

Introductory lecture on Environmental Ethics: the  
frames of moral consideration in Environmental  
Ethics

# Ethics

- Derived from greek word *ethos* – custom, morals
- Latin word *mos*, from which term „morality” is derived and meant originally „will”. It means also will imposed on people (by gods or emperors), namely law & regulations and later traditional customs.
- Philosophical discipline that defines rules and norms of human conduct in terms of good and evil
- In ancient times way to achieve **moralized** happiness

# Environmental Ethics

- **Environmental Ethics** is the discipline in philosophy that studies the **moral relationship of human beings** to, and also the **value** and **moral status** of, the **environment and its nonhuman contents**.
- It challenges the **anthropocentrism** (i.e., humancenteredness) embedded in traditional western ethical thinking
- 2 basic questions of Environmental Ethics:
  - Values and norms
  - Whom should we include, the range of ethics

# Why environmental Ethics was started?

- Perception of environmental crisis
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ipbc-6IvMQI>
- Recognition of the role of ethics as an instrument to overcome ecological crisis
- Attempt to overcome instrumental approach to nature
- Recognition that not only man should be subject of moral norms
- Attempt to broaden scope of ethics

# Frames of moral reflection

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Which beings are morally relevant?

# The concentric circles approach

Who is morally considerable?:

- Should the circle of moral considerability encompass only oneself (egoism)?
- Only one's family (nepotism)?
- Only one's fellow citizens (patriotism)?
- All of the humanity (anthropocentrism)?
- All sentient beings (sentientism, animal ethics)?
- All living individuals (biocentric individualism)?
- All ecosystems (ecocentrism)?
  
- The circles are overlapping, plus there are beings which are difficult to classify

# Anthropocentric ethics

- Greek *ἄνθρωπος* (human being) + *κέντρον* (center)
- Accepts and emphasizes the dominance of human being
- Human being is rational, responsible and has free will, that's why man is the crown of creation
- Is this the historical root of our environmental crisis (Lynn White jr., 1967) ?
- All traditional ethics is anthropocentric.
- Enlightened anthropocentrism (or prudential anthropocentrism) acknowledges human's obligation towards nature. Usually due to human interest, for example it might support the idea of nature protection, because human beings need nature to live.

# Anthropocentric ethics

- What is the historical root of our environmental crisis (Lynn White jr., 1967) ?
- Lynn White wrote an article in which he blames Judeo-christian religions for anthropocentrism. He claims that the thesis that man was created God-like made human beings think they are special



# Biocentric ethics

- Greek: βίος(life) + κέντρον (center)
- It widens scope of ethics to all living and sentient creatures
- It doesn't approve privileged position of man
- It claims that every living creature has an intrinsic value

- Paul Taylor's biocentric egalitarianism
- **Individualistic (not holistic - as is Leopold's land ethic):**
  - **Individual organisms** (not species or ecosystems or natural processes) **are what has moral standing/worth**
  - Taylor thinks his individualism follows from his biocentrism, as only individuals are alive.
- **Humans are nonprivileged members of the earth's community of life.**
- **All organisms are teleological (=goal-directed) centers**
- **Respect to nature leads to respect towards the other human being**

# Holistic ethics

- Greek: ὅλος (all, whole, entire, total)
- Cover its range not only living creatures but also nonliving elements of environment
- All biosphere elements has an intrinsic value
- It emphasizes the obligations of man towards biosphere
- It expects man to sacrifice himself for biosphere, as it claims that biosphere is higher good than individual man.

- Aldo Leopold, Baird Callicot – biotic community, all the organisms and ecosystems are part of one community and our ingeretation in some part of the ecosystem influence the other parts of it.

# Animal ethics

- Is a result of care of animal welfare
- It was started as an protest against mean practices (for example massive production of animals, animal testing, using animals for science as guinea pig or for entertainment where animals are included)

# Animal ethics

## Critique :

- The key issue is question whether animals have any rights if so what kind of rights are these
- Opponents argues that because of low mental development animals do not have any rights