

Abstract

Title: Humanity and Nature. Towards a Consistent Holistic Environmental Ethics

Author: Petra Andersson

Language: English

Department: Department of Philosophy, Göteborg University, Box 200, SE-405 30
Göteborg

Series: Acta Philosophica Gothoburgensia, no 20.

ISSN: 0283-2380

ISBN: 978-91-7346-578-6

Ph.D. dissertation at Göteborg University, 2007.

Within the theoretical framework of holistic environmental ethics (HEE), moral status is ascribed to biotic wholes, such as ecosystems, species and landscapes. The purpose of HEE is not entirely clear HEE, since the framework contains conflicting ideas about which properties of the biotic whole contribute to moral status, and which moral reasons this moral status gives rise to. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the prospects of an internally consistent version of HEE. On the basis of an initial analysis of HEE ideas, the tensions are organised in three themes: human- (HC), integrity- (IC) and nature-centred(NC) HEE, and are then analysed with regard to NC, which claims that naturalness is an important contributor to the moral status of biotic wholes.

If naturalness is seen as a binary property, it creates grave incoherence within HEE. If naturalness is instead, as well as NC, understood in more nuanced terms (so that naturalness can be a question of different degrees or senses), some of these problems become less serious, but new problems emerge. In particular, the question whether a version of HEE that incorporates NC may allow human beings a reasonable space remains. If NC is rejected, however, several internal tensions within HEE may be resolved. It is therefore argued that a plausible version of HEE should abandon the NC theme, i.e. reject the idea of "natural nature" as being morally significant in itself. The idea that integrity gives rise to moral status of a biotic whole is more fruitful, and can also be combined with most of the particular opinions that might motivate NC. Without NC, IC may also be consistently combined with HC, and HEE may thus provide reasonable room for human beings in nature.

Keywords: biotic communities, biotic wholes, denaturalisation, ecocentrism, environmental ethics, holism, human membership in biotic communities, moral status, naturalness, nature, nature knows best, the end of nature