

Bridging the Gap between Ethical Holism and the Animal Liberation Movement

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Introduction

Aldo Leopold's *The Land Ethic* (1949) is considered by many to be the seminal text in environmental ethics. He writes that an action is generally good if it preserves the stability, beauty and integrity of the biotic community. This paper supports his view, discussing the moral status of the biotic community. It first discusses the shortcomings of differing views on our moral obligations to the biotic community provided by Singer (1975), Korsgaard (2004) and Nussbaum (2006). It then argues for a distinction between ecosystems and biotic communities in a Land Ethic. It further considers the apparent tension between the Land Ethic and the Animal Liberation Movement regarding the consumption of animal products, as set out by JB Callicott in *The Triangular Affair* (1980). It argues that this alleged ethical conflict is based upon a misunderstanding of the differing scopes and aims of the Animal Liberation Movement and the Land Ethic (also referred to as Ethical Holism). Reactionary to our current meat-eating world, the Animal Liberation Movement has a significantly different scope and aim to Ethical Holism, which proposes a transition to an entirely new ethical framework. The paper's conclusion is twofold: first, that Ethical Holism convincingly asserts that we have direct moral obligations to the biotic community; second, that under an Ethical Holist framework there is no need for an Animal Liberation Movement. As such, there is no real conflict between the two positions.

§1 - Singer and the Cultural Default

Before broaching the triangular dialectic that Callicott's (1980) paper focuses on, we should first introduce the 'default' ethics of Western culture. To borrow Callicott's term, this dominant ethical (or moral) humanism¹ can be generally understood as the view that only humans are morally considerable. The principles and ethical decision-making that guide our actions need only to include human agents in its scope. This rings true in how we talk about ethics in an everyday sense: 'can killing in some circumstances - like self-defence, or by accident - be justified?' 'Are all lies devious or are some acceptable?' and so on. These familiar tropes in ethical discussions contain the implicit premise that the only relevant agents are human.

The philosophical arguments that underpin this position often opt for a capacities-based approach. For example, a Kantian moral humanist might set out an argument that:

1. Rationality is the criterion by which moral considerability is determined.
2. If an entity has the capacity for rational thought, then you have moral obligations towards it. Vice-versa, if an entity lacks the capacity for rational thought, then you do not have moral obligations towards it.
3. Humans have the capacity for rational thought.
4. Non-human animals and non-human natural entities lack the capacity for rational thought.
5. Therefore, we have moral obligations towards humans, and we do not have moral obligations towards non-human animals or natural entities.

In this way, we can see how the inference from (3) to (5) leads to the view that only humans are morally considerable. Non-human animals and natural entities lack the crucial qualification for ethical moral considerability. We should note that this capacity is not always rationality - this argument-form is only intended as a general template for the kinds of reasoning that underpin the default position. It might be adapted to include having interests, being self-aware, having emotions, and so on. The crux of this point is that there is some qualification for ethical considerability (often a capacity) which only humans have.

¹ Callicott, "Animal Liberation," 315.

A significant portion of the ethical literature evaluates this implicit assumption, and this discussion serves as a contextual backdrop to the main points of this essay. A cornerstone position in the literary landscape, and one of the hallmark figures of contemporary ethics, is Peter Singer's preference utilitarianism. In simple terms, utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory of ethics which proposes that there are moral courses of action that we can actually calculate. Whereas the classical utilitarian (under Bentham's calculus and Mill's rules) would restrict the scope of relevant agents to human beings, for this calculation, Singer introduced a value theory founded on 'preferences', and this expands the utilitarian calculus to include non-human animals.

A classical (hedonic) utilitarian might be inclined to conclude that an action is good if and only if it maximises the happiness of all moral agents, or it maximises pleasures of a higher order. This generates the premise:

If x tends to maximize the happiness of all relevant moral agents, then x is good. In simple terms, Singer's revolutionary case was to shift the qualification from any creature which can experience the right happiness or pleasure to any which can experience pain, in light of this, has a preference not to:

'If x tends to maximize the satisfaction of the preferences of all relevant sentient beings, then x is good.'².

Where a non-human animal might have been excluded in the calculation for the moral course of action, Singer expands the utilitarian scope by integrating a more pervasive qualifying standard.

Alongside Singer's developments of modern utilitarianism is a swathe of philosophical issues and moral qualms with the ethic that our culture has historically developed: that factory farms have unlivable and cruel conditions, that the meat industry is a major contributor to increasing environmental damage, that cosmetic testing on non-human animals is unjustifiable, and so on. In some ways, our argument assumes - to some

² Adapted from Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 12.

extent - that the moral humanist position is philosophically untenable and therefore morally objectionable. Moreover, our development of Callicott's *Triangular Affair* (1980) is better contextualised by an understanding of the relevant ethical literature and cultural dialogue; therefore, we will not attempt to expand on all objections to Moral Humanism. Rather, there is room to evaluate Singer's position and the cultural default in terms of a more fundamental problem in the theoretical meta: positing a criterion for ethical considerability.

Singer's more inclusive alternative still draws a line in scoping morally relevant entities for ethical decision-making; we will go on to explain how this is parallel to Kantian Humanism and how Leopold's Ethical Holism provides a radical alternative:

1. Preference is the criterion by which moral considerability is determined.
2. If an entity has the capacity for preferences (a capacity to experience suffering, and the preference to avoid it), then you have moral obligations towards it. If an entity lacks the capacity for preferences, then you do not have moral obligations towards it.
3. Humans and some non-human animals have the capacity for preferences.
4. Other non-human animals and biotic entities lack the capacity for preferences.
5. Therefore, we have moral obligations towards humans and some non-human animals but we do not have moral obligations towards other non-human animals, nor biotic entities.

As is clear, the argumentation structure of (6)-(10) is identical to that of (1)-(5). Thus, rather than addressing the problem with Moral Humanism's argument, all Singer does is shift the goalposts to a new criterion. To cover the triumvirate of classical ethical positions, we will set out the Kantian view and Korsgaard's development, as well as Nussbaum's Virtue Ethics. We show these to be equally guilty to positing a criterion for ethical considerability before setting out Leopold's view.

§2 - Korsgaard and Kantian Ethics

Despite the humanistic foundations of the theory, non-human animals do feature in classical Kantian Ethics. Under the deontological framework (where ethical decision-making is guided by reasoning about what we have *duties* to do), we have direct moral duties to other human beings. According to Kant, only a 'good will' (willing some-ends just because it is right to do so, and not where willing those ends is a constitutive means to some other end) is good (Kant 2012, §1). Human beings have a faculty of reasoning which allows us to work out our moral duties *a priori*. We use this rationality to evaluate which maxims (action-guiding propositions) should become duties. According to these principles, we have direct duties to other humans. Additionally, we have at least some kinds of moral obligations that guide our treatment of non-human animals: our treatment of them reflects our moral character: '[if] he is not to stifle his human feelings[...] must practice kindness towards animals, for he who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men' ³. In other words, we do have moral obligations to non-human animals, but these obligations are indirect. A traditional application of Kantian Ethics to non-human animals might be as follows:

1. In accordance with the Categorical Imperative, our actions towards non-human animals do not themselves relate to moral duties.
2. Our treatment of non-human animals reflects on our moral character (and our treatment of each other).
3. We ought to treat each other with respect and consideration (because of our rationality).
4. Therefore, we should treat non-human animals with respect and consideration.

Maxims become moral duties if they satisfy the various formulations of Categorical Imperative: The Formula of Universal Law, for example, functions as a 'litmus test' for errors in ethical reasoning⁴. Maxims about our treatment of non-human animals cannot pass through the Categorical Imperative - by definition they fail the Formula of Humanity. This stems from a respect for the human capacity for reason. Thus, we do not have direct duties to non-human animals. However, treating them poorly (perhaps in

³ Kant, "*Lectures on Ethics*", 240.

⁴ Wood, "Duties to Oneself, Duties of Respect to Others," 231.

the ways which our cultural default permits) reflects negatively on how we deal with other human beings. It shows a lack of respect for the rationality of others and oneself. Our interactions with and respect for other humans is foundational to Kantian Ethics. We should treat animals with care and respect, even if we do not have strict moral duties towards them. A particularly interesting aspect of a basic application of traditional Kantian Ethics to our treatment of non-human animals is the specification of humans as the 'moral creatures' - much in line with the capacities-based justifications that often underlie moral humanism. Unlike moral humanism, however, traditional Kantian Ethics does not give us license to mistreat other animals.

Korsgaard sets out a defence of Kantian Ethics against issues with indirect moral duties by revisiting the foundational logical structure of Kant's reasoning; in this way, we might consider Korsgaard's theory a development or contemporary interpretation of Kantian Ethics - or at least the Kantian deontology. Unlike an application of traditional Kantian Ethics, Korsgaard argues that the logical basis of Kantian Ethics actually entails *direct* - as opposed to indirect - moral duties towards non-human animals.

1. The difference between being an agent and an object - a 'you' and an 'it' - is incremental rather than black and white, as is acting for reasons that we choose.
2. People are aware of the external world *and* their own beliefs and desires: we can distance ourselves from our beliefs and desires and ask whether we should have them in the first place.

We decide whether a given desire is appropriate grounds for action and, in doing so, either do or do not endorse that desire. We might consider ourselves subjects only to the extent that we engage in this process of rational reflection and legislation (and, for humans, we simply cannot avoid it).

3. To be a subject, we must value ourselves as rational choosers. When we endorse something as an end, we confer value upon it and ourselves. For example, if I value a painting because it is beautiful, then I am endorsing beauty (and so I should value all beautiful paintings): to say otherwise would be inconsistent.

4. In this way, valuing ourselves as rational choosers requires us to value *all* rational choosers.
5. Many non-human animals have goods that they pursue and are - at least implicitly - aware of. In other words, they have an *animal nature* and pursue certain ends which are good to them: at least implicitly, those goods matter to them.
6. Similarly, many of the incentives we rationally endorse act upon our animal natures.

In endorsing them, we implicitly value our animal natures. In the same way as valuing a painting because it is beautiful implies valuing beauty (and valuing beautiful paintings), valuing our animal natures implies valuing animal natures in general.

7. As such, although non-human animals are not part of the rational legislating that happens when we endorse some-ends according to our beliefs and desires, we are committed to valuing their animal natures insofar as we value our own, and therefore have obligations to them.⁵

In traditional Kantian Ethics, the principle of humanity (part of the categorical imperative) arises from our obligation to respect the rational faculty of other human beings. In the first place, it follows that this rational faculty is worthy of respect because it is the exercising of our rationality via acting upon certain beliefs and desires that results in moral action: to choose to act upon a certain desire is to endorse a certain end, and that endorsement should be thought of as an act of moral legislation. Just as valuing a painting for its beauty implies valuing beauty, endorsing a certain course of action implies a moral commitment. We can see how a vital component of Kantian Ethics is the legislative action of a rational moral will. The crux of Korsgaard's defence (and perhaps revision) is that we act upon our animal natures just as non-human animals do, and that the logical consequence of the moral legislation that binds Kantian Ethics is a valuing of animal natures generally: this includes non-human animals. Analogously, consider that - even in a world where women cannot vote - we still have an obligation to respect women's free speech (even though they would not have participated in the legislating of

⁵ Adapted from Korsgaard, "Fellow Creatures: Kantian Ethics and Our Duties to Animals," 100-104.

the right to free speech). Unlike the traditional application, Korsgaard's Kantian Ethics *requires* that we treat animals as ends in themselves - that we respect them in moral terms - because it is an inevitable commitment of the rational moral legislation that comprises the deontological framework.

Korsgaard should be understood as both an evaluation of the indirect duties present in traditional Kantian Ethics as well as an extension of Kant's original reasoning about the Good Will and rational agents. In our estimation, her critique and development is a better way of framing the Kantian approach and illustrates how the Kantian deontological framework can go some way to integrate non-human animals into our ethical thinking. Since our aim is to provide an accurate introduction and layout of the primary approaches to ethical thinking about non-human animals and the biotic community, a more in-depth evaluation of Korsgaard-Kant is unnecessary: the extended (or revised) theory depends upon commitment to the Kantian Good Will, and a narrower focus on the dialectic of Kantian Ethics detracts from a focus on how these ethical theories contextualise our discussion of ethical holism. It is important to note, however, that Korsgaard-Kant commits to the same restriction of ethical scope as Singer's preference utilitarianism and the presuppositions of the cultural default: here, rationality is the barrier to ethical legislature, and 'animal nature' the barrier to moral considerability.

§3 - Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach

A more convincing, yet still narrow to non-human animals, approach to thinking about our moral standing with the biotic community comes from Martha Nussbaum. In her paper, *The Moral Status of Animals* (2006), she introduces the 'capabilities' approach that she goes on to develop in her book. We ought to understand Nussbaum's position in the context of somewhat Aristotelian roots. For Nussbaum, moral goodness is tied-up with the notion of flourishing - or fulfilling innate functions, in terms of Aristotle's

teleology. More specifically, that activities are bad if they inhibit a creature's ability to fulfil those functions which are important and good to it ⁶.

Consider the animal nature of non-human animals that we mentioned in Korsgaard's development of Kantian Ethical reasoning: non-human animals act on their animal nature to pursue particular ends which are good for them. For example, many mammals over-eat during the summer season (assuming their food sources are in abundance, which is usually the case) in order to gain excess fat to keep them warm during the winter months. In Korsgaard's case, these kinds of activities allow us to examine animal nature. However, for Nussbaum, we might consider that these summer feedings are an example of a 'good' for a creature: some course of action that is worthwhile for them. In this way, we can appreciate the case that some courses of action aim towards an end which is a constitutive means to an improved state of living for a creature.

However, that might look different for different creatures. Nussbaum points out that we are likely quite familiar with what a flourishing human life looks like but that we are relatively ignorant of what it might mean for anything non-human. So, the virtue ethicist's practical wisdom and recognition of this species-bias comes into play. Consider a tiger in captivity at a zoo. For human beings, we'd condemn violence in light of our capacity for rationality; however, violent predation is part of a tiger's natural activity and it might turn out to be detrimental if we impose the same standards for activity on the tiger as we do ourselves. So, Nussbaum calls for common-sense solutions appropriate to the context. Perhaps mirroring the intensity of the hunt with weighted toys and dynamic activities - in spite of the artificial habitat - is closer to the kinds of activity that the tiger requires to pursue ends that are good for it in the wild.

We should also note, however, that there might be difficulties in extrapolating a useful evaluative standard for some creatures, or for certain kinds of experience which are constitutive of flourishing. For example, our account of what it is to flourish for a bat might be incomplete if we consider that we may not have access to the phenomenal

⁶ Nussbaum, "The Moral Status of Animals," 2-8.

experience of actually *being* a bat; if there are such conditions, then grasping the nature of flourishing for non-human animals might be unfeasible⁷.

In essence, Nussbaum calls us to consider the capacities of sentient beings, human or otherwise, so that we can navigate our moral activity according to our best understanding of what is detrimental to the flourishing of others. The idea is that the practice of developing our own virtue is inextricable with mindfulness of the capacities of other sentient beings, so we have no licence to treat circus animals as we do, or maintain factory farming, or harsh experimentation. A key difference that we should keep in mind is that Nussbaum also specifies the threshold for ethical considerability as sentience - the capabilities for different creatures, that moral agents should use their practical wisdom to apprehend, are only explained in terms of sentient non-human animals, so we are not obliged to act in consideration of the capacities of a plant, stone, or non-sentient invertebrate.

Despite its sensitivity, however, Nussbaum's capacities approach echoes the same line for ethical considerability as the presuppositions of the cultural default, Singer's preference utilitarianism, and Korsgaard-Kant's duties approach. In the case of each primary ethical theory, there is some restriction of scope due to a particular qualifying capacity, and herein lies the turning-point in our introduction to the ethical literature and theoretical meta. Inspired by a more holistic approach to ethical thinking about non-human animals - but also the environment and biotic community more generally - Leopold introduces an alternative which is more expansive in scope.

§4 - Leopold and Ethical Holism

As discussed, Nussbaum's virtue ethic environmentalism is an attractive view with some unattractive features – namely its threshold at sentience for moral considerability, and the difficulty of identifying what flourishing might be for some individual creature. We argue that Ethical Holism can grant non-human animals direct moral obligations in the

⁷ (Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?" 435–456.

way Nussbaum desires. It can also go further than Nussbaum: rather than capping considerability at sentience, Ethical Holism can grant the abiotic community indirect moral obligations.

Ethical Holism can be viewed as a communitarian virtue ethic. It looks to cultivate certain virtues for the community, rather than an individual. The Land Ethic is Leopold's attempt to establish Ethical Holism⁸. The fundamental principle of the Land Ethic is that the good of the biotic community is the ultimate measure of the moral value of actions, or that an action is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community."⁹

Ethical Holism requires us to reconceive the natural landscape as a unified system of integrally related parts, rather than as a set of individuals or a network of intricate relations. In doing so, we see that we are part of a biotic community in the same way we are part of a human community. Leopold (1949) looks to extend the moral obligations we have towards our human community to the biotic community. He refers to 'the Land', which includes soils, waters, plants, and animals. Our actions are morally assessed upon the good of the biotic community (its beauty, stability and integrity).

The mountain discussed by Leopold¹⁰ provides an example of this moral assessment. From a naïve perspective, we condemn the wolf for killing the deer. However, if the wolf were removed from the mountain, the deer population would boom, and the mountain's shrubbery would be decimated. Over time, the deer would starve to death and die at a faster rate without the wolf. So, the stability of the biotic community is maintained by the wolf. Similarly, whilst a moral humanist might advocate for a wolf-less mountain to promote safer hiking, this would compromise the integrity of the biotic community. Further, because the removal of the wolf would cause the destruction of shrubbery by overpopulated deer and reduce ecological diversity, the beauty of the biotic community would also be compromised.

⁸ Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," 324-325.

⁹ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 224-225.

¹⁰ Leopold, *Thinking Like a Mountain*, 1-2.

Unlike the other ethical theories discussed, Ethical Holism is not built from determining any threshold for moral consideration. Instead, it is constructed from the aim of maintaining the beauty, stability and integrity of the biotic community. Anything and everything relevant to this end is morally considerable.

In *Against the Moral Considerability of Ecosystems* (1988), Cahen challenges this grounding principle, arguing that we should not recognise moral obligations to 'the Land', because an ecosystem cannot be morally considerable. One only has direct moral obligations towards an entity X if X is morally considerable. For Cahen, X is morally considerable if and only if: X has interests, it would be prima facie wrong to frustrate X's interests, and the wrongness of frustrating X's interests is direct. As such, key members of Leopold's 'Land', such as soil and water, cannot have moral considerability, and so Leopold's grounding principle seems flawed. The Land Ethic incoherently forces us to extend obligation to inanimate objects: how could one morally wrong a rock? Cahen does, however, grant moral considerability to plants and animals upon the capacity of goal-directedness: the interest of achieving biological goals.

We argue that this distinction between goal-directed biotic entities as morally considerable and abiotic entities as morally inconsiderable remains coherent with Leopold's theory. Despite naming his theory 'the Land Ethic', writing from a mountain's perspective, and including soils and waters in his community, Leopold frames his grounding ethical principle in terms of the biotic community. Contrarily, Cahen's objection is with direct moral obligations to ecosystems, which include the biotic (animals, plants) and abiotic community (waters, soils). Although the Land Ethic does suggest we have moral obligations towards abiotic aspects of ecosystems, Leopold only explicitly claims that we have direct moral obligations toward the biotic community. The biotic community is the subclass of 'the Land' to which we have direct moral obligations.

In the Land Ethic, anything that contributes to the virtues of the biotic community is morally considerable. However, moral considerability is not equivalent to being the

subject of direct moral obligations. We argue that the Land Ethic can coherently suggest that we hold indirect obligations towards abiotic members of an ecosystem in virtue of their vital role in preserving the beauty, stability and integrity of the biotic community. It is incoherent to have a direct obligation to a rock, but coherent to have an indirect obligation to that rock due to the woodlice living underneath it and the salamander who uses it to bask in sunlight. Continuing the analogy between human and natural community, one is obligated not to damage abiotic parts of the community just as one is obligated not to damage the homes and livelihoods of other people. Leopold does discuss extending the bounds of the community to include soils and other abiotic members, but we view this as granting such members indirect duties, rather than direct ones.

It is unclear whether Leopold would agree with us – he does not give much thought to the difference between the biotic community and the Land. However, this is not hugely important. We hope that he would make a similar distinction if given the chance but, if not, all we are presenting is an alternative version of Ethical Holism, heavily inspired by Leopold's view. Thus, as we continue to mention the Land Ethic, we discuss it as if Leopold would agree with our distinction. We have direct moral obligations to members of the biotic community, and indirect moral obligations to the abiotic members of the Land. Given this clarification, the Land Ethic does not assert moral considerability of ecosystems (just their moral importance) and thus avoids Cahen's critique.

§5 - The Triangular Affair

Ethical Holism is able to claim direct moral obligations for non-human animals and maintain that ecosystems in their entirety are morally considerable. We view this as a distinct advantage over the moral default and the ethical theories of Singer, Korsgaard and Nussbaum. Thus, we view Ethical Holism as the desirable moral position for any environmental ethicist to hold. However, in his paper *The Triangular Affair* (1980), Callicott presents an apparent tension between Ethical Holism as a normative theory and the current views of actual environmental activists in the Animal Liberation

Movement and Ethical Veganism groups. He believes this threatens the credibility of Ethical Holism as a foundation for environmental activism and ethics.

Here is the issue: the Land Ethic does not condemn the killing and eating of animals; in fact, at times, Leopold stresses the ecological, and therefore moral, importance that the hunter possesses. Upon the mountain, the wolf hunting deer was presented as morally good. Contrarily, the Animal Liberation Movement and Ethical Veganism condemn the slaughter of animals, consumption of animal products, and the entire meat industry as unethical and cruel. The agricultural industry is contributing to the climate emergency. Ethical Vegans also criticise the lack of moral consistency in the default view: if we view consent to be important (specifically in the contexts of harvesting the labour of another person or appropriating their property), then treatment of non-human animals without consent is at least analogously problematic. If it is morally permissible to skin a cow to make leather, then a morally consistent person ought to have few qualms about skinning a person with similar cognitive capacities. Singer's critique of Moral Humanism is a fundamental tenet of the Animal Liberation Movement.

This seems to present a clear contrast to the Land Ethic. Contemporary, applied environmentalism seems at odds with the foundational theory. This suggests that either the Animal Liberation Movement is flawed, or the Land Ethic is an inadequate basis for extending moral obligations to the biotic community. Given the difficulty of ignoring the horrors of factory farming and animal abuse, it is unlikely a convincing argument can be made against the moral claims of the Animal Liberation Movement.

However, in examining the scope and aims of both the Animal Liberation Movement and the Land Ethic, we can see that they do not conflict. The Animal Liberation Movement (and Ethical Veganism) is a direct response to Moral Humanism, our current ethical framework – people have seen the treatment of animals in the meat, clothing and pharmaceutical industries, as well as terrible environmental impact, and condemned the action of these industries. Ethical Veganism protests the way animals are cruelly and unsustainably used and butchered, whilst the Animal Liberation Movement protests the

mistreatment of animals in all major industries. Importantly, though, this moral objection is not against the specific act of killing an animal. This distinction is not often made but is important: Ethical Vegans would not coherently condemn a wolf for killing a deer, and so cannot label the killing and eating of an animal as inherently morally wrong. They might respond that we know better than the wolf, and so should not eat meat, but this too is unsustainable: if one were to oppose the eating of animals on the basis of moral considerability (our direct moral obligations towards animals), then one would also be unable to eat plants, as they too are morally considerable (as shown by Cahen). It is not that eating meat is morally wrong, it is that the current system of eating meat is morally wrong.

The Land Ethic is completely distinct from these movements in scope and aims. It is not reactionary to contemporary society; its scope is wider: it is a new ethical framework that Leopold is looking to be cultivated within society. The Land Ethic does not attempt to solve the issue of the immoral treatment of animals from within a current ethical framework. It looks to establish a new ethical framework altogether.

Leopold would also object to the system of factory farming, cruel slaughter and the environmentally unsustainable meat industry on account of the damage it causes to the integrity, beauty and stability of the biotic community. However, in an Ethical Holist society – which the Land Ethic looks to create – everything from city and family planning to commerce and diet would be designed around Leopold's grounding principle. In this society, neither the Animal Liberation Movement, nor Ethical Veganism, would coherently exist. The consumption of certain animals might be morally important, whilst our agricultural industry would be built upon virtues that prevent morally abhorrent practices. The project of the Land Ethic is in accordance with the intuitive ethical principles of these contemporary environmentalist groups.

This, though, leads to another clash between intuition and the logical consequences of the Land Ethic, as mentioned by ¹¹. In genuinely following the Land Ethic, the value of a

¹¹ Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," 326.

human life would be inversely proportional to the population of the species (in the same way as deer). Human overpopulation is undeniably a severe environmental issue and seems to present the Land Ethic with a dilemma: either it is anthropocentrically insincere (in that it condemns for humans what it promotes for deer), or it advocates for – among other unsavoury positions – the culling of the human population. Callicott provides solutions to this issue which bite the bullet and defend human culling, such as Plato’s advocacy of infanticide¹².

We do not find this solution convincing for three reasons. Firstly, an adequate basis for environmental ethics should not force us into mass culling or infanticide when we have other options available. We ought to be cautious of moral systems that advocate righteous extermination of human beings. Secondly, we do not have to mirror the cruelty of the natural world in our solutions to environmental issues – the goal is to reduce the ecological impacts of human population size, not to reduce population size in the same way that nature might. Softer measures, such as incentives for sustainability, greater sex education, and family planning regulations would allow us to resolve overpopulation humanely. Mill (1874) has convincingly written on the absurdity of necessitating precise conformity to nature. Thirdly, the Land Ethic presents Ethical Holism as an end point, not something we ought to change overnight – Leopold consistently discusses the development of a Land Ethic. The drastic measures suggested by Callicott are unnecessarily short-sighted. As such, the Land Ethic is able to convincingly assert direct moral obligations to the biotic community, and - in virtue of the biotic community - assert indirect moral obligations to the abiotic community. It can do so without being forced into unsavoury moral conclusions.

Conclusion

There remain issues with Ethical Holism and the Land Ethic. Any ethical maxim containing the word “generally” is philosophically unsatisfying in its ambiguity – this is something Callicott (1988) critiques of Warren’s environmentalism. This “generally”

¹² Callicott, “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair,” 326-329.

encompasses many situations which the Land Ethic might describe as good, and which we do not: if a bear kills a hiking family who tend to litter, we do not see that as morally good, despite the fact that the stability, integrity and beauty of the wood is preserved; if a virus kills a town of loggers in the Amazon, we do not celebrate a moral victory. There are also issues of the hierarchy of members' interests, and the fascinating question of the extent of our obligations to micro-biotic organisms.

These problems present opportunities for further exploration into Ethical Holism and the moral theory behind environmental ethics. However, these issues need not be resolved to accept that Ethical Holism extends direct moral obligations to the biotic community, and indirect moral obligations to ecosystems. The current moral default is clearly morally problematic - many of our current agricultural practices are morally and environmentally abhorrent. Further, the moral theories of Singer, Korsgaard and Nussbaum each show themselves to be unconvincing by placing arbitrary thresholds upon moral considerability. We have shown Ethical Holism to coherently establish moral obligations to the biotic community, and to be consistent with the goals and aims of current environmentalists. We have also shown that it avoids morally unsustainable conclusions, such as advocating human population culling, without being humanocentrically insincere. We ought to begin to use the Land Ethic to transition towards a realisation of Ethical Holism.

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