Philosophica 39, 1987 (1), pp. 3–10

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

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I

This journal is probably the first philosophical journal on the European continent to devote an entire issue to environmental ethics. In the Anglosaxon world not only whole journal issues, but complete journals are concerned with environmental ethics. This is why most contributors to this special issue of *Philosophica* are Anglosaxon and not continental philosophers. The papers they present here are the outcome of a tradition that has its academic origin in the early seventies and its historical roots in the 19th century. In order to understand their coherence and to have a better grasp on their philosophical frame of reference, it is worthwhile, therefore, to have a look at the intellectual ancestry of contemporary environmental ethics. Such a retreat in the past may also prove to bring up an explanation of the curious absence of environmental ethics on the European continent.

II

One of the first authors to make frequent use of the term "environmental ethics" was Lynton Keith Caldwell. For Caldwell, the environmental crisis must be understood against the background of the way in which the dominant Western philosophical tradition has portrayed man's relationship with nature. In this tradition man is viewed as the legitimate ruler over nature and nature as valuable insofar as it is valued by man. This traditional moral point of view must be abandoned, Caldwell argues, or else we will be saddled with major environmental disasters. Instead, a new ethic, an environmental ethic must be developed. In this ethic nature will be accorded not merely instrumental, but also intrinsic value.[1]

Caldwell's ideas were not original. Three years earlier the historian Lynn White had already created quite a stir by stigmatizing the Judeo-Christian heritage as the chief culprit of the environmental crisis. In White's view, the Judeo-Christian

tradition had offered man a license for the unbridled exploitation of nature. Therefore, White argued, it should be replaced by a religious view, such as Franciscus of Assisi's, that substitutes "the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man's limitless rule of creation."[2]

The writings of Caldwell and White were part of what denigratingly has been labeled "ecological doomsday literature", i.e., the kind of popularizing literature about the environment that came into being in the late sixties and early seventies, simultaneously with the rising public concern about the environment. The public's sudden awareness of the seriousness of environmental problems[3] and the resulting crisis-atmosphere explain why so many writers were inclined to produce prophecies of impending doom and why pleas for a new ethic or religion were so abundant. It suffices to browse through the vulgarizing ecological literature of around 1970 to be overwhelmed by this crisis-atmosphere and, consequently, to understand how the environmental crisis came to be perceived as a value-crisis, only to be solved by far-reaching value shifts.[4]

Not surprisingly, the idea that the environmental crisis is a value-crisis also occupied a central place in the first academic philosophical writings on environmental ethics. In "Ethics and Ecology", for instance, William Blackstone argued "that the basic causes of the environmental crisis are mistaken values and attitudes and that the resolution of the crisis will require a transvaluation of values."[5] Similarly, Richard Routley argued on the fifteenth world congress of philosophy that there is a need for a new, an environmental ethic.[6] And in 1975 Holmes Rolston III undertook the first full-fledged attempt to justify such an ethic.[7] Not everyone in the philosophically community agreed with these authors, though. Passmore, for one, stressed that "conventional morality suffices to justify our ecological concern."[8] He and others thereby triggered of a debate on the necessity and possibility of an environmental ethic that still hasn't subdued.[9]

Contrary to any possible suggestion so far, environmental ethics is not solely preoccupied with the value of the environment or nature as a whole. The moral aspects of man's treatment of animals require an equal attention. Academic interest in this topic dates from the early and mid-seventies.[10] It is quite probable that also in this case the heightened environmental awareness provided a powerful impetus to more intensive intellectual reflections on the subject. On the other hand, it would be shortsighted to explain the occurrence of academic interest in environmental ethics as a mere result of the environmental crisis.

Both the concern with animal welfare and with the state of

non-animal nature have roots that go back to at least the 19th century. In his *Man and the Natural World* Keith Thomas has argued convincingly that already between 1500 and 1800 a whole cluster of changes occurred which "[redefined] the relationship of man to other species" and "[challenged] his right to exploit those species for his own advantage".[11] In the 19th century those changes materialized, first in England and later in the United States, in the form of Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals that exercised a powerful influence on the public's attitudes towards the "brute creation".[12] Concern with non-animal nature was somewhat neglected in this process, but resurfaced at the end of the 19th century as conservation movements got a foothold in all major industrialized countries. Especially in the United States the conservation ideology flourished;[13] this may partly explain why the development of environmental ethics as an academic discipline has been most pronounced in America. Similarly, the current lack of interest in environmental ethics on the European continent can be in part understood in view of the relative weakness of its 19th century animal welfare and conservation movements. There is however, another and more important reason for this difference between the Anglosaxon world and the European continent.

It must be observed in this respect that the Anglosaxon environmental movements are politically much more moderate than their continental European counterparts. The former fight their opponents in the courts and seek the support of established political figures, whereas the latter chose the path of direct action and follow a political *Fundamental-opposition*-course. As a result, philosophical arguments that may be put to use in legal and legislative battles play a much more predominant role in the Anglosaxon than in the continental European world.[14] As a further result, environmental ethics is more at home in the reformism of Anglosaxon environmentalism than in the turbulence of continental European environmentalism.

III

The contributions to this issue can be divided in two groups: those that work within the animal welfare-tradition and those that embroider on the conservationist heritage. The papers of Regan, Frey, Pluhar and Attfield belong to the first class, those of Birnbacher, Callicott, and De Roose to the second class.

Tom Regan has for more than a decade been the most active philosophical defender of animal rights. His monumental *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of Cali-

fornia Press, 1983) indicates that he is probably also its most able defender. For those that are familiar with this work "Pigs in Space", Regan's contribution to this journal, offers a nice summary of his thoughts. For those that are less acquainted with Regan's philosophy, his contribution may prove to be an excellent introduction to some of the most ticklish affairs in animal ethics, notably the so-called argument from marginal cases and the relationship between the mental capacities of animals and their moral status.

The argument from marginal cases is further discussed in the next two contributions by Evelyn Pluhar and Raymond Frey. Their minute analyses of the argument provide the most extensive as well as the most intensive discussion of the subject so far and are, consequently, difficult to summarize here. Suffice it to say that their conclusions radically differ. To Pluhar the argument from marginal cases points out the untenability of "the assumption that the boundaries of moral rights and moral considerability are set by personhood or humanity". To Frey, on the other hand, the argument falls short of showing the "equality in value between animal and human life" because there "is no such presumed equality in the defective/normal human case".

In "Biocentrism, Moral Standing and Moral Significance" Robin Attfield further elaborates on some themes already discussed in his *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983). More specifically, he first criticizes Taylor's well-known defense of biocentrism[15] and then goes on to present his own theory. Attfield accords moral standing to all living beings, but avoids biotic egalitarianism by attributing special moral significance to the capacities for consciousness and sentience. Therefore, he stands closer to theories in the animal welfare tradition than to the holist approach of the conservationist tradition.

Both Birnbacher and De Roose try in their contributions to bridge the gap between these two traditions. Birnbacher argues that ethical principles can only pertain to sentient nature, but also holds that there are good reasons to embrace some "ecological principles" as non-ethical guiding principles. He, thus, tries to preserve what is attractive in environmental holism -- "its faithfulness to the experience of nature" --, while discarding its burdensome metaphysical and axiological assumptions. De Roose sets out for a similar task; he criticizes several axiological foundations of ethical holism and points out that axiology itself is unfit as a basis for an environmental holist ethic. He consequently, tries to develop a non-axiological approach that centers around the ideal of harmony with nature.

Callicott concludes this issue with the presentation of an

ecological world-view or, as he calls it, "an organismic myth". This myth should provide us with "a conceptual framework, imaginative climate, and spiritual-emotional tonality tailor-made for meeting the challenge to human survival". Whatever one may think about this organismic myth, it will indeed be clear from Callicott's contribution that environmental ethics and human survival are closely linked. Therefore, it would be hopeful if this *Philosophica*-issue would further stimulate the environmental ethics-study, not only in the Anglosaxon world, but also on the European continent.

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NOTES

1. Caldwell, *Environment. A Challenge for Modern Society.* Garden City, N.Y.: Natural History Press, 1970, esp. pp. 231-251.
2. Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", *Science* 155 (March 10, 1967), p. 1207.
3. Erskine has depicted this sudden awareness of environmental problems as "a miracle of public opinion": "Alarm about the environment", she says, "sprang from nowhere to major proportions in a few short years. When the first polls on pollution appeared in 1965, only about one in ten considered the problem very serious. Today most people have come to that realization". (Erskine H., "The Polls: Pollution and Its Costs", *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 [1972], p. 120).
4. Joseph Petulla has observed that this crisis-atmosphere even pervades the titles of books of this period, such as *Silent Spring, The Closing Circle* and *The Population Bomb*: "Spring will be silent because no wildlife will be left in the wake of the increased use of insecticides, the world itself is beginning to suffocate as the circle of modern technology closes in around us, or it will be wiped away by a time bomb ticking under all of us..." (Petulla. *American Environmentalism. Values, Tactics, Priorities.* London: Texas A&M University Press, 1980, p. 99).
5. William T. Blackstone, "Ethics and Ecology", in William T. Blackstone, ed. *Philosophy and Environmental Crisis.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974, pp. 16-42. The quotation is from Blackstone's "Introduction" (p. 3) to the contributions.
6. Richard Routley, "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?" *Proceedings of the XVth World Congress of Philosophy.* Sofia, 1973, I, pp. 205-210.

7. "Is there an Ecological Ethic?" *Ethics* 85 (1975), 93-109. Other early, philosophical articles that are relevant with respect to the quest for a new, environmental ethic are Thomas B. Colwell, "The Balance of Nature: A Ground for Human Values," *Main Currents in Modern Thought* 26 (1969), 46-52, James A. Keller, "Types of Motives for Ecological Concern", *Zygon* 6 (1971), pp. 197-209, E.M. Adams, "Ecology and Value Theory", *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 10 (1972), pp. 13-16 and Arne Naess, "The Shallow and Deep Long-Range Ecology Movement", *Inquiry* 16 (1973), pp. 95-100.
8. John Passmore. *Man's Responsibility for Nature.* London: Gerald Duckworth, 1974, p. 187.
9. Worthwile to consult in this respect are the articles in K.E. Goodpaster, K.M. Sayre. ed. *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century.* Notre Dame & London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979, in D.S. Mannison, M.A. McRobbie and R. Routley, eds. *Environmental Philosophy.* Canberra: Australian National University, Department of Philosophy, 1980, in Donald Scherer, Thomas Attig, eds. *Ethics and the Environment.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1983, in Robert Eliot, Arran Gare, eds. *Environmental Philosophy. A Collection of Readings.* University Park & London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983, in Donald Van De Veer, Christine Pierce, ed. *People, Penguins, and Plastic Trees: Basic Issues in Environmental Ethics.* Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth, 1986, and, of course, many contributions to *Environmental Ethics.*
10. The most influential publication of that period was Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation.* N.Y.: Avon, 1975. Less popular and more academic are Joel Feinbergs "The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations", in Blackstone, ed. *Philosophy and the Environmental Crisis*, pp. 43-68 and Tom Regans "The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 5 (1975), pp. 181-214.
11. Keith Thomas. *Man and the Natural World. A History of the Modern Sensibility.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1983, p. 15.
12. For an account of the development of the animal welfare movement in the 19th century see James Turner. *Reckoning with the Beast. Animals, Pain and Humanity in the Victorian Mind.* Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1980.
13. See on this Joseph Petulla. *American Environmental History. The Exploitation and Conservation of Natural Resources.* San Francisco: Boyd & Fraser, 1977 and Stephen Fox. *John Muir and His Legacy. The American Conservation Movement.* Boston & Toronto: Little, Brown & Co., 1981.
14. This is exemplified by the fact that some treatises in envi-

ronmental ethics, such as Christopher Stone's *Should Trees Have Standing?* Los Altos, Cal.: William Kaufman, 1974, were specifically written in order to support the environmental movement's legal actions.

15. Taylor's theory has recently appeared in booklength format under the title *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.