

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INFORMATION ECOLOGICAL ETHICS: PROBLEMS IN ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract: *Traditional ecological ethics did not establish a set of effective philosophical theories. Ecological romanticism cannot bring deeper philosophical thinking and fail to create the theoretical foundation of ethics. The holism thought put forward by land ethics is easy to lead to the natural totalitarianism with ideas that human interests and well-being should be subject to the overall interests of the earth's biological community. Biosphere egalitarianism will eventually fall into the trap of absolute generalized equality of rights, which is a principle full of uncertainty in practice. The basis of value classification proposed by environmental ethics still base on human-oriented value systems which does not concern the nature of value. There are many fundamental problems in traditional ecological ethics. Firstly, it does not explain the nature of the concept of value; secondly, it does not distinguish between the nature of value and the evaluation of value; and finally, although it involves ideas of ecosystem, it does not provide any real theoretical solution to explain the reason why human beings have a moral obligation to natural existence.*

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Introduction

Ecological ethics has been discussed for a long while; however, it did not establish a set of effective philosophical theories to gain the "Ought" of human beings' moral obligations to natural beings from the "Is" of objective ecological laws.

1. Problems of Ecological Ethics Romanticism

The traditional ecological ethics originated from the appeal for "protecting nature" by romantic artists, such as the slogan of "returning to nature" put forward by Jean Jacques Rousseau, and the content in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. The latter takes the ecological romanticism thoughts of criticizing materialism and Anthropocentrism up to a new level. [1] However, ecological romanticism is merely a kind of understanding and expression of ecological protection thoughts based on people's lifestyles and habits. The literary composition is stronger, and it cannot bring deeper philosophical thinking or create the theoretical foundation of ethics.

In 1923, French philosopher Albert Schweitzer put forward the concept of "ethics of respecting life", and believed that "The nature of benevolence is preserving life; promoting life and making the developable life realize its highest value". [2] This is the earliest expression of ecological ethics. Although the ethical thought has expanded from human beings to all nature beings on the earth, which is a great progress in ethics, it is obvious that the ethics of respecting life still does not completely jump out of the narrative mode of ecological romanticism and lacks of deeper theoretical construction. Moreover, it is not enough to extend ethics to nature beings ---- the ecosystems on which creatures depends on should also be included.

In 1949, the American philosopher Aldo Leopold proposed his land ethics in *A sand country Almanac*. A large number of important concepts in ecology have been pointed out in land ethics, such as "food chain", "land pyramid", "Earth Community", and so on. [3] The concept of "life community" is also proposed for the first time in land ethics. Land ethics introduces nature and life into ethics for the first time and emphasizes the ethical status of the nature, which has epoch-making significance,

Leopold also puts forward the concept of "wilderness". The "wilderness" literally means the natural and ecological environment that has not been developed and destroyed by human beings. However, as mentioned above, "wilderness" does not exist on the earth, so it is meaningless to merely maintain and protect wilderness. Human has caused many ecological problems.

Now we need to focus on how to restore the prosperity of the ecosystem rather than protecting and maintaining the status quo.

It is necessary to emphasize that the early ideas of land ethics do not pay attention to the contents of the later developed theory of complexity science due to the confinement of its times. And it did not establish a deeper theoretical basis on the moral reasons for human to constrain on nature. The holism thought put forward by land ethics is easy to lead to the natural totalitarianism with ideas that human interests and well-being should be subject to the overall interests of the earth's biological community. [4]

2. Problems in Deep Ecology and Environmental Ethics

In the late stage of the development of traditional ecological ethics, the entry point of value philosophy appeared. The representative theories are deep ecology established by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess and others [5] and environmental ethics proposed by the American philosopher Holmes Rolston III [6]. Both theories are trying to jump out of the human-oriented value tradition, establish a new value paradigm, and demonstrate the intrinsic value of nature. [7]

Deep ecology puts forward "biospheric egalitarianism", which asserts that all living beings have their intrinsic value and it does not depend on their usefulness to others. After that, Naess proposes his Ecosophy T theory.

Rolston proposes that nature has three values: instrumental value, systematic value and intrinsic value. He also points out that "the intrinsic value of nature refers to the value inherent in natural scenes, which does not need to be referred to human beings." [8] The establishment of these ideas has promoted the development of traditional ecological ethics, but it contains a lot of problems in its argument.

Naess' biosphere egalitarianism theory fails to explain in detail that why all living creatures have similar rights to exist and prosper, and how the inanimate natural environment be able to gain equal rights with all living creatures. In the real ecosystem, the survival and prosperity of one species must be based on the death and decay of multiple others, which will directly leads to an absurd

question: in order to survive, whether a species has the right to deprive other species' right to exist. Some scholars have criticized the idea of absolute equality, which is suspected of directly applying the way how human beings calculate interests to deal with the so-called natural interests in the natural environment. That is the utilitarian thought of absolute social democracy and is extended to nature in this case. [9] Biosphere egalitarianism will eventually fall into the trap of absolute generalized equality of rights, which is a principle full of uncertainty in practice. We can never put aside the ecosystem relationship to talk about the interests and rights of each element or individual in an element.

The Ecosophy T theory proposed by Naess later regards human self-realization as a way to solve the environmental crisis caused by human selfishness and exploitation of nature. He states that every form of life has the right to exist and develop. Human beings should establish "self-realization" on all forms existing in the ecosystem, that is, a "universal symbiosis". [10] Some scholars believe that it is dangerous to regard nature as a part of human because it can prove that it is reasonable to use nature at will. A person only has the right to treat oneself by the way he or she likes and should not treat another individuals by the same way. [11] Some scholars believe that the self expansion idea in deep ecological theory is actually a disguised version of human colonialism, which cannot allow nature gain its status as a real "other" independent of human interests and purposes. [12] In fact, the idea of using human empathy to carry out ecological protection does not make a difference in practice ---- just like persuading people to quit smoking by using the reason that smoking is harmful to body cells.

There are also problems in the argumentation of the so-called concept of intrinsic value. Rolston summed up 10 types of intrinsic value of nature in the early stage [8], and then added up to 14 types. [6] He believes that these values are unique and intrinsic in nature rather than values based on human creation and evaluation or social factors such as money and price in economics. Rolston's value theory has somehow implied the ecological value and the complex relationships and value links among humans, other life, the inorganic environment, and ecology. His theory has laid the foundation for the construction of information ecological ethics.

However, on closer examination, the basis of his value classification still base on human-oriented value systems which does not concern the nature of value. It must be certain that the intrinsic value of things itself objectively exists and it does not depend on the subjective evaluation. That is a common misconception of previous value theories. Rolston confuses value with evaluation. His value types are not directly aimed at the inherent value of nature but merely list the potential value of natural things to human beings. Therefore, those value types are evaluation rather than value itself. [13] Nature or natural systems of broad sense itself does not have purposefulness or subjective agency, it acts and evolves according to mere natural laws. Even if nature has its own value, it does not necessarily entail human ethical responsibilities. Meanwhile, if ecological ethical norms are to be explored, they should perhaps not be concerned with the question of whether they are valuable, but with the question of how to value ecosystems in a pluralistic way. And information philosophy happens to provide a generalized theory of values, laying the foundation for the construction of ecological civilization's value theory. [14]

Secondly, there are problems in the interpretation of instrumental value and intrinsic value. Instrumental value refers to the value of things as a means to achieve other purposes, while the intrinsic value is the value of things as an end itself, regardless of whether they are also used as a means to achieve other purposes. [15] Obviously, it is problematic to explain the concept of intrinsic value with "things as the purpose itself", because the purpose we are talking about can only extend to the fields of life and ecosystems. As for the question of whether general nature or nature of broad sense has purpose, based on the previous viewpoint, we believe that the answer should be negative. The idea that general nature has purpose will directly lead to a kind of pantheism or animism.

In addition, the traditional ecological ethics thought has met many opposition voices in the third world countries. Some critics accuse ecological ethics of elitism, which attempts to preserve the wilderness experience for a small number of people who are economically and politically wealthy. It is described as a new form of cultural imperialism, which aims to ensure that people in backward countries turn their attentions from industrial development to

ecological protectionism so that to limit the economic development of the third world countries from a "moral" perspective. [16] The "green missionary" movement further exploits the world's poor and indigenous people. [17] Some scholars believe that such unrealistic ecological thought is a utopian vision that is inconsistent with reality. [18]

Conclusion

There are many fundamental problems in traditional ecological ethics. Firstly, it does not explain the nature of the concept of value; secondly, it does not distinguish between the nature of value and the evaluation of value; and finally, although it involves ideas of ecosystem, it does not provide any real theoretical solution to explain the reason why human beings have a moral obligation to natural existence. The era is calling for more interpretative and feasible thoughts of ecological ethics to solve these problems.

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