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Ethical Attitudes Toward the Environment: The Romanian Case

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Introduction

> "In the thick forests around Baia Mare, 240 miles northwest of Bucharest, the toxic emissions of this metallurgical center have cut plant growth in half. About one third of the roughly 30,000 acres of forest have been devastated. Some trees have lost up to two thirds of their foliage. Even in the least affected areas, acid rain has covered the leaves with brown spots. [...] The two main culprits, the state-owned Romplumb and Phoenix plants, are still operating, spewing sulfur dioxide and lead into the air at levels 100 to 200 percent over the Romanian norms".[1]

This terrifying description of twenty years ago has impressed many readers of *The New York Times*. At that time, the Romanian national television repeatedly broadcast reports on the environmental tragedy in the Northern part of the country; but quite a few people in Romania trembled at those images, and even so, they did not find themselves determined to act. As *The New York Times* acidly commented, 'The city government has brought the two plants to court, seeking damages of $3,000 for each day of operation. But few people take the move seriously'. The issue I would like to take into account in this paper is why environmental issues (including cases like pollution in Baia Mare) were not perceived in Romania even in the nineties as problems in need of careful, reasoned examination and resolution. I shall not spend much time with the well known claim that in countries characterized by huge economic problems concern for the environment is seen as a luxury, as opposed to more pressing decisions. To quote again from *The New York Times*:

> "The human cost is appalling. For Baia Mare's 150,000 residents, life expectancy is 50, nearly 20 years below the Romanian average. Children in a health survey conducted by UNESCO show high deposits of lead in their bones and teeth. Chronic bronchial diseases are endemic [...]. 'We put our protests', Petre Mărcuţă, state secretary of the Ministry of Environment in Bucharest, said. 'But given that we don't have legal rights and because of the grave economic situation generally, we'll have to wait a little longer for the necessary means to make a difference' ".

These comments are undoubtedly correct; but they point only to surface and circumstantial beliefs and attitudes, while leaving unquestioned the deeper roots of

1 *The New York Times*, 1992. August 16.

the prevalent beliefs on, and attitudes toward the environment in today's Romania.[2]

The web of domination

Environmental ethics seeks to broaden the scope of moral concern by arguing that concepts like duty, obligation, respect or rights genuinely apply to items in the natural world; the range of these items varies from theory to theory, steadily extending from higher animals to all living organisms, to species, ecosystems, land and even Earth. Influential environmental philosophers see this movement as a final step in a long process of turning away from the merely particular (myself, my family, my clan, my fellow humans, etc.) to the universal. Selfishness (disguised in traditional Western ethics under some brand of "human chauvinism") was completely discarded and, as a last successful generalization, nature was recognized as morally considerable.

The underlying assumption of this position is that of a close association of ethical assessment with universalization and abstraction. Environmental ethical theories aim at putting forward universalizable maxims, in the form of ethical principles and rules of conduct. Many authors devoted a large space to stating and defending principles and rules, and were much concerned with the methodological requirements for accepting a principle or a rule.[3] When concrete cases were in need of concrete resolutions, the strategy was to produce new, more substantive principles, along with some second-order principles to regulate issues of priority in applying the first-order ones. For example, if we cannot avoid being exposed to some dangerous or harmful organisms, Taylor's "principle of self-defence" permits us to protect ourselves even by destroying them.[4] We may act in a certain way because we are guided by a general principle. But the ethical theory must also contain some new (and general) second-order principle entailing that in any case of that sort the principle of self-defence takes priority over the (general) principle of respect for living organisms.

This picture was, however, subject to strong criticism from various directions. First, some feminists questioned the emphasis on abstraction and universalization, and the implicit disregard of the particular and the emotional. They argued that when these are set aside as irrelevant or suspect, as subjective or personal, the only conclusion to emerge is that the basis of morality consists in rules of abstract reason, in impersonal procedures best exemplified in the public sphere.[5] As V. Plumwood put it, "The opposition between the care and concern for particular

2 Things changed in the past years, with the pressure of the European Union to implement the *acquis communautaire*. However, I shall have in mind especially the case of the last decade of the 20th century.

3 See, for example, T. Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1983, Chapter 4; P. Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1986, Chapter 4; P. Wenz, *Environmental Justice*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1988.

4 P. Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, pp. 264-65.

5 See also the eco-feminist view developed in M. Miroiu, *Convenio. Despre natură, femei și morală*, Polirom, Iași, 2002.

others and generalized moral concern is associated with a sharp division between public (masculine) and private (feminine) realms. Thus it is part of a set of dualistic contrasts in which the problem of the Western treatment of nature is rooted. And the opposition between care for particular others and general moral concern is a false one".[6]

Second, the establishment of grounded principles for treating new entities is often regarded as a mark of progress. But is it necessarily so? If successful at all, would theories of environmental ethics (i.e., structured collections of first-order general principles and second-order general priority principles) be signs of a moral improvement? As far as environmental ethicists are committed to an affirmative answer, it may be argued that they are wrong. To see why, let me start with an analogy. Suppose I learned that in a certain country, say in Eastern Europe, a spectacular increase in justice happened in the first five to ten years after the collapse of the old regime. Fair decisions, subject to impartial and procedural mechanisms, derived from general principles, largely replaced the old and unbearable burden of lack of liberty, and other unjust constraints in public life. The political improvement is surely undeniable. But can we say, from this information alone, that this increase of justice is associated with an overall moral improvement? Well, it depends. "[A] gain in justice can come about in one of two ways; it can arise where before there was injustice, or it can occur where before there was neither justice nor injustice but a sufficient measure of benevolence or fraternity such that the virtue of justice had not been extensively engaged".[7] In the former case, we can hardly doubt the moral improvement.[8] But, as M. Sandel argues, things are not so very straight in the latter case. For example, in a (more or less ideal) family or group of friends, relations are governed in large part by spontaneous affection, by generosity and care. Claims of fair shares are rarely made, and even if one gets less than she would under a distribution governed by principles of justice, this question is not part of the core of that way of life. But suppose that dissent appears and, due to growing divergent interests, affection, spontaneity, generosity and care come to be replaced by demands for fairness and the observance of rights, and that moral necessities are met with justice, such that no injustice looms. Parents and children, wife and husband, and friends regulate their interactions with all-encompassing justice. Are we inclined to see in this new situation a restoration of the full moral character of life in the old days? Is the arrival of justice a moral improvement not only over the conflictual situation, but also over the morality brought about by affection, generosity, and so on?

The case I have in mind is not that general principles of justice are not to govern modern societies; rather I worry about the inclination to allow them to invade

6 Val Plumwood, "Nature, Self and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism", in L. Gruen, D. Jamieson (eds.), *Reflecting on Nature*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1994, p. 145.

7 M. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p. 32.

8 In the two decades following the collapse of communism, the lack of moral principles in public life became obvious. Two of the most important issues in Romania were corruption and economic inequality.

the private moral sphere with similar standards and procedures. My background, as a person who lived his youth in the late seventies and in the eighties, makes me very cautious about the dangers such an inclination might involve. While in Poland or Hungary, for example, the signs of a new order could at least be dreamt of in that period, Romanian society fell under a strong authoritarian regime. The party-state aimed to bring under its regulation the entire public sphere. Any free economic activity was strongly prohibited, and no forms of civic organisms were permitted. A free press was not even conceivable. The ideological pressures extended to all members of the society. Mass media were under strong ideological control. The pressure of the public sphere over the private one was overwhelming.

A politicized public sphere governed by impersonal, general principles, no prospects for professional achievements, a more and more aggravated economic crisis, and a humiliating lack of even elementary means of subsistence. In this context, many people directed their energy to the private sphere. Family and groups of friends became the only realm of enjoyment and happiness; even in those social or political conditions, human flourishing was still pursued. And we found immense sources of self-achievement in close connections with parents and children, in friendship and in other interpersonal relations. Morality was seen to define behaviour and character traits in this private sphere — while the public sphere was largely regarded as outside of or external to morality. What is moral was understood in terms of affection, trust, care, generosity; while duties, obligations, or rights were immediately rejected as external, public and hence amoral constraints. Such a reaction was due especially to the general and impersonal connotation of these terms. Universal principles did not directly pertain to the concreteness of real moral interpersonal relations.[9]

In general, the individuals' attitude in that time was to find means to resist, and to individuate themselves as beings different from public oppression able to individually flourish. Their main strategy was to retreat to the private sphere of family and friendship, or the private study of culture, art or science. Moral boundaries were supposed to work there, in contrast to the alien, neutral and highly politicized public field of their life. To oppose was to retreat. To fight against aggression was to develop alternative niches in life, in which aggression was pointless. The attitudes one found in her or his family (e.g., care, generosity and trust) had nothing to do with the equity standards promoted by the party-state. One

9 The contrast between more personalized, more concrete ties in society, on the one hand, and more unpersonalized, anonymous relations among people, on the other, is analyzed from multiple theoretical perspectives. See for example the sociological view, as expressed in Granovetter, M., "Economic Action and Social Structure: the Problem of Embeddedness", *American Journal of Sociology*, 91, 1985, pp. 481-510, and the economic view, described in Platteau, J.-Ph., "Behind the Market State – Where Real Societies Exist", *Journal of Development Studies*, 30, 1994, pp. 533-577; 753-817 or Greif, A., *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006. A very general approach, applicable also to the Romanian society, both during the communist regime and in the transition period following it, is developed in North, D.C., Wallis, J.J., Weingast, B.R., *Violence and Social Orders.A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009.

could not be neutral and formal with one's friends. Equity and fair shares were not usually among the concepts one thought of when spending time, energy or money together with family or friends. Hence, to resist was to develop new and private forms of life. They were not directly opposed to the public one, but nevertheless they were outside its control.

My point is **not** that universal principles are not an essential part of an ethical outlook. I do not intend to rely on the plethora of anti-theorists, who deny the significance, or at least the usefulness, of ethical theories. Rather my argument is that an environmental outlook expressed only in terms of universal first-order and second-order principles should also make room for moral concepts like care, sharing, love, benevolence and so on.

What about the attitude toward nature? The official view during the communist period was that nature needs to be conquered, dominated and subjugated.[10] The largest part of the Danube Delta, a huge area of wilderness, the home of hundreds of species of birds, was transformed into an industrial complex of reed harvesting. The ecosystems on the Danube holm were destroyed: in less than twenty years some million acres turned into irrigated land. On most mountain rivers, dams were built: around them, deforestation was extensive, and many years later one could still see monstrous, dilapidated sites of auxiliary buildings or materials. Nature was viewed instrumentally: its value was its capacity to fulfil collective goals put forward by political organizations. So, people's daily life and nature were in the same boat: fellow subjects to the same source of domination. Situations like the one in the city of Baia Mare were perceived as a case of sharing a common fate: people's life of misery had its counterpart in hard pollution. In this context, if relation to nature is to be moral, people's attitudes to it were more personalized. They were more concerned with concepts like empathy or care, than with duty, obligation or justice.

Redeemed nature

Talk about traditional Western attitudes toward nature is usually contrasted with two kinds of worldviews. One was born three or four decades ago somewhere in the United States (and maybe Australia), and baptized environmental philosophy, and specifically environmental ethics. The other kind comprises less recent, but neglected, rejected, undervalued or even lost worldviews, among them the native American or the aboriginal Australian outlooks.[11](This type of approach is not peculiar to this field of inquiry. As some popular writers, seldom quoted by environmental philosophers noticed, certain views of modern physics display certain resemblances to Oriental ones).

At least two main fundamental attitudes toward nature can be discerned in the Western religiously-grounded world-view: the despotic and that of stewardship.

10 In the communist period, economic planners failed to address issues like pollution, or destroying many natural sites. Environmental damage was nothing but an externality.

11 See, e.g. J. B. Callicott, *Earth's Insights: A Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1994.

The ultimate roots of these views are sought in the first chapters of *Genesis*, and the entire evidence is provided from that book of the *Old Testament*. With a view to the non-despotic interpretation of *Genesis*, J. B. Callicott writes:

> "The God of the Judeo-Christian tradition is transcendent, not immanent. The hypothesis of such a God therefore permits us to conceive intrinsic value as determined objectively, that is, from some point of reference outside human consciousness. From God's point of view, we may imagine the creation as a whole and all its parts are 'good'. Everything may not seem good from a subjective human perspective – poison ivy, mosquitoes, rattlesnakes – but they are all 'God's creatures', and therefore good in His eyes. [...] The mastery of *Homo sapiens* over other species [...] is a sign of the fallen and cursed condition of *Homo sapiens*, not a privilege ordained by God".[12]

This J-theism does not look at first sight incompatible with accepting the genuine, intrinsic value of natural items: they are part of God's creation, and God saw that all of His creation was good. Note that an essential assumption lies behind such an account. An irreconcilable dualism between nature and divinity is taken for granted; the gap between the two realms is absolute, and any attempt to fill it is hardly intelligible. This interpretation might indeed allow for conceiving of natural items as good, from God's view, and hence as intrinsically valuable. But, to use a phrase J. B. Callicott likes, their value is intrinsic only in a 'truncated' sense. For according to the Judaic tradition, when we say that something is good, our statement is quite different from the statement that God is good. God is so highly situated, and His creation is so low, that the value of such a being is hardly more than nothingness. God is absolute positivity, His creation – and nature, consequently –is negativity; genuine intrinsic value is with God, while the value of any part of His creation is only secondary and derivative. The value of each being can thus be intrinsic only if relative and dependent. The fact that the value of these beings is objectively determined is pointless: since it applies to everything and nothing is excluded, it is void; and since from that perspective the value of any creature amounts to nothing, actually we are left with no value at all. Callicott is right: the underlying premise of this position is the hypothesis that God is transcendent, and no transfer is possible from the transcendent realm to the natural, immanent one. But, as I shall try to argue, he is wrong when assuming that this view is *the* 'Judeo-Christian' one.

On the other hand, humans are in a sense opposed both to God and nature. Humans are also part of creation, and are as distant as any natural item from the transcendent divinity. Their intrinsic value is as dependent onGod as in the case of any other being. Human life is sacred but only because it is the gift God gave us, not because it is mine or yours. However, humans were created in God's image, after His likeness. In contrast with mere natural things, they are not just body. They have spirit. This gives them a special place in the world of creation. The dualism between

12 J. B. Callicott, "On the Intrinsic Value of Nonhuman Species", in his *In Defense of the Land Ethic*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1989, pp. 137-38.

body and spirit became the operational counterpart of the dualism between what is divine and what is created. Body is nature, and it gives no chance to salvation. Our only hope is the spirit. Even within the stewardship tradition, which required reverence for nature, the contrast between what is immanent, created, and the transcendent God is absolute. The worth of natural items, if existent at all, is not inherently theirs; it is derived from the fact that they are part of creation.

The story that derived from this world-view is well known: body was associated with matter, with nature, with the negative, the inferior, the passive, dependence, the feminine, etc. The dualism resulted into a strong axiological asymmetry. Nature, women, passions, etc. were undervalued. And natural things were discriminated against as devoid of any moral standing.

I do not intend to linger over these issues. What I want to notice is that some authors like to use sharp distinctions in their environmental ethical theories. Are humans natural beings, and should what they do be assessed along with natural events? Or is this not the case, and should we sharply distinguish the results of human action from natural results? Or, is there a fundamental contrast between the moral status of my pet dog and that of a wild wolf?[13] Is it possible to define wilderness as a total lack of human involvement?[14] I do not favour such dichotomies. My reasons for holding this view will be apparent once I invoke a Byzantine account of nature.

Note first that here we face a profound tension with some specific Christian doctrines. Indeed, the doctrine of incarnation supported a 'sacramental' view ofthe whole of creation. The embodiment of Christ left ungrounded the absolute contrast between the transcendent and the immanent, and hence the derived dualism between spirit and body. If Christ was fully human, then His human body was also divine in character. Divinity was not degraded when transfigured in human flesh and bones. Rather creation was elevated to a new dignity.

It might be objected, however, that although within this doctrine the status of human beings is rendered differently, nature still remains in the opposite pole: Jesus Christ was a human, and it was the human milieu that got a new status. But this would not prohibit attitudes of domination and instrumental accounts of 'mere natural' things (as, in fact, the history of Christianity proved so many times). This argument is, I think, not correct. On the one hand, the divine embodiment cast doubts on the patterns of dichotomous oppositions and of hierarchical domination and subjugation. God's humility and human haughtiness do not match very well. If it is possible for God to have a body, then the absolute gap between our spirit and the dust in us is rendered unintelligible. On the other hand, the attempt to limit the

13 For a critical perspective on this distinction, see Elliot Sober, "Philosophical Problems for Environmentalism", in B. G. Norton (ed.), *The Preservation of Species*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1986, pp. 173-194.

14 See for example the opposing views of J. B. Callicott and H. Rolston, III. See J. B. Callicott, "The Wilderness Idea Revisited: The Sustainable Development Alternative", in *The Environmental Professional*, 13 (1991), pp. 235-47; H. Rolston, III, "The Wilderness Idea Reaffirmed", in *The Environmental Professional*, 13 (1991), pp. 370-77; J. B. Callicott, "That Good Old Time Wilderness Religion", in *The Environmental Professional*, 13 (1991), pp. 378-79.

relevance of Christ's embodiment to the human sphere is just one of many possible interpretations.

Byzantine or orthodox Christianity does not follow these lines. I cannot smother my surprise to find out that the orthodox view of nature was largely neglected in the works of environmental philosophers. For orthodoxy is an essential part of the European tradition, not an exotic world-view: Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, Romanians, Ukrainians, Russians, etc. are orthodox. For the orthodox mystic doctrine,[15] Christ's embodiment did not concern just the human world. The human body is dust from the ground, and embodiment affected the entire nature. The meaning of His coming was to save humans both as spiritual **and** as bodily, natural beings. In this way, His sacrificial act meant that the **entire creation** was saved. According to the orthodox view, nature *per se* cannot be subject to being disvalued. It is not sinful, the eternal source of the evil. There is no room for somatophobia in the orthodox world-view, and the contrast between spirit and body has no strong support. Our bodily needs, our affections and passions, our pains and diseases are not evil in themselves. Flesh is not sinful. Human beings, as well as natural entities, are equally redeemed.

Natural entities and wilderness are not opposed to humans; although most of them are outside human control and understanding, they are not viewed as mysterious and dangerous sources of evil, for they are God's creation, and hence good. But notice a fundamental difference between this position and the one reported by Callicott: for orthodox Christianity, the fact that natural beings are intrinsically valuable is not to be explained by the fact that they look good from an absolute, transcendent and thus objective perspective. The explanation runs differently: natural beings are (objectively) intrinsically valuable because (1) humans are intrinsically valuable, as Jesus Christ proved by His sacrifice on the cross; and (2) humans and the other natural beings are on the same par. We share the same fate. Both humans and nature are part of creation and salvation brought by Jesus Christ concerns both humans and nature.

It would then be inconsistent to hold that we human beings are intrinsically valuable, while natural beings lack this sort of value. Since this would entail that we are only spiritual creatures, and that our bodies – dust from the ground – would not be valuable; this would require that embodiment was not total, that Jesus Christ had not human flesh and bones.

For orthodox Christians, the premise Callicott takes for granted, that "[t]he God of the Judeo-Christian tradition is transcendent, not immanent" is hard to defend. Jesus Christ is not intangible and far, too far from us. In fact, His dwelling is in our innermost nature. Insuperable dualisms, and the hierarchical views they entail are alien to and not supported by the orthodox doctrine. Nature, body, affection, the feminine, the subjective are not inferior; culture, spirit, the masculine, the objective enjoy no priority. The orthodox attitude toward natural items did not then involve the issue of including them in the moral sphere, as required when classical, primarily Western ethical theories were considered. For orthodox Christians, the fact

15 Some orthodox thinkers argued that their doctrine is better describable as mystical rather than theological in nature.

that moral boundaries do not enclose exclusively the human world has profound, religious grounds.

Environmental concern: Why is it ethical?

In the previous sections I argued for two theses. First, I argued that in the Romanian society non-personalized ethical principles and rules, grounded in universalizable maxims were associated, especially in the past half century, with the public, highly ideologised (and felt as amoral) sphere, controlled by an oppressive regime. If morality pertains to human flourishing, if it is to provide a guide on how we should live, then highly individualized connections with other humans or natural items are ultimately relevant. An environmental ethic theory following usual patterns of concentrating on first-order and second-order principles and rules would not be appealing for a Romanian philosopher. S/he would feel more comfortable with attempts to make principles and rules more substantive, full of concrete content and far from claiming to settle large collections of cases.[16]

Secondly, I argued that the Christian orthodox religion provides a basis for a genuine environmental ethic. Natural items have intrinsic value. On this premise, the argument runs further as follows: Christ redeemed humans from the original sin. Salvation concerned human beings in their integrity, as spirit as well as body. Since redemption involves also the body, nature is not evil in itself. So, it would be inconsistent to hold that human beings are intrinsically valuable, while natural items are not. Or, to put it in another way, nature is valuable because humans are valuable. Humans' having intrinsic value explains why natural items are not ethically neutral. Notice that the reference to the intrinsic value of human beings is essential. But this does not involve a subjective view on the value of natural items: the sort of value attached to them is objective. The inference involved is not that a natural item has intrinsic value because some humans value it as intrinsically valuable. It is a fundamental ontological fact that grounds the assertion of value: Christ's embodiment to redeem the entire creation. Objectivity is independence from human valuers. But it does not result from a transcendent assessment. Rather it comes from the inner nature of any creature, be it either human or natural.

These two theses have, on my view, a peculiar epistemological status. They are not the sorts of things one can directly include in her/his preferred theory. Indeed, they are not first-order principles concerning what it is for something to have moral status in a theory, i.e. to have rights, or to be a subject of duties or obligations, of our care or benevolence and so on. Rather these theses express general conditions on the acceptability of an ethical theory. They involve requirements one cannot ignore if she attempts to frame an environmental ethical theory. Suppose that, say in the Romanian cultural context sketched above, I want to put forth an ethical theory that genuinely concerns the environment. Then, its principles and rules must involve moral concepts like caring, sharing, love, etc., as well as rights, duties or obligations. Moreover, living with that theory should not have oppressive results: its principles

16 H. Rolston, III, *Conserving Natural Value*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, pp. 26-33; 62-67; 97-100; 134-141; 228-234, and *passim*.

should not compel ways of behaving in most intimate spheres, from a public, alien position; finally, the ethical theory should assume that natural items are valuable in themselves. Such constraints are not sufficient, though, to restrict options to one theory or to one sort of environmental ethical theory. A large palette is still available.

In this sense, my position is not subject to an obvious line of criticism, which runs as follows. It is doubtful that one can meaningfully speak about (all) Romanians' view on the environment. The very idea of investigating the idea of a *Volkgeist* might have had some respectability in Europe in the first decades of the past century,[17] but it is an obsolete one today. So, to assume that there might be a Romanian ethical theory is not a promising strategy. I agree with this. But my argument was not concerned with an abstract, atemporal, and absolute notion of a Romanian *Volkgeist*. I only relied on some cultural features of today's Romanian cultural context that might have some relevance to accepting environmental ethics approaches. Secondly, and more importantly, I did not argue that Romanians' view **is** a certain, specific ethical theory. Rather, the implication was that such a context would provide us some structural (epistemological) constraints on acceptable ethical theories, rather than substantive ones. Those constraints concern the class of preferable ethical theories, not just a preferred one.

I think it is worth mentioning a sharp difference between the consequences of these structural constraints and the problems faced by authors who work in the 'standard' Western tradition. Environmental ethicists argued that a satisfactory ethical theory should make sense of the intrinsic value of natural items. The theory's range of application cannot consist only in human beings and their behaviour. It should essentially concern natural items. If one agrees with the basic position emerging from the Romanian cultural context, then the ethical theories she is likely to accept would naturally involve a genuine environmental concern. Keep in mind that this constraint is independent of, and prior to, framing particular ethical theories.

In the past decades enormous theoretical (as well as practical) effort was spent to acknowledge that environmental ethics is a respectable academic discipline. From my point of view, two different, although not always carefully distinguished theoretical accounts contributed to this achievement. On the one hand, the birth of environmental ethics involved construction, testing, and comparison of ethical theories. Some of these constructs proved to be better articulated, more promising, broader in scope and aspirations than others, while some such constructs failed when their internal consistency was investigated, or they were regarded as incompatible with certain considered ethical judgements. Not surprisingly, it was tempting for many environmental philosophers to locate around these lines the main controversies and results. For in this way their work looked similar to what other people, in highly esteemed academic fields, did: produce, test and use general, competing accounts of the relevant phenomena.

This picture is correct, if partial. It overlooks a non-competitive, rather co-operative theoretical activity of environmental ethicists, consisting of bringing about reasons, motives and arguments for acknowledging that cases in which natural

17 Following German authors they were most acquainted with, many Romanian philosophers dealt extensively with this topic.

entities were involved are genuinely ethical. A favourite example of H. Rolston is this: 'A bison fell through the ice into a river in Yellowstone Park; the environmental ethic there, letting nature take its course, forbade would-be rescuers from either saving or killing the suffering animal to put it out of its misery.'[18] I wonder, was that decision an ethical one? I do not ask whether it was right or wrong. My question is, did it make sense to say that as a matter of ethical assessment we ought to let that animal die? Rolston is explicit: 'the environmental ethic there', nature took its course. Today we may agree that the premise that this situation is a moral one is apparent and not problematic. But was it so a few decades ago? Did we really think then that the decision of the park officer was ethical in character?

I want to argue that the birth of environmental ethics involved two different types of ethical activity. One such activity is the standard one of constructing, testing and comparing theories. But these aspects aside, a quite different kind of ethical activity was developed: it was extensively argued that moral boundaries are not established once and forever; that cases which reasonably (i.e., according to established ethical theories) were regarded as outside the scope of morality actually were misunderstood; that entities which reasonably were thought not to belong to the moral sphere actually could be said to deserve moral considerability. The former type of theoretical activity concerns a **substantive** issue: what as a matter of 'ethical fact' deserves moral considerability?[19] The latter type is **conceptual**: what can be meaningfully said to deserve moral consideration?[20] When we inquire about what can have moral standing, and consequently about the range of meaningful applications of an environmental ethic theory, the investigation is not bound to a peculiar theory, however appealing it might appear. Rather it is **disciplinary**: it points to the sorts of beings and concrete situations which a satisfactory theory in that discipline is expected to deal with. The environmental ethicists succeeded in showing that ethical theories cannot afford to be silent on environmental issues. The fact that an ethical theory failed to provide satisfactory accounts could not then be treated simply as a consequence of the fact that the theory itself did not intend to deal with such cases. The argument is that, if genuinely ethical at all, the theory **should** deal with those cases. Environmental issues were proved to be not marginal and optional fields of application of ethical theories. Rather they had to be regarded, to use Th. Kuhn's famous phrase, as **paradigmatic** applications.[21] Failure to deal in an appropriate manner with them is blame on the theory, and no immunization procedure can help.[22]

18 H. Rolston, III, "Environmental Ethics: Values in and Duties to the Natural World", in F. H. Borman, St. R. Kellert (eds.), *The Broken Circle: Ecology, Economics, Ethics*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1991, p. 74.

19 See K. Goodpaster, "On Being Morally Considerable", in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1978, pp. 308-25.

20 I discussed these issues at length in my papers "The Conceptual/Normative Distinction in Environmental Ethics", *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie*, 42-43, 1999, pp. 133-145 ; 'Two Approaches to Intrinsic Value', *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie*, 44, 2000, pp. 367-376.

21 Th. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, second ed., Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1970.

22 See also my paper "Global Warming and Moral Theorizing", in *Theoria*, 11 (1996), 27, pp.

To conclude, taking into account the attitudes of a philosopher who wants to make sense of the sorts of moral experiences people faced in the past half century in a country like Romania has significant implications. The conceptual issues are in her case settled to a large extent: it is easier and more directly arguable that cases in which some natural items occur, essentially may be regarded as genuinely ethical. Specifically, environmental ethics as a discipline is less problematic.

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