

Book Review:**Revising The Land Ethic After 30 Years: J. Baird Callicott's "In Defense of the Land Ethic"**

Callicott, J. Baird (1989). In Defense of the land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy. State University of New York Press.

Efe Aytekin | Bilkent University

Land ethic as a theoretical framework finds itself on various levels, primarily in terms of its insistence upon the worthiness of human-land relations as a novel philosophical project, while setting forth a groundbreaking effort to dismiss conventional ways of reasoning about human beings, animals, the land and the way they interact from an ethical point of view. Philosophy professor Callicott's book, for this very reason, aims to enlighten the potentials of a land ethic that does not fall into the error of anthropocentrism. Western philosophy has no doubt failed to provide a reasoning scheme that take inanimate objects into consideration, even though their existence is required for a sustainable environment. Ethical humanist scholars whose philosophy has been deeply influenced by Kant's moral framework, for instance, excitedly cherish the property of being a human with regards to our cognitive capabilities that both animals and non-living -yet fundamental- components of ecology lack. By extended cognitive capabilities, the liberal notion that human beings are rational has been implied. Humane moralism on the other hand, as Callicott puts it, represents a utilitarian school of thought in which most animal liberationists gather around -prioritizing sentiments over cognition.

These are what Callicott covers in the first two chapters of the book. He refers to Bentham as the founding father of utilitarianism and puts Kant forward, emphasizing his deontological ethics. In a sense, for Callicott, the intellectual tension between sentimentalists and deontologists portrays the entirety of Western philosophy in the recent centuries, within a philosophical context in which we puzzle our brains on some essential questions: Do animals bear moral rights? What are the basics of moral regulations between human beings and animals - if there are any?

The book, with all respect to the way it presents Kantian and Benthamian ethics, operates as an informative piece on the overall philosophies of Kant and Bentham as well. Those who are not familiar with these great philosophers, specifically the way they process metaphysics, are enabled to follow through easily. This can be attributed as one of the key strengths of the book, since it allows creating links between

philosophers, their metaphysics, perspectives on ethics and most importantly, generating an environmental philosophy with a coherent set of principles.

Before we move forward to the land ethic, perhaps a more detailed description of ethical humanism and humane realism is needed. Ethical humanism asserts that non-human animals do not bear moral rights due to their incapableness of complex, rational decision-making and linguistic capabilities. Such hierarchy manifests itself as a dichotomy between higher animals and lower animals. On the contrary, human beings qualify as such - therefore, they deserve moral considerability for the sake of their so-called cognitive development. Humane moralists object fiercely, suggesting that not even all human beings fulfil such criteria. Human infants and people with serious mental disorders with severe cognitive impairments, beyond any doubt, are deprived of these privileges ethical humanists are all agog. Utilitarian response to ethical humanism is based on the living beings' capability of feeling pain and pleasure, which in return pushes us to conceptualize animals as worthy of moral consideration. Callicott reminds, however, that sentimental faculty does not reflect itself as a black or white phenomenon. It rather emerges as a spectrum as studies clearly show. Utilitarians being aware of this end up proposing another relational hierarchy, making a distinction between higher animals and lower animals.

Callicott, at this point, appeals to infinite regress: there is no plausible explanation for appreciating the very first premises. It seems arbitrary to insist on reason or sentiments as the founding blocks of morality. Moreover, one will suddenly realize that neither deontologists nor utilitarians possess a sophisticated perspective on ecological sustainability. Land ethic emerges as a response to the apathy towards the very essential components of our world. Rocks, lands, seas, oceans, agricultural zones and many other elements of our environment are in fact matters of life and death. The long-term welfare of our biotic communities depends on a highly complex ecological system. Consider the following example: some wild animals cause nothing but suffering, and constantly produce failure in terms of maximizing pleasure and happiness. This reasoning would be compatible with utilitarian ethics, yet one cannot even imagine the amount of damage brought to our ecosystem in case the wildlife disappears.

Therefore, land ethic may be a powerful alternative to utilitarianism and deontology. It is predicated on a naturalistic metaphysics rather than a priori rationalism. Prioritization of (i) integrity, (ii) stability and (iii) beauty of the biotic community is placed at the very forefront of the theory. Interdependency of human beings, non-human animals, non-animal living beings and inanimate objects play a crucial role. Ethical constructs such as moral responsibility and moral consideration

are not assessed on particulars such as those of utilitarian and deontology. In this sense, as Callicott also highlights, land ethic can be considered as a Humean school of thought. All of these objections and new opinions are proposed on metaethical grounds which will not be analyzed in-depth in this paper. I will focus on how brand-new normative ethics look like in relation to land ethic, as Callicott did. At this point let's keep in mind that land ethic does not happen to be a monolithic perspective. Conscious of this, Callicott goes on by looking beneath the surface and one by one examines various land ethic theorists. His main focus revolves around Aldo Leopold, a non-recognized ecologist from the early 20th century.

First, he reminds us that social norms and regulations evolved as a consequence of natural selection. Social restraints, therefore, can be assumed to have an evolutionary function. Survival and reproductive advantages gained via membership in a community, on average, are greater than advantages lost with being subject to ethics, or some other system of social limitations. If an individual animal is subject to ethical or other socially related behavioral limitations, then he is also, necessarily, a member of a community. This is because without the advantage of being a member of a community or cooperative group dealing with life's struggle in common, the individual animal in question would become disadvantaged. Restricted behavior and his genes would be eliminated from the species' gene pool due to further natural selection. From a strictly naturalistic point of view, then, to be a community is equivalent to being subject to ethical limitations, or any system of moral-like restraints, or any system with limitations on individuals' behaviour to an extent that social organization is maintained. Leopold, taking this reasoning into account, urges us to realize that we are members of a human community as well as an ecological community, in Callicott's terms. Enlarging the boundaries of our community to include nonhuman natural entities as beneficiaries of moral obligations without imposing those upon them -which would be absurd- is, in summary, what has been proposed by Leopold, Callicott and land ethic theorists.

Callicott does wonders providing a philosophical discussion revealing the potentials of a holistic land ethic. Objections against ethical humanism and humane moralism are deliberated wisely and clearly. The book goes beyond the classical themes that centre around environmental ethics, and the philosophical foundations of each school of thought are processed. From undergraduate students to philosophy academics, Callicott's work acts as a strong reference guide to philosophical opportunities and challenges I briefly covered in this piece.