An Introduction to Conservation Ethics

What is Ethics? Philosophical inquiry to answer the questions:

"What is good?"
"What is to be praised and blamed?"
"What actions have quality?"

A. Teleological (Consequential)

The morality of an activity relies upon the outcome of their non-moral consequences

John Stewart Mill considered the ratio of good:evil, where:

good = happiness and bad = unhappiness

Good actions maximizes this ratio.

Other types of 'good' can exist, including: knowledge, beauty, power

Types of Utilitarianism

1. Egoism: An act is moral when it best promotes an individual's long-term interests

Objections: logically inconsistent; no single moral code exists; can't obtain council from others

2. Utilitarianism: An act is moral then it produces the greatest possible ratio of good to evil for all concerned

No time frame given! Thus is short term generates good but more evil happens as a result in the long term then the action is unethical.

    a. <u>Act Utilitarianism</u>: The right act is the one which produces
                the greatest good to evil

    b. <u>Rule Utilitarianism</u>: The right act is determined by the consequences
                of the rule under which the action falls

Objections: Do the ends always justify the means?

Consequences of actions are not quantifiable: a universal evil-meter does not exist!

Hard (impossible?) to formulate a rule: Don't lie. Or, don't intentionally lie? Or…

3. Utilitarian-based Conservation Ethics

a. Species / nature should be preserved as their protection will lead to
    more good in human populations than evil.

       Short-term: wild species important to human economies
                   though agriculture, new food sources, medicine,
          industry

       Long-term: increase environment stability, decreasing
                   chance of human extinction

b. Such arguments will be the most convincing to politicians, especially
    in poorer nations

c. Other approaches will do no good if teaching them takes longer than
    nature has to survive

4. Problems with Utilitarian Conversion ethics

a. Calculating the economic value of a species may be impossible.

- Numbers likely change over time.
- What happens when we learn how to more cheaply and easily
     make some compound through chemistry and do not need
     the species?
- Or if the value leads to exploitation and extinction (Pacific Yew).
- Most species will have no economic worth (mosses, snails, etc)
- Most species are not vital to our survival (consider the North
American Chestnut; raptors)

b. How often is a species worth to humans greater than the direct
advantages to exploitation?

*What if more human good is achieved by exterminating all whales and
investing the profits into human enterprise, like health care,
economic justice and education?*

c. Places burden of proof on science to "prove" species worth. And this destroys our objectivity, as we set out to defend a given outcome and   not let the data tell us.

Consider Leopold (page 210) on 'circumlocations' when species existence can only be justified through economic value; A/B Cleavage

Example: the Diversity – Stability hypothesis! Not clear that this is true, with stable assemblages often having fewer species than earlier transitional states. Or that every species is needed to maintain human society. In fact, we may be the consequence (not the cause) of the current extinction pulse, as it began 5-10 million years before we appeared.

d. Economics is not ethics!

e. When only human good:evil is considered,
- human needs will ALWAYS outweigh other species
- placing human value on other species makes us superior to them
- human utilitarianism is the root cause of environmental degredation

B. Deontological (nonconsequential)

"The nature of an act itself, independent of its consequences, will make that act good or evil"

Morality of an act is based on grounds which may be arbitrarily decided, divinely revealed, or metaphysically deduced.

Types of Nonconsequentialism

1. Act nonconsequentialism.

Each person will have their own individual rules, based on their own individual moral standard

Objections: - No way to resolve conflicts between different people
            - Feelings are apt to become your moral guide
            - General rules of conduct impossible

2. Rule nonconsequentialism

a. Divine Command: always do the Will of God (but if you are only doing this to get to Heaven then it could be egoism!!)

Objections: - How do we know what the god/dess commands? All 'divine' texts are ultimately written by fallible humans, so the 'rule' could exist because of us!

- Cannot know why rule exists

- Commands may conflict:
  Do not Kill vs. Eye for an Eye.
  Golden Rule: is torture ethical when a masochist wants it?

b. Categorical Imperative (Immanuel Kant): goodness resides in the **will** to create happiness, not happiness itself. Moral acts must be done   out of duty, and if done for results then they are not done for moral reasons.

The right things must be done for the right reasons.

Moral duties can be deduced though reason, and must be logically consistent and free from logical contradiction. They must be   universal so that everyone acts under the same rule.

The single categorical universal rule is:

We should act in a way such that the underlying reasons for action can be made into a universal law.

Objections: - Do such universally logical rules actually exist?
    - What if people cannot agree on the underlying assumptions
        or logic employed?

3. Deontological Conservation Ethics:
What rules exist to defend nature?

a. *Divine Command*: by destroying biodiversity we are defiling
   God's creation. We need to extend golden rule to human –
   non-human interactions as all are of God. Human's dominion
   over rest in Genesis also carries with it the   obligation to act
   responsibly.

b. *Freedom of Thought*: nature must exist to allow human to
        experience nature and better themselves. This is traceable to
      the transcendentalists of the 1800s who believed humans   needed
nature for inspiration. Also includes things like   Native
American beliefs, Shinto, etc.

c. *Land Ethic*:

Kant defined 'universal' law only within a human context.

Also Leopold expands this to include all life and ultimately the abiotic
world as well.

History of ethics is an expansion of the scale being considered, starting
with only the self, then to the family, tribe, and ultimately the
entire of humanity. This gets us to Kant's Universible Maxim.

But, humans are also part of a larger community that includes all other
life on Earth as well as the abiotic world that nurtures that life.

Being a member of the community means that it comes with obligations.

The Utilitarian view is that membership brings only privileges.

Leopold argues that the universable maxim must be expanded to
include the human-nature relationship. Treat the rest of nature as
we would a neighbor.

The Land Ethic avoids a number of previous problems:

a. Not human-centric: human happiness is not the only concern

b. Does not require the making of questionable assumptions to 'prove' worth

c. Includes both the biotic and abiotic world

d. Seems to do the right things for the right reasons

4. Problems with Deontological Conversion ethics

a. Divine writings often conflict, not only between religions but within a given tradition. Which view do we give precedence? Do we take 'dominion' as meaning God wants us to exploit, or other lessons to show that just dominion means you don't destroy the system? No way to resolve these conflicts both within and especially between belief systems.

b. Land Ethic will take a long time to evolve within cultures. And loss / exploitation will continue until these beliefs take hold. There may be nothing left when that happens.