

Title

Reconciling Ecological and Social Justice to Promote Biodiversity Conservation

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Abstract

In this article, we focus upon a division between generalized schools of philosophical and ethical thought about culture and conservation. There is an ongoing debate playing out over conservation between those who believe conservation threatens community livelihoods and traditional practices, and those who believe conservation is essential to protect nonhuman species from the impact of human development and population growth. We argue for reconciliation between these schools of thought and a cooperative push towards the cultivation of an environmentally-focused perspective that embraces not only social and economic justice but also a concern for non-human species. Our goal is to underline the ethics and tangible benefits that may result from combining the cultural data and knowledge of the social sciences with an understanding of environmental science and conservation. We highlight instances in which social scientists overlook their own anthropocentric bias in relation to ecological justice, or justice for all species, in favor of exclusive social justice among people. We focus on the polemical stances of this debate in order to emphasize the importance of a middle road of cooperation that acknowledges the rights of human and nonhuman species, alike. In conclusion, we present an alternative set of ethics and research activities for social scientists concerned with conservation and offer ideas on how to reconcile the conflicting interests of people and the environment.

Keywords: anthropocentrism; conservation; ecological justice; environmental justice

1. Introduction

On August 7th, 2013 in Manchester, England, the organizing committee of the 2013 World Congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) held a plenary debate on the notion "Justice for people must come before justice for the environment." This notion is rooted in beliefs shared by many social scientists that efforts to protect the environment through conservation threatens community livelihoods and endangers traditional practices (Brockington et al. 2008; Duffy 2014; Fletcher 2014; Igoe 2011; www.justconservation.org; West 2008; West and Brockington 2012).

Those supporting the notion presented arguments centered on the idea that the majority of conservationists are Western elites whose actions impinge upon cultural practices and the economic development of local communities. These speakers argued that anthropologists have a duty to uphold human rights and indigenous entitlements against Western neocolonial environmentalists. The speakers' critique of environmentalism rested on the proximity of conservation groups to the perpetrators of a capitalist rapacious, neo-imperialist and even racist enterprise that perpetuates environmental injustice through impingement on human or indigenous rights while catering to wealthy elites. Environmental injustice, in this case, referred to the unequal access to environmental benefits (such as natural resources) amongst human populations. The speakers hinted at historical contexts in which conservation areas or national parks were created in developing countries, with particular emphasis on the critique of the top-down and neo-colonial practices, in which environmental values are seen to be either imposed by post-colonial governments, or by international conservation organizations.

Those presenting against the motion argued that environmentalism is not a Western but a universal phenomenon and that love of nature is shared by traditional societies. They agreed with the proponents of the motion that culpability for ecological problems lies largely with corporate and political elites that support the industrial economy and commodification of nature. However, they pointed out that the 'cultural practices' of most societies have now given way to globalized consumerism.

Those arguing against the motion presented a number of inter-related points: First, the notion of justice is fundamentally concerned with equalizing relations between those who have power and those who do not. Second, humans, other species, and the material world are bound together in communal processes of production and reproduction that are interdependent. Third, the dualistic vision of culture and nature, which underpins the separate categories of 'social' and 'environmental', is theoretically inadequate. Fourth, we manifest the beliefs and values that we promote. If we compose a worldview in which human needs and interests are prioritized, we will act accordingly, invariably giving insufficient weight to the needs of the non-humans. The speakers also argued that it is necessary for social scientists

to widen their empathy circles to include other species using the same ethical framework that guides their interactions with other humans.

This, the speakers contend, will require continuous advocacy and representation for non-humans (who will never speak for themselves) and may necessitate a kind of ‘affirmative action’ to deconstruct hierarchical dichotomies that prioritize the rights of humans above those of nonhuman species. At the conclusion of the debate, a vote was held amongst the audience to assess the resultant opinion over whether or not "Justice for people must come before justice for the environment." The result was over 90 votes against the motion, 30 votes in support (for the full details of the debate please see Strang 2013).

This debate reflects a wider division between generalized schools of philosophical and ethical thought about culture and conservation. In this article, we outline an alternative ethics and research activities for social scientists concerned with conservation and encourage collaborative efforts between conservation groups, social scientists and biologists. We focus on the polemical stances that divide eccentrically concerned social and natural scientists and conservation groups, from anthropocentrically oriented social scientists in order to underline the importance of and promising opportunities that may result from a middle road of cooperation and collaboration. Our goal is to resolve certain misunderstandings between these groups and reveal the possibility that, together, we can reconcile environmental justice among people, and ecological justice among species.

1.1. Different schools of thought on conservation

Within the social sciences, on the one hand, there is a tradition of studies on the origins of environmentalism and conservation (e.g. Milton 1994; Anderson 1996), exploring the interdependency of all species (e.g. Kumar and Kumar 2008), critiquing economic approaches to biodiversity conservation (e.g. Redford and Adams 2009) and generally signifying a ‘species turn’ in social science (e.g. Haraway 2008). This literature explores the interconnections between conservation and individuals, as well as the sentimental commitment of communities and cultures to conservation (e.g. Milton 2002). Some of this research is largely inspired by ecocentrism - a nature-focused set of values that denies the idea that there is a hierarchical division between human-nature realms that grants humans greater intrinsic value than nonhuman species.

Several ecocentric environmentalists, social and natural scientists today argue for increased recognition and protection of the rights to life of nonhuman species and the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity (e.g. Cafaro and Primack 2014; Crist 2012; Nash 2012). Many of these authors argue that conservation should be based not only on the instrumental value of nature and nonhuman species to humans but more importantly, on intrinsic value, as well (e.g. Crist 2004, 2012; Boyd 2007; Redford and

Adams 2009). The purely instrumental motivation for conservation threatens those species that do not offer any explicit benefit to humans. Instrumental motivation reflects what is referred to as humanistic altruism, or altruism directed specifically toward humans, ranging from concern with one's self to all of humanity. Kopnina (2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2014a), Miller et al. (2014), and Cafaro and Primack (2014) voice the concern that humanistic altruism and anthropocentric approaches to conservation will lead to the abandonment of the protection of species that are not instrumental to human well-being. These authors also assert that violence against nature and individual species is a moral evil.

This argument is based on environmental ethics and largely inspired by cross-cultural models of human-environmental connection. Environmental ethics are in part intended to extend the scope of concern beyond one's community to include all people and the whole of nature – both now and in the future (Yang 2006). In *Uncommon Ground, Cultural Landscapes and Environmental Values*, for instance, Veronica Strang (1997) explored environmental values that underpin human-environmental relations, focusing on those that are acquired through both universal and culturally specific factors. This exploration is permeated by empathy for both local communities and other species calling for recognition of animal suffering and victimhood. These values are included in what environmental psychologists call biospheric altruism, defined as an extension of concern beyond human beings that acknowledges the intrinsic value of non-human species (Dietz et al. 2005). Such support for nonhuman species that recognizes the inherent rights of all species, regardless of their relationship and utility to human beings, is referred to as 'ecological justice' (Baxter 2005; Kopnina 2014b).

Ecological justice is opposed in social science literature by critics of conservation and environmentalism - those conflicted by an assumed contradiction between supporting local cultures and promoting environmental conservation. These include a. several anthropologists that oppose conservation for its impact on local level cultures and tradition (Brockington et al. 2012; Duffy 2014; Fletcher 2014); b. social scientists who argue that nature is a cultural construction and its conservation, an expression of oppressive power (Peet and Watts 1996; Robbins 2012); and c. those who support pluralistic approaches to conservation, including those exclusively for economic development and profit (Kareiva and Marvier 2012).

Many social science researchers that oppose conservation efforts, associate conservation groups with development agencies and depict them as more concerned with capital gain than with human or environmental wellbeing (e.g. Brockington 2002; Escobar 1999; Garland 2008; Holmes 2010; West and Brockington 2012). Critics condemn conservation groups for demonizing humans, and being misanthropic (Duffy 2014; Marvier 2014). By blaming humans for environmental destruction, these critics argue, conservation groups fail to appreciate cultural traditions including dependency upon 'animal harvests' (Einarsson 1994; Kalland 2009; Kottak 1999; McElroy 2013; Wenzel 2009). In contrast to the

aforementioned ecocentric thinkers, this group of researchers is largely anthropocentrically motivated. Anthropocentrism is the hierarchical view of human life, needs, and rights that sees humans as more important than nonhumans, valuing nature primarily for its utilitarian value. Anthropocentrism is often opposed to the idea of ecological justice, which attaches standard theories of justice to ecology, and claims that all organisms have the right to a fair share of the planet's environmental resources (Baxter 2005). These critics express concern about 'environmental justice' - the belief that the burden of environmental damage should be equally distributed so that underprivileged communities are not unfairly saddled by exposure to environmental risks or the necessity for environmental repair (Low and Gleeson 1998; Schlosberg 2007).

Many social scientists engaged in environmental justice efforts accuse conservation groups of collaborating with political elites who withhold compensation, force community migration, and even for exposing disadvantaged communities to unequal shares of environmental risk (e.g. Brockington 2002; www.justconservation.org). These same critics argue that conservation is linked to various forms of violence, from the displacement of resident communities (e.g. Fletcher 2014) to the deployment of environmental protection in the name of neo-colonial state building. These critics speak of exclusionary conservation tactics leading to social conflict and "green violence" (e.g. Kelly 2011) or "war to save biodiversity." (Duffy 2014). This accusation goes well beyond the response to environmental crime such as commercial poaching (itself an increasingly violent economy). The critics often speak of for-profit conservation groups, which engage in the expansion of private conservation spaces and support the consolidation of state sovereignty over conservation territories as representing money-making schemes that employ environmental concern as a guise (Brockington et al. 2008; Buscher and Fletcher 2014; Lunstrum 2014).

These critiques, for the most part, are well placed; but they do not incorporate the ethical concerns that drive ecocentric environmental conservation groups (e.g. The Rewilding Institute), nor recognize the environmentally-oriented philosophies of many nonwestern societies who they claim to be supporting through their opposition to conservation. Furthermore, many of these social scientists dismiss ecological justice by failing to consider the role of conservation in preventing the increasing frequency of species' extinction (Cafaro and Primack 2014; Hoffman et al. 2010; Miller et al. 2014; Pimm et al 2014), and the pressing need for not less but more regulation regarding human impact on the environment (Hoffman et al. 2010).

2. The critical study of human-environment relations

Ecological determinism, the belief that the physical environment determines human social development, was conceived in the 19th century and suggested that all cultural practices are ecological adaptations. *Cultural determinism*, which developed in the early part of the 20th century, was as a reaction to this idea and counters that the world is, instead, defined through cultural perceptions. Cultural determinism has heavily influenced theory since the 1950s. Within this framework, concepts such as biodiversity, wilderness, and nature are largely believed to be cultural constructions. This constructivism holds that human concepts of reality reflect 'incomplete, incorrect, biased, and false understandings of an empirical reality' (Brosius 1999:37). The cultural and historical contingency of nature, thus, not only depicts nature as a product of culture, but also makes the existence of the natural world culturally variable, relative, and makes the problem of environmental damage subject to cultural interpretation (Brockington et al. 2008; Cronon 1995; Escobar 1999). From an environmentalist point of view, the constructivist perspective is doubly destructive for it makes it impossible to judge one attitude towards nature as better or worse than any other (Crist 2004; Kidner 2000). Wilderness, as an example, is often argued to exist only as a human sentiment, rather than as a natural feature of the environment (Cronon 1995).

In conjunction with this constructivist perspective, there also reigns a perception that there is a dichotomy between natural and human domains. In this case, it is not the dichotomies or dualisms, themselves, that is so disturbing but rather the implied physical human domination over other species. One can dichotomize white people and black people, or men and women, for example, and still not subordinate one or the other. While constructivism, to some degree, may align well with the anthropological tenet of cultural relativism, from an applied point of view it makes Milton's (1994) insistence that "some degree of cultural reform is necessary if we are to reduce the harmful impact of human activities on the environment and build a genuinely sustainable future" a moot point by devaluing any objective or 'scientific' perspective on what might constitute an environmentally beneficial behavior.

Those supporting the social construction of nature largely deny a role for the environment as an autonomous, scientifically verifiable entity or set of systems, and are unsympathetic to ecocentric perspectives seeking the protection of and/or provision of rights to nonhuman species (Milton 1996; Shiva 1993). As Rappaport (1990:68) observed, 'the concept of an ecosystem *is not simply a theoretical framework* within the world that can be analyzed. It is in itself an element of this world, one that is crucial in maintaining the world's integrity in the face of mounting insults to it.'

3. Study of environmentalism itself as a cultural practice

One thing anthropocentric and ecocentric scholars more frequently agree on is the critique of the commodification of nature. This commodification is evidenced by the notion of 'natural resources' or

Payments for Environmental Services (PES) that currently dominate environmental politics and the vocabularies of international organizations (e.g. www.unep.org/ecosystemmanagement/) PES is an approach that attempts to overcome market failures in managing environmental externalities. The central idea is that eco-friendly forms of agriculture alongside watershed and forest protection in rural areas create ecological services, such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity, erosion and flood control, clean drinking water, or landscape beauty, for which providers (i.e. farmers and other land and resource managers) should be compensated (Neef 2015). Despite evidence that incentives such as PES may be one of the only effective ways to motivate conservation amongst impoverished local communities (Neef 2015), PES is criticized by anthropocentric social scientists for displacing local knowledge and alternative narratives and instituting corporate conservation as the only normative institution controlling both the environment and the local people (Igoe et al. 2009).

Although for different reasons, both schools of thought argue that the economic capture approach to conservation is inadequate. The more anthropocentric scholars argue that some dominant societies or human groups benefit more from commodification than others since they control access to natural resources (Sullivan 2009). The pro-conservation group of thinkers, on the other hand, has emphasized that 'natural resource' approach is ethically flawed. Crist (2012: 145) reflects that the concept of resources works as "discursive incarceration of the living world" because it has "engraved the delusion of human supremacy into common-sense, science-sense, technocratic, and political thinking, policy discourse, and other social arenas." In this view, the issue is not with who profits from the distribution of natural resources and whether local communities are properly compensated but with the very idea of turning nature into a "natural resource." The commodification of nature encourages a tendency for "economism that dominates human concerns in the West to override any conservationist concerns" (Bonnett 2013:11).

The relationship of many anthropocentric social scientists to conservation and power holders is paradoxical on two counts. In their support of local 'livelihoods,' which is often based on wage labor, consumption, and the treatment of nature as natural resources, many social scientists align themselves with the very profit-driven enterprise they criticize. On the other hand, supporters of 'traditional lifestyles' tend to prioritize indigenous rights *over* the lives and wellbeing of nonhuman species (e.g. Desmond 2013; Finsen and Finsen 1994; Thorne 1998). In both scenarios, social scientists are compelled to overlook the objectification of the nonhuman species that local communities depend on (e.g. Leakey and Morrell 2002; Scruton 2012).

3.1 Environmental altruism and justice

Many social scientists, however, are working to better understand the basis for human behavior towards, and treatment of, the environment (Dietz et al. 2005) and toward the development of approaches that increase awareness of the significance of nonhuman species (e.g. Dunlap and Van Liere 1977; Pluhar and Rollin 1995; Crist 2012; Nash 2012). These efforts involve the expansion of theory and methods in studies of human-environment interactions to include the consideration of altruism, justice, and ethics - both formalized and personal - and on changing the idea that one species deserves to be separated from and exalted above others. For instance, conservation psychologists have noted that there is an empirical distinction between surveys that report on respondents' readiness to act because of their concern with other humans (humanistic altruism), and those reporting on concern that includes other species or the biosphere (biospheric altruism) (Dietz et al. 2005).

As evidenced by the rise in environmental justice issues addressing the equitable distribution of environmental burdens across populations and socioeconomic levels, our humanistic altruism has increased during the post-colonial decades. Yet, perhaps as a result of this concern, billions of animals are slaughtered and biologically diverse flora is cleared on a daily basis to satisfy the consumption aspirations of humans. Understanding why humans do or do not act in concert with biospheric altruism, or how they may be persuaded to adopt a broader ethical base that acknowledges the rights of nonhuman species, is within the skill set of social scientists and compatible with local level ethnographic research that examines human-environment interaction on a case-by-case basis. We believe that the cultural knowledge of social scientists, particularly anthropologists, combined with an understanding of the ecological goals of conservation groups would significantly increase the efficacy of conservation efforts.

3.2 Environmental ethics and ecological justice

Environmentalists have long maintained that human voices are necessary for defending the rights of non-human species (Baxter 2005; Leopold 1949; Naess 1973). Furthermore, ecocentric thinkers do not see people as hierarchically superior to nonhuman species but demand that nonhuman species be granted rights independent of their relationship or utility to human beings.

The 'convergence thesis' states that preservationist and conservationist policies will tend to converge in the long run (Norton 1986). Jamieson (1998: 46) supports this pointing out that, "one can go quite far towards protecting the environment solely on the basis of concern for animals." For example, the production of organic meat demonstrates an increased state of health and wellbeing for farm animals and humans. Another familiar example is fighting pollution that is likely to harm both human and environmental health. Eric Katz (1999: 390) has furthermore pointed out that, to a point, anthropocentrism can make a positive contribution to the evaluation and justification of environmental

policy in situations dealing with artificial and not natural systems: "Examples might include policies involving urban air pollution, greenhouse gases, issues of environmental justice, and the environmental impacts of agriculture."

This type of convergence thinking tends to dominate sustainable development rhetoric and promotes 'balancing' human and environmental needs. Partially stemming from this idea of unity, it is often assumed that the protection of the natural world *is* in the interests of humans. Yet, caution needs to be exercised not to assume that human interests always correspond with those of nature. There is enough empirical evidence that mass extinctions can occur *without* any apparent effect on human welfare. Katz (1999) reflects that in situations where environmental systems are still largely natural there is a clear difference between anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric justifications for environmental policy and urges us, in the case of wilderness preservation and the protection of endangered species, to commit to nonanthropocentrism.

The relationship between environmental sustainability, animal rights, and human interests remains a contingent one (Garner in press). There are cases where protecting animals indeed helps humans, as well; and others in which it has no bearing on any particular human interests. But, more significantly, there are many instances in which there are conflicts between upholding the interests of animals and those of humans. In the case of some human-wildlife conflicts, for instance, it was proposed that wildlife populations should be more effectively managed by a range of fertility control tools, including the use of injectable, single-dose immune-contraceptive vaccines to sterilize females, oral avian contraceptives, and new methods of remote contraceptive delivery including "bacterial ghosts, virus-like particles and genetically modified transmissible and non-transmissible organisms" (Massei and Cowan 2014:1). Garner (in press) provides another pertinent example:

...environmentalists are very keen to ensure that chemicals are toxicity-tested extensively before they are permitted to be used. But of course, this testing is undertaken largely on animals. Only a rejection of anthropocentrism, in all of its guises, would remedy this situation. This would enable the defense of nonhuman animal species, *even when* there is a human cost of so doing (Garner in press).

Protecting species from harm or extinction in these instances would require a special assignment of rights and intrinsic values that could protect non-humans from human-induced, avoidable injustices. The legal and ecological details of what would be involved in this type of declaration are beyond the scope of this paper.

To assure the critics blaming environmentalists of misanthropy, however, ascribing rights and respect to nonhuman species does not belittle human beings (see Ingold 2006). Just as a person does not

have to be black to support racial equality or a woman to support women's rights – human beings do not have to be blind to the plight of other species (Nash 2014). To be sure, granting overdue attention to the non-human physical world will only become increasingly more important as greater numbers of environments and ecosystems are endangered. Appealing to an anthropocentric perspective, one could argue that there are possible pharmaceutical discoveries to be made for human benefit; but more importantly, there are lives at stake. If not today, then someday, the majority of humans alive will balk at the arrogance and ignorance of those of us who, in misguided self-interest, stood by the abuse and eradication of other beings.

Thus, here we would like to add a focus on other species. We write with the hope that social scientists, motivated by altruism in defense of the poor, downtrodden, and marginalized, are morally predisposed to extend their disciplinary horizon and ethics beyond anthropocentrism and recognize human connections to and responsibility for nature.

4. Alternatives

In order to expand the social science focus to include nonhuman species, social scientists must critically investigate their role in relation to these species. The aforementioned reluctance to cooperate with conservation groups when we could perhaps assist in the resolution of conflicts, or expand the applications of our research beyond human benefit exacerbates ecological myopia and perpetuates anthropocentric bias (Kopnina 2012a, 2013, 2014).

One way for social scientists to expand their foci would be to include different subjects, such as conservation activists, themselves, in order to understand their cultural and ethical motivations. For instance, by focusing only on the failures of mainstream conservation groups, many social scientists ignore the messages, motivations, and ethics of alternative types of environmental movements (Kopnina 2012c; Regan 2003; Singer 1975; Taylor 1991). Further research into ecocentric communities and cultures is also a possibility (Anderson 2011). In this way, social scientists can be advocates for behaviors that espouse inherently sustainable cultural practices. Social scientists are also primed to expand their study of the cross-cultural application of traditional ecological knowledge, and the traditional, cultural practices and perceptions that are used to identify with, rather than belittle nature. As Lilian “Na’ia” Alessa (2009), of Salish ancestry, wrote:

It should not be surprising that somebody suggests that the approach of traditional knowledge is not limited to humans. We have only recently become aware that elephants have very calculated ways of using and moving through their environments. They will find their food, raise their young, interact, and bury their dead in ways that are distinct to their clans, locations, and

preferences and they will transmit this information from one generation to the next using a complex subsonic language. My grandmother told me similar stories about ravens, that we were really not that different, and that if we searched our memories really hard, we could actually see someone we knew in those brilliant, wise, winter eyes
(<http://schoolingtheworld.org/resources/essays/the-other-way-of-knowing/>).

Social scientists, we believe, also need to add a focus on the ways in which people could potentially change their behaviors or the reasons why people may be unable to do so (Shoreman-Ouimet and Kopnina 2011). Most environmental social scientists, for instance, do not study those groups that do the greatest damage (e.g., intensive agriculture, logging companies, chemical manufacturers, etc.), where they could arguably make the greatest difference (Shoreman and Haenn 2009; Shoreman-Ouimet 2011a). This is largely due to limited access. Elite groups, such as corporations and community leaders - those who consider themselves as having something to lose through disclosure - are often less willing to participate in ethnographic research efforts. There are, however, examples of anthropological and ethnographic research on elites that incorporate holistic, broad methodologies that take all aspects of individual and corporate culture, history, and values into consideration (Adams 2009; Marcus 1983; Shoreman-Ouimet 2011b). While the more traditional anthropological mode of representing the voiceless is an invaluable practice, it often leads to fighting for the rights of humans to continue costly subsistence practices. Thus, we argue that we should balance these efforts by adding foci on the origin of damaging behavior and what changes can conceivably be made.

Lastly, we need to expand the traditional notion of holism in order to unpack and study contexts in which humans are important but not the only players. Some researchers are doing so, for instance, by collaborating in interdisciplinary efforts to combine theories and research from the social and natural sciences (see Cafaro and Crist 2012). Others are participating in the writing of 'multispecies ethnographies,' which stress the philosophical, cultural, and biological aspects of animal-human encounters and depict the roles that humans and nonhumans simultaneously play out on a landscape (Feinberg et al. 2013; Paleček and Risjord 2013). Recognizing the multiplicity of lives at stake and on stage in human-environment interactions can also be accomplished by responding to biologists' call for increased data on cultural needs and beliefs in the context of conservation (Hoffman et al 2010) and working with, rather than condemning, conservation groups, biologists and others involved in extinction prevention.

5. Summary

As this discussion has revealed, there is indeed, an ongoing debate playing out over conservation between those who believe conservation threatens community livelihoods and traditional practices, and those who believe conservation is essential to protect nonhuman species from the impact of human development and population growth. Despite some shared interests, the relationship between some social scientists, biologists and conservation groups has deteriorated in place of a 'them or us' mentality that pits the welfare of human groups and nonhuman species against one another. Rather than engaging in the process of defining and implementing environmental responsibilities for the long-term benefit of both humans and nonhumans, some social scientists have allowed their focus on human communities to preclude their participation in conservation. The tension is understandable – yet the unity of purpose in environmental protection seems to be more logical and desirable.

Indeed, there was a time that human groups and the surrounding environment were not at the extreme odds that they are today. Under traditional conditions - low population density, a subsistence rather than a market economy, adequate fallow periods, and extensive forests for future gardens - human activity was not a major threat to global ecosystems and other species (Sponsel 2013). However, these traditional conditions are now rare. The encroachment of Western civilization, consumption patterns, and the growing human population, has irreversibly depleted natural resources, degraded ecosystems, and pushed nonhuman species to extinction.

Today, human cultures and sustenance practices are as threatened by pollution, deforestation and climate change as the nonhuman species on which they depend, and the destruction of rich elements of nature impoverishes everybody. As members of the human race, we have long sworn our allegiance to the human victims, but it is this interdependence between human and nonhuman, as Strang (2013) points out, and the gravity of environmental deterioration, that demands we make the two realms one and increase our study and promotion of conservation.

Unfortunately, it seems as though many social scientists' long-held obligation to defend local cultures against outside interests is contributing to the condemnation of conservation programs. As a result, many social scientists are seemingly unable and therefore excused from engaging or assisting with conservation. This distance prevents them from delving into the important study of what motivates and perpetuates environmentalism and what differentiates it from anti-environmentalism, as well as, from educating people about or advocating for, the welfare and rights of nonhuman species.

Although as a global society we are making strides to allocate justice across human communities, this often comes at the expense of flora and fauna who are unable to speak for themselves. The inverse relationship between human interests and ecosystem wellbeing bears a remarkable resemblance to instances of colonial, racial, and gender inequalities in which one group prospers at the expense of the other. Today, the majority of social scientists acknowledge these immoral actions and much of their

research examines the impact of such atrocities. Thus, before the exploitation of flora and fauna becomes yet another regrettable result of historical myopia, we encourage social scientists to support the right to life for nonhuman species, and offer their understanding of human behavior to assist conservation efforts by broadening their subject pool and prioritizing a more inclusive set of environmental ethics.

Adopting a thesis of 'convergence' (Norton 1986) that the majority of human and nonhuman interests coincide will only get us so far. Relationships between humans and nonhuman species are too complicated to be generalized and in practice will likely need to be addressed on case-by-case bases. We believe it pertinent that each case is approached with an emphasis on justice for both humans and nonhumans; and the recognition that every species has inherent value regardless of their utility and/or risk to human development. Our goal here is not to favor nonhuman species over human, but rather to emphasize alternative ways that ecocentric and anthropocentric academics, alike, can utilize their ethics and knowledge of cultural beliefs and behaviors to inform and improve conservation efforts. To do so we need not take humans off of their pedestal, but rather expand the pedestal to make room for the environment and non-human species.

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