instrumental to life. We do not have duties to rocks, air, ocean, dirt, or Earth; we have duties to people, or living things. We must not confuse duties to the home with duties to the inhabitants. Conservation is for people, not an end in itself.

But this is not a systemic view of what is going on. We need some systematic account of the valuable Earth we now behold, before we beheld it, not just some value that is generated in the eye of the beholder. Finding that value will generate a global sense of obligation. The evolution of rocks into dirt into fauna and flora is one of the great surprises of natural history, one of the rarest events in the astronomical universe. Earth is all dirt, we humans too arise up from the humus, and we find revealed what dirt can do when it is self-organizing under suitable conditions. This is pretty spectacular dirt.

Really, the story is little short of a series of “miracles,” wondrous, fortuitous events, unfolding of potential; and when Earth's most complex product, *Homo sapiens*, becomes intelligent enough to reflect over this cosmic wonderland, everyone is left stuttering about the mixtures of accident and necessity out of which we have evolved. For some the black mystery will be numinous and signal transcendence; for some the mystery may be impenetrable. Perhaps we do not have to have all the cosmological answers. Nobody has much doubt that this is a precious place, a pearl in a sea of black mystery.

We will not be valuing Earth objectively until we appreciate this marvelous natural history. This really is a superb planet, the most valuable entity of all, because it is the entity able to produce all the Earthbound values. At this scale of vision, if we ask what is principally to be valued, the value of life arising as a creative process on Earth seems a better description and a more comprehensive category.

Do not humans sometimes value Earth’s life-supporting systems because they are valuable, and not always the other way round? Is this value just a matter of late-coming human interests? Or is Earth not historically a remarkable, valuable place, a place able to produce value prior to the human arrival, and even now valuable antecedently to the human uses of it? It seems parochial to say that our part alone in the drama establishes all its worth. The production of value over the millennia of natural history is not something subjective that goes on in the human mind. In that sense, a valuable Earth is the foundational value. The creativity within the natural system we inherit, and the values this

generates, are the ground of our being, not just the ground under our feet. Earth could be the ultimate object of duty, short of God, if God exists.

6. Humans

But humans, you will object, are getting too much left out of this global picture. After all, even if there are some values out there in nonhuman nature, humans are on top of the value pyramids. They count most of all, and beside them any intrinsic values in wild animals, or plants, or species lines, or even ecosystems are relatively insignificant. Humans are the only evaluators who can reflect about what is going on, who can deliberate about what they ought to do conserving it. When humans do this, they must set up the scales; and humans are the measurers of things. So what really counts is people, and what they have at stake on their landscapes.

In practice, as well as in principle, we must put humans at the center of conservation. Be pragmatic about it; no conservation policy can succeed unless people get persuaded that it is in their best interests. Intrinsic value in nature can never outweigh our own enlightened self-interests. Humans are going to look out after themselves; they are never going to pay much attention to intrinsic values in nature.

But maybe this insisting on our privileges at the center of the picture is another of those half truths that skews all the answers. The surprise of the last century, and the lesson still to be learned as we enter the millennium, is that nature is always with us late and soon. Nature is the milieu of culture. Nature is the womb of culture, but a womb that humans never entirely leave. The four critical items on our human agenda are: population, development, peace, and environment. All are global; all are local; all are inter-twined; in none have we modern humans anywhere yet achieved a sustainable relationship with our Earth. Perhaps the deepest trouble is this forever putting ourselves first, never putting ourselves in place in the fundamental biosphere community in which we reside. If we ask, What is the matter?, the deepest problem may be this conviction that nothing matters unless it matters to us.

Our welfare, our well-being is a matter of living in sustainable communities, human and natural; this flourishing requires policies and behavior that keep population and development in harmony with landscapes. It is going to be difficult to keep peace with each other, until we are at peace with our environment. What we want is not just "riches," but a "rich life," and appropriate respect for the biodiversity on Earth enriches human life. There is something subjective, something philosophically naive, and even something hazardous in a time of ecological crisis, about living in a reference frame where one species

takes itself as absolute and values every thing else in nature relative to its potential to produce value for itself.

Humans belong on the planet; they will increasingly dominate the planet. But we humans, dominant though we are, want to be a part of something bigger, and this we can only do by sometimes drawing back to recognize the intrinsic values in nature. Unless and until we do this, we cannot truly know who we are and where we are. *Homo sapiens*, we have called ourselves, the wise species. But none of us can truly be wise in ignorance of the intrinsic values in nature.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE ETHICS OF NATURE: NATURE, VALUES AND OUR DUTIES TOWARDS ANIMALS[1]

PÁLL SKÚLASON

I

In this paper, I will be focussing for the most part on three related topics: first, the values of life; second, the view that we humans have of nature; and, third, our duties towards animals. Before addressing these concerns directly, I would like to explain why they are of capital importance today. For a long time, I have felt that the assessment we have of the values of life is deeply inadequate, that we are frequently wrong regarding what really matters, and that we tend to view everything we encounter in the world solely from our own private and very narrow human vantage point. Furthermore, we have a tendency towards a certain self-centredness which invites the idea that we stand above and beyond all other living creatures: that as humans, we are such unique and remarkable beings that our interests should have absolute priority over the interests of other creatures, and that we have the right to manipulate other creatures as we please, guided solely by our own interests. According to this type of thinking, the interests and the rights of other living creatures must always give way to our interests and rights to enjoyment of the values of life.

In my mind, it is quite clear that this view violates the principles of true morality. One of the most important tasks of ethics consists precisely in showing why it is wrong to put such emphasis on especially human interests that, in the end, we cease to take the needs and rights of other creatures into account.

In this short paper, however, it will neither be possible to give a sufficiently thorough account of our human narrow-mindedness nor enter into a detailed analysis of just what it is that separates humans from other animals. Instead, I

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[1] This article first appeared, in Icelandic, under the title „Siðfræði náttúrunnar: Um gæði lífsins, afstöðu manna til náttúrunnar og skyldur okkar gagnvart dýrum", in Páll Skúlason (1991) *Sjö siðfræðilestrar*, Reykjavík, The University of Iceland Press, pp. 27–39.

will let it suffice to specify some important things that all living creatures have in common and, in addition, point out some that set them apart.

Every living creature can be said to consist of two sides: one *passive* (or receptive), the other *active* (or creative). Insofar as the living creature is passive, it is influenced by its environment, undergoes various stimuli, receives communicative messages from other creatures, and so on. Insofar as the living creature is active, it exerts an influence on its environment, performs various functions, emits communicative messages, and so on. In addition to these two aspects, each living creature is furnished with some sort of faculty whose purpose is to join them together, processing the incentives that the creature undergoes and organising its actions. With regard to what sets creatures apart, there are of course numerous possible answers but, in the end, all the possibilities are related to the faculty which creatures have for processing the incentives they undergo and organising their actions. In this regard, the specific character of the human being consists in the fact that its faculty for processing sense data and making plans for action is much more powerful than that of other creatures—for example with regard to the establishment of goals to pursue. In this faculty (or power)—which in everyday parlance goes under the names of reason, rationality, soul, consciousness, mind, spirit, etc.—lies the ability to make it clear to oneself what is for the better and what is for the worse, not only for oneself or other human beings, but also for all other living creatures and even for a given ecosystem. Here, above all, lies the special nature of the human being. It can perceive the values of life in much richer detail than can any other living creature known to us. Education, in the broadest sense of the word, consists in our cultivation of this gift: in gathering knowledge of life and of the world which makes us more capable of appreciating and enjoying the values of life, as well as safeguarding and multiplying those values and ensuring that they are not improperly applied.

But what are those values that life has to offer? In a nutshell, I propose to schematize the values of life as follows. First, there are *mental values* which can be divided into scientific, artistic and technical values. Their main characteristic is that they are unlimited in themselves, there is no need to compete for them and they are said to be enduring or even eternal. Second, there are *worldly values* which consist of economic, political and social values. They are chiefly characterised by the fact that there is a perpetual shortage of them, and therefore people constantly compete for them; furthermore, they are unreliable and fleeting. Third, there are *moral values* which can be subdivided into three categories according to the kind of personal relationship they entail: first, relationships between people in general (whether they are familiar with each other or not); second, close personal relationships (family ties and the bonds of friendship); and third, one's relationship with oneself (manifested, among other

things, in one's self-esteem and one's judgments about oneself). What matters most in all possible relations between people in general is justice and respect for life. In close personal relations, love and friendship play the key role, but for the individual as such, good judgment and freedom are of capital importance. Good judgment is of great value because it provides the individual human being with the key to all other values, whether moral, worldly, or mental: we make use of our judgment when evaluating all the values of life; good judgment enables people to act and think independently.

I will now attempt to demonstrate how these values of life are related to our view of nature, and then discuss a few moral consequences that arise in this context relating to the way we should behave towards animals.

II

We can distinguish three kinds of fundamental views that human beings have of nature:

(1) Nature is what we perceive as outer reality. This is *a subjective view* that involves a conception of nature as the origin of mental values and regards the human being as passive or receptive.

(2) Nature is what we seek to struggle with and to exploit. This is *a practical view* that conceives of nature as the origin of worldly values and considers the human being in its creative or active aspect.

(3) Nature is what we need to reconcile ourselves with and return to. This is *a moral view* that sees nature as the origin of moral values and conceives of the human being as simultaneously receptive and creative, where equal weight is given to these two aspects.

The Subjective View

In the first case, nature is what we can perceive by means of our senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. But we also know from experience that "mother nature" does not reveal herself completely to our senses. She is at once visible and invisible; she is full of mysteries. It appears as if nature has been designed specifically for us to discover and try to understand and, further, for us to play with, for training and disciplining our senses and mental faculties, our imagination, understanding and feelings. Thus, we can safely say that nature amounts to an inexhaustible source of mental values for us: of sciences, arts, sports and games.

This subjective view is sustained by various kinds of emotions, wonder and admiration as well as fear and dismay, with regard to natural forces. We also