

Introduction

Anthropocentrism is the world view that places human beings as the center of the cosmos

Five Interconnected Themes:

- 1) natural order has a grand hierarchy (a “Great Chain of Being)
- 2) the ontological divide between human and nonhuman nature
- 3) nature as a machine
- 4) only humans beings have intrinsic value/nature has only instrumental value
- 5) the moral community is limited to human beings

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

The Summa Contra Gentiles

develops the ethical implications of the Great Chain of Being

humans are closest to the likeness of God

rational creatures exercise free will

God bestows intrinsic value on rational creatures

“Accordingly intellectual creatures are ruled by God, as though He cared for them for their own sake, while other creatures are ruled as being directed to rational creatures” (63)

other creatures are slaves to their environment

their actions casually determined by the environment

thus human beings alone are morally considerable

only human beings have freedom

“he is free who is cause of himself . . . intellectual nature alone is free”

human beings have the right to subjugate other beings below on the hierarchy

“Hereby is refuted the error of those who said it is sinful for man to kill dumb animals: for by divine providence they are intended for man’s use in the natural order” (64)

anticipating Kant, the only danger in killing dumb animals
is that such behavior might lead to cruelty to human beings

Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

The Great Instauration

focus of knowledge should be practical

the improvement of the human condition

knowledge is power over nature

“the roads to human power and to human knowledge lie close together, and are nearly the same”

this view of knowledge as power is stated more clearly in *New Organon (1620)*

Title refers to Aristotle’s logical and methodological works known collectively as the Organon

this will be a new organon, thus a new scientific method

“Human knowledge and human power meet in one; for where the cause is not known the effect cannot be produced. Nature to be commanded must be obeyed” (Book One, III).

Here Bacon conceives of knowledge as power,
 as the ability to “command nature,”
 to “penetrate into the inner and further recesses of nature”
 and there discover truth, the secrets of nature.

What is this new scientific method that Bacon outlines, and how does it contrast with the previous methodology?

must start with observation
 the understanding left to itself cannot do much
 Knowledge as power, nature is to be commanded,
 but to be commanded must be obeyed
 thus to gain this power over nature
 one must not expect nature to conform to our preconceived notions
 must observe nature
 conduct experiments on nature
 thus inductive vs deductive reasoning

nature has value as human resource
 the method to achieve this power over nature is reductionism:
 carve nature into its constitutive parts
 “For this is the very thing aimed at in the separation of bodies of uniform structure by means of distillations and other modes of analysis, – that the complex structure of the compound may be made apparent by bringing together its several homogeneous parts” (68)

René Descartes (1596-1650)

Descartes is considered the starting point
 the father of modern philosophy
 our text contains a brief selection from the *Discourse on Method*
 and two selections taken from Descartes’ letters,
 which were collected and published as *The Correspondence*
 in these selections Descartes insists on the distinction between humans and animals
 human beings are capable of thought and animals are not
 animals are devoid of sentience
 complex biological machines
 the handiwork of God, but machines
 thus animals cannot be the object of moral consideration
 any more than a clock or an engine
 what underlies Descartes’ arguments here is his metaphysical *dualism*
 which insists on an ontological difference between human beings and all of nature
 Descartes’ dualism is the view that reality consists of two fundamentally different *substances*
 thinking substance: *mind/soul* which is capable of thought and has free will
 (Descartes does not distinguish between mind and soul: “I think, therefore, I am”)
 extended substance: *matter/body* which is a mere machine and not capable of thought or free will
 The classic statement of Descartes’ dualism comes from the *Meditations*:

First, I know that all the things that I clearly and distinctly understand can be made by God such as I understand them. For this reason, my ability clearly and distinctly to understand one thing without another suffices to make me certain that the one thing is different from the other, since they can be

separated from each other, at least by God. The question as to the sort of power that might effect such a separation is not relevant to their being thought to be different. For this reason, from the fact that I know that I exist, and that at the same time I judge that obviously nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I rightly conclude that my essence consists entirely in my being a thinking thing. And although perhaps (or rather, as I shall soon say, assuredly) I have a body that is very closely joined to me, nevertheless, because on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, insofar as I am merely a thinking thing and not an extended thing, and because on the other hand I have a distinct idea of a body, insofar as it is merely an extended thing and not a thinking thing, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it. (*Meditations VI*)

DUALISM

thinking substance	extended substance
mind	matter
soul	body
free will	obeys mechanistic laws of nature
freedom	necessity
only humans (and God)	all of nonhuman nature

Motivations for Dualism:

- 1) immortality of the soul: the soul is a difference substance from the body and can exist after the death of the body
- 2) resolve conflict between science and religion: science can have authority over the realm of extended substance and religion can maintain authority over the realm of the soul
- 3) provide for free will: the mechanistic view of nature enabled control over nature, but it was necessary to insist that the soul is a different substance from the body in order to account for free will. Free will is necessary for moral responsibility. As Aquinas had said it is because human beings have free will that they have intrinsic value.

this dualism of soul and body can be traced back to Plato
 runs through the Christian tradition
 already there in Aquinas
 Descartes gives it the clearest formulation

the last paragraph of our selection from the *Discourse* (first paragraph page 70)
 is a further explanation of a point made in *Meditation VI*
 a little further after the above statement of dualism
 Descartes seemed to contradict his dualism:

By means of these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, nature also teaches not merely that I am present to my body in the way a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am most tightly joined and, so to speak, commingled with it, so much so that I and the body constitute one single thing. For if this were not the case, then I, who am only a thinking thing, would not sense pain when the body is injured; rather, I would perceive the wound by means of the pure intellect, just as a sailor perceives by sight whether anything in his ship is broken. And when the body is in need of food or drink, I should understand this explicitly, instead of having confused sensations of hunger and thirst. For clearly these sensations of thirst, hunger, pain, and so on are nothing but certain confused modes of thinking arising from the union and, as it were, the commingling of the mind with the body. (*Meditations VI*)

Descartes seems to contradict his dualism here by admitting that I am not in the body like a pilot in his ship because I feel pain when the body is injured but his dualism would imply just the pilot and ship analogy Descartes' dualism has been called the "ghost in the machine" hypothesis the mind is a sort of ghostly substance (it is not extended, does not take up space) which is somehow in the body which is only a machine

here, in our selection from the *Discourse* he explains that he only meant to say that the soul must be more closely conjoined with the body than a pilot to his ship

but this is not to say that the soul is the same as the body Descartes concludes here with a clear statement of his dualism: "our soul is of a nature entirely independent of the body" (70)

Descartes' dualism separates human and nonhuman nature only humans have souls and all animals are mere machines two interesting issues are taken up by Descartes:

I) can human beings be mere machines?

If dualism is wrong and human beings are part of nature and nature is but a machine, then can artificial human beings be created? This issue is the subject of much science-fiction think of the film *Blade Runner*

Descartes thinks there should be two ways of distinguishing such machines or automatons (robots) from real human beings: first, they would not be able to use language he concedes they might be made to utter words but not in a way that communicates thought to others second, their actions would reveal that they acted "not from knowledge but only from the disposition of their organs" (69)

II) are animals capable of thought or are they only mere machines?

Descartes argues here in the *Discourse* and in the letters that animals cannot think because they do not really have language he acknowledges that parrots can be trained to mimic words but this is not language which requires being aware of the meaning of signs even deaf-mutes "invent for themselves signs by which they make themselves understood"

Descartes rejects the idea that animals can talk but we just cannot understand their language he thus concludes that animals are wholly lacking in reason thus not capable of thought

thus not thinking substance but only extended substance

in the correspondence:

“the reason why animals do not speak as we do is not that they lack the organs but that they have no thoughts” (70)

at the end of the same letter Descartes suggests another argument
animals do not have thought because:

“if they thought as we do, they would have an immortal soul like us. This is unlikely, because there is no reason to believe it of some animals without believing it of all. . .” (71).

what do you make of this argument?

do only humans have souls?

do some animals have souls and others not? Where does one draw the line?

do all animals have souls?

is all of life ensouled?

do higher order animals have thoughts?

do they have language?

Is language more common in nature?

There is a new field of study called *Biosemiotics* which takes up this view

semiotics: the study of signs, symbols, and signification

Biosemiotics is thus the study of semiotics in the biological realm

Isaac Newton (1642-1727)

most famous work is *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687)

more simply referred to as the *Principia*

in this book Newton lays out his theories of universal gravitation and the three laws of motion

here we find a concise statement of the mechanical view of nature

that had been put forth by Bacon and Descartes:

“all phenomena may depend on certain forces by which the particles of bodies, by causes not yet known, either are impelled toward one another and cohere in regular figures, or are repelled from one another and recede”

ought to be able to calculate motions of bodies with mathematical certainty

in the *Optiks* Newton derides two of Aristotle’s four causes:

1) efficient cause: how, by whom, or what is it made?

2) material cause: what is it made of?

3) formal cause: what kind of thing is it?

4) final cause: what is it for?

Newton says Aristotle’s formal and final causes are “occult qualities”

i.e., not really existing in the natural order

all of nature can be understood in terms of efficient and material causes

the study of material and efficient causes is the methodology of the mechanical view

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

the best known English speaking philosopher of the 19th century
is most well known for his development of Utilitarian Ethics
first proposed by his predecessor and mentor
Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)

Utilitarianism is the view that the rightness or wrongness of an action
is determined by its consequences (motives are irrelevant)

In Bentham's formula the principle of Utilitarianism is
"the greatest good for the greatest number"

Utilitarianism came to have a pervasive influence on government in Britain
in emphasizing the greatest good for the whole society
whereas an emphasis on individual rights has had a more pervasive impact in the U.S.A.
Bentham's Utilitarianism came down to a "hedonistic calculus"
the greatest happiness for the greatest number
Mill's Utilitarianism departed from Bentham's in insisting on
difference in qualities of happiness
but the moral worth of any action is still determined by its consequences

Mill is also important for his political philosophy
in particular his "principle of liberty"
outlined in perhaps his most influential book *On Liberty*
this principle holds that the only justification for government interference in personal liberty
is to prevent harm to others
the individual should thus be free to do whatever he likes
so long as it does not cause harm to another

Contemporary Western philosophy is split into two main traditions:

The Continental tradition: any philosophy that has its origins in the European continent
mostly French and German philosophy
different movements in Continental philosophy include:
Marxism, Existentialism, Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Deconstruction
some of the most important philosophers:
Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, Derrida....

The Analytic tradition
has its origins in the early 20th century in Britain
Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein
this tradition is dominant in English speaking countries: The U.K., U.S.A, Canada, Australia...
much of the focus of analytic philosophy is on philosophy of language
one of the main objectives involves conceptual clarification
many philosophical problems would just dissolve if one clarified the meaning of key terms
this emphasis on conceptual clarification marks much English language philosophy
can be traced back to Hume and to Locke
and is quite evident in our selection from J.S. Mill's book *Nature*

In this text Mill examines multiple meanings of the word "nature"

1) everything that exists

“Nature in the abstract is the aggregate of the powers and properties of all things. Nature means the sum of all phenomena...” (73)

this sense of the word “nature” would obviously include human beings

here “art” is also part of “nature”

2) everything that happens “without the agency of man”

in this sense, “nature” is what is left untouched by human beings

in this sense, “nature” is opposed to “art”

3) Mill distinguishes a third sense

“But the employment of the word Nature as a term of ethics seems to disclose a third meaning, in which Nature does not stand for what is, but for what ought to be” (75)

this is the view often expressed when it is recommended

that one ought to act “according to nature”

Mill argues that this conception of “nature” is confused

for to act “according to nature” would mean not acting at all

“If the natural course of things were perfectly right and satisfactory, to act at all would be a gratuitous meddling, which as it could not make things better, must make them worse” (76).

Mill emphasizes here that nature ought not be used as a standard for human conduct

for nature itself is amoral

Mill emphasizes the triumphs of Art over Nature

by which he means the human improvement of nature

to recognize these triumphs is to recognize

“the ways of Nature are to be conquered, not obeyed” (76)

Mill was very influential in social reform movements in his day

he was very active in working for women’s rights

it is obvious, however, here in his reflections on Nature

that he views nature as having only instrumental value for human beings

Mill’s anthropocentrism may seem at odds with the environmental movement

and yet Holmes Rolston develops an environmental ethics while accepting

Mill’s view of the amoral status of nature

John Locke (1632-1704)

Locke is one of the most important modern philosophers for two reasons:

1) his philosophy marked the starting point of *empiricism*

which is the epistemological view that knowledge comes from experience

his rejection of Descartes’s *rationalism* begins with a rejection of Descartes assumption of innate ideas (that we are born with some knowledge)

for Locke the mind is empty, a *tabula rasa* (erased tablet), at birth

this has two implications:

a) we are all born equal

b) all ideas come into the mind through sensation

and thus all knowledge about the world must be grounded in sense evidence

2) Locke is also very important for his political philosophy

in the *Second Treatise of Government* Locke outlines his conception of the social contract

the idea that government is the result of a social contract

was first developed by Thomas Hobbes' (1588-1679)
Locke's idea of the social contract was a response to Hobbes' view

Hobbes had argued that the purpose of government is peace and security, law and order
in his conception of the contract, rational individuals would contract among themselves
in order to get out of the state of nature (what human society would be like without government)
for the state of nature, for Hobbes, is necessarily a state of war
in which life is "nasty, brutish and short"
rational individuals would thus gladly surrender the unlimited rights to
whatever they can get away with in the state of nature
and accept being bound by law in order to gain security
for Hobbes the king (he was in favor of monarchy) was above the law
as law requires an all powerful authority to impose it
so there would be nothing to prevent such a king from executing an innocent person
if that is what it took to keep the people in fear and thus obedient to law

Locke had a gentler conception of the state of nature
it was not necessarily a state of war
whereas Hobbes saw scarcity in the state of nature
and thus inevitably conflict over resources
Locke sees abundance in nature
and Locke also saw nature as governed by a moral law
Locke was thus an adherent to natural law theory which goes back to Aquinas
Hobbes had the more modern notion of nature as amoral

though not a state of war, the state of nature is still inconvenient enough
especially because of disputes over property
that a social contract is still needed to get out of the state of nature
and enter into human society under civil government
but for Locke the primary purpose of the social contract is to protect individual rights
Locke had the most influence on the founders of the American social contract
his conception that the purpose of government is to protect the
inalienable rights endowed by the Creator
is enshrined by Jefferson in the *Declaration of Independence*
it is easy to see why Locke had such an influence on this document
for Locke, the government is not above the law
the social contract is between the people and the government
and if the government fails in its purpose to protect the rights of the people
the people have the right to revolution

in Chapter IX of the *Second Treatise of Government*
"Of the Ends of Political Society and Government"
Locke argues that the primary purpose for individuals to enter into the social contract is:
"for the mutual *preservation* of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name,
property."
Jefferson changes this in the *Declaration*, to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"

as one of the primary purposes of government, for Locke, is the protection of private property

Chapter V of the *Second Treatise of Government*, “Of Property”

is a crucially important text, and our selection comes from this chapter
in this chapter Locke lays out his conception of the origin of private property

God gave humankind the earth as natural resource

private property acquired by mixing one’s labor with nature

“Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property” (§27)

Locke seems to acknowledge limitations to the acquisition of private property

one can only accumulate as much private property as one can use without spoiling

for “Nothing was made by God for man to spoil or destroy” (§31)

one could perhaps develop some sense of responsibility to the environment from such a view

but it is clear that for Locke God gave nature to men in common to develop

and nature left uncultivated is like refusing God’s gift

“God gave the world to men in common, but since He gave it to them for their benefit and the greatest conveniences of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed that He meant that it should always remain common and uncultivated” (§34)

Locke thus argues that it is God’s commandment to subdue the earth (§35)

one can see Locke’s view of nature as abundant in §36

it is clear for Locke that nature really only has instrumental value

the value of things depends only on their

“usefulness to the life of man” (§37)

though Locke argues that one should not acquire so much property that it might spoil

the exchange of perishable goods for money which does not spoil

allows for the acquisition of wealth

this is developed in sections 46-48 not included in our reader

our editor points out in the introduction to this chapter

that Locke’s view that humans have a responsibility to develop nature

is the view that shaped the environmental policy of

Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946) first chief of U.S. Forest Service

this view was obviously challenged

by the idea that we have an obligation to preserve some land as *wilderness*

do we have such an obligation?

what is the best argument against Locke for preserving wilderness?

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

some say that Kant is the most important philosopher in the Western tradition after Plato

Kant tried to resolve the conflict between rationalism and empiricism

and in doing so he changed the conception of the human mind

whereas previous philosophers had all assumed the mind to be something like

a mirror of nature

true knowledge thus reflects accurately, or copies, reality as it is in-itself

Kant argues that we can never know reality as it is in-itself

we only know the phenomenal world, the world as it appears to us

and it appears to us only in the way that the human mind is made to perceive it

thus to use an analogy to explain Kant’s view:

it is obvious that the instrument of a black and white camera
can never record color pictures even though reality is colored
just so the human mind can only perceive reality
in the way that the instrument of the human mind allows
thus the mind is not merely a passive mirror
but something that actively shapes or filters reality
in a way that human beings can understand it
this conception of the mind as somewhat active instead of a passive mirror
was a radical revolution in the conception of the human mind
though Kant argued that we cannot get knowledge of reality as it is in-itself
we can still get “objective” knowledge of the phenomenal world, the world as it appears to us,
and thus science is still possible
because the human mind is basically the same enough in all of us
the human mind is thus basically “programmed” to see reality in terms of space and time
and in terms of causality, etc...
this is the briefest summary of one of the most difficult texts in the history of Western thought
Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*

Kant is also hugely important for his ethics
which is developed in the *Critique of Practical Reason*
and the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
Kant simply assumed that morality must be possible
so his question was *how* is morality possible?
here Kant argues that even though we cannot know
reality as it is in-itself
we can make assumptions about reality as it is in-itself
as a practical necessity in order for morality to be possible
thus practical reason takes precedence over theoretical reason in regards to morality
thus Kant argues that even though we cannot “know” this through theoretical, or pure, reason
we must assume that God exists, the soul is immortal, and the mind has free will

Kant argued that it is not the consequences of our actions that matter
(this is the view the Utilitarians would develop)
for we don’t have complete knowledge of the consequences
and even more so, we don’t have control over the consequences of our actions
what matters for Kant is our intention, or our *moral will*
and our moral will is shaped by a sense of *moral obligation*
thus Kant’s ethics is an ethics of duty, or a *deontological ethics*
deontology (from Greek *deon*, "obligation, duty"; and -logia)
Thus the two main traditions of ethics in modern philosophy
are the Kantian, or deontological ethics, and Utilitarian ethics

Kant argued that we all have a duty
to treat other human beings only as ends and not as a means for our own ends
for human beings are rational and capable of free will
thus human beings have intrinsic value
Kant’s view of human rights are based on this duty

in our selections from Kant's *Lectures on Ethics*
he argues that humans have no direct duties to nonhumans
for only rational beings are worthy of moral consideration
but there is an anthropocentric rationale for indirect duties to nonhuman nature
the way one treats nonhuman animals may affect the way one treats human beings
“for he who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men. We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals” (82)

Kant makes a similar argument about our duties to inanimate nature:
“Destructiveness is immoral; we ought not to destroy things which can still be put to some use. No man ought to mar the beauty of nature; for what he has no use for may still be of use to some one else. He need, of course, pay no heed to the thing itself, but he ought to consider his neighbour. Thus we see that all duties towards animals, towards immaterial beings and toward inanimate objects are aimed indirectly at our duties towards mankind” (83)

notice that despite the differences between Kant's deontological position and Mill's Utilitarianism that they share a similar view toward nature—nature must be put to some use

it should not be surprising that Environmental ethics developed from both deontological and utilitarian perspectives

one might take a deontological approach
do we argue, with Kant, that we have an indirect duty to animals and nature
or argue, against Kant, that we have a direct duty to nonhuman nature
a duty to animals, or a duty to protect nature
because animals and the environment have intrinsic value?
we thus should preserve wilderness
not because of its instrumental value for us
but because of its intrinsic value

or one might try a utilitarian approach
we should protect the environment
because the consequences of doing so would produce
the greatest benefit for the greatest number of human beings
thus, one might argue that we should preserve wilderness
as this would in the long run benefit humanity greater than some short term development
in preserving an ecosystem that all of humanity depends upon

all of these philosophers share an anthropocentric viewpoint
one of the great questions we shall ponder
is whether an environmental ethics requires abandoning the anthropocentric viewpoint
in the last selection in this chapter
Wilfred Beckerman (an economist) and Joanna Pasek (a philosopher)
argue that anthropocentrism is inevitable

they argue that it is possible to argue for the “intrinsic value” of nature
from an anthropocentric position
this may seem counter-intuitive

and it is not surprising that much of the development of environmental ethics begins with a critique of anthropocentrism

Beckerman & Pasek argue that an anthropocentric, or “subjectivist” argument for the “intrinsic value” of nature is actually the stronger argument than an “objectivist” or nonanthropocentric argument

an “objectivist” argument is that something has “intrinsic value” because it has value in-itself, independently of any human valuations

the “subjective” argument is that
“values cannot exist without a valuer” (84)
it is thus naive to talk of “objective” values
values simply are “subjective”

but one can value something for how it can serve one’s own use
or one can value it for its “intrinsic value”
I can value the rose for the way it pleases my love
or I can appreciate the beauty of the rose
and still think it has value regardless of how it serves my interests

I love watching and listening to the apapane outside my window
and I can also regard them as having value apart from my interests
but I recognize that the source of the values are subjective

the authors acknowledge that the common objection to the subjectivist position is that it can slip into moral relativism
if values are merely subjective then they can vary from culture to culture
or individual to individual
and thus there would be no firm ground upon which to criticize
an individual or culture that does not recognize “intrinsic” values in nature
there is no guarantee that future humans will value the environment at all

against this, however, they argue that
“the common environmentalist claim that nature is the bearer of some objectively intrinsic values seems difficult to defend” (86)

they argue that all interpretation of nature will always be rooted in a human-centered perspective
“it is simply inevitable that, to whatever view we subscribe about the value of nature, it will always be our human view” (86)

thus:

“Since ‘anthropocentric’ simply means ‘seen from the standpoint of a human being.’ then all views about the status and value of nature are equally anthropocentric” (86)

to what extent are they right about this?

is it necessary to abandon anthropocentrism in developing an environmental ethics?