

## A Fast Introduction to Environmental Ethics

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### Today's reading had...

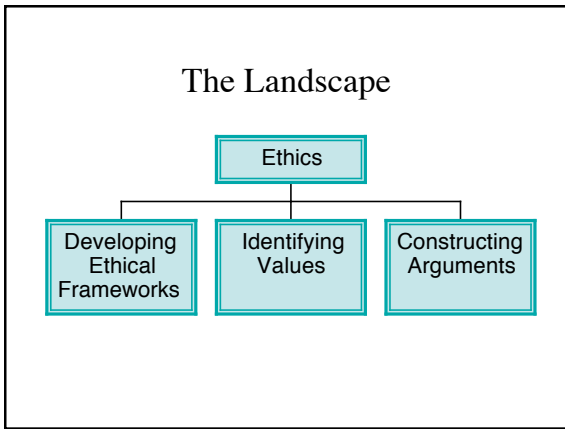
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Issue	Percentage
1. A page that was too blurry to read	26%
2. A missing page	72%
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### Singer criticizes economists specifically for...

1. Discounting the future 35%
2. Ignoring aesthetic values 29%
3. Anthropocentrism (human-centeredness) 35%

Criticism	Percentage
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## Ethical Reasoning

Ethical reasoning is the means by which moral agents determine morally acceptable actions giving due consideration to all those deserving of moral concern.

We ask:

- (1) What should we do?
- (2) Why should it be done? (justification)
- (3) How should it be done? (policy)

### Salmon Species of the Pacific Northwest

1. What? Salmon extinction should be prevented.
2. Why? Because extinction of any species is undesirable.
3. How? Pull down dams along the Columbia and Snake Rivers.

**Salmon Species of the Pacific Northwest**

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2. Why? Because extinction of any species is undesirable.  
Why? Because...?
3. How? Pull down dams along the Columbia and Snake Rivers.

**Salmon Species of the Pacific Northwest**

1. What? Salmon extinction should be prevented.
2. Why? Because extinction of any species is undesirable.  
Why? Because...?
3. How? Pull down dams along the Columbia and Snake Rivers.  
But pulling down dams is undesirable too!

**Salmon Species of the Pacific Northwest**  
Revised reasoning

1. What? Salmon extinction should be prevented.
2. Why? Extinction is undesirable and should not be allowed unless prevention will cause other more significant harms.
3. How? Develop technology for “fish ladders” to mitigate the effects of the dams.

**Different sorts of claims**

- Empirical claims
  - describe states of affairs in the world
  - can be true or false
  - To know whether a given claim is true or false, we need to know certain things about the world.
- Normative claims
  - describe what ought or ought not to be the case or what ought or ought not to be done
  - concern values

**Values**

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- Instrumental  
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⇒ substitutes

## Sustainability

- **Obligation:** Equivalence of some sort  
"An obligation to conduct ourselves so that we leave to the future the option or capacity to be as well off as we are" (Robert Solow).
- **Worry:** Resource depletion

BUT Instrumental values always allow substitutes

- **Instrumental optimism**  
"There is no necessity either in logic or in historical trends to suggest that the supply of any given resource is 'finite'" (Julian Simon).

## Ethical Frameworks

### Rights Theories

Individuals possess certain prerogatives to act, choose, or be in particular states and it is the duty of moral agents to accord, or not interfere, with these prerogatives.

Moral Principle: Act in accordance with the rights of others.

- the primary concept is the "right"
- stress is on what is permissible;  
duties are entailed to insure "permissibility"

### Utilitarian Theories

**Utility:** a measure of whatever one takes to be intrinsically good  
(e.g. pleasure, happiness, or well-being)

**Total Net Utility:** for a given act, the sum of all individual utilities for the collective under consideration

Moral Principle: Act so as to maximize Total Net Utility.

[In other words, do that which brings the greatest good for the greatest number of individuals.]

### Moral Considerability

Who counts? Why?

Traditional ethical frameworks are anthropocentric.

Humans are the creatures deserving of moral consideration.

Challenges:

- issues of distribution and justice
- the individual vs. the social
- responsibilities to future generations

### Climate Change

- **Distributional equity and Global justice**  
Must all countries adopt the same restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions?
- **Obligations to future generations**  
How can we have obligations to persons that do not exist?
- **Uncertainty + risk**  
How do we handle uncertainty in our empirical knowledge and in the likely outcomes of our actions?

**Moral Considerability**  
Who counts? Why?

Traditional ethical frameworks are anthropocentric.

But if we ask “why?”...

Possible grounding:

- high cognitive function/rational capacities
- sentience (experiential)
- having interests
- being alive

**Moral Considerability**  
Who (or what) counts? Why?

When we look for the dividing line, it is not at all clear that **only** humans will be worthy of moral consideration.

⇒ non-anthropocentrism

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Are mountains? ecosystems?

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Individualism vs. Holism

**Peter Singer’s Position**

- utilitarian
- non-anthropocentric
- individualist

Grounding: sentience  
(pain and pleasure as the measure of utility)

BUT this excludes non-sentient living things, and thus, presumably, any “holistic” entities.

Sticky issues: gradations of intrinsic value  
“interests” versus “sentience”

**Aldo Leopold’s Land Ethic**

The Moral Principle:  
"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise".

Built upon a newly acquired, ecological understanding of the biological world...

⇓

The Land Pyramid

"All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts... The land ethic simply enlarges the boundary of the community..."

"It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without... a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense."

### Deep Ecology

Two Basic Norms:

1) Self-Realization:

- identification
- self-in-Self

2) Biocentric Equality:

All living things have equal right to live and flourish.

All living things are equal in intrinsic value.

(careful: "living" is used very broadly here)

### Summary of central concepts

- Values: intrinsic, instrumental
- Claims: empirical, normative
- Moral considerability
- Anthropocentrism vs. non-anthropocentrism
- Individualism vs. Holism
- Ethical frameworks: Rights theory, Utilitarianism, Land Ethic, Deep Ecology