

Earth, and the Ethics of Sharing: the Significance of Global Connections for
Justifying Rational, Foundational, Duties to Earth—Samos, Greece 2006

Notes on “Environmental Stewardship and Global Human Rights”

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As it becomes ever clearer that there is just one earth that all of humankind must share (no quick trip to a verdant “other planet” on which to replicate humanity’s fabled history of expansion, conquest and displacement of others from their traditional territory, and of the building of new empires on new land), the old models need to be replaced by an updated, well thought out, ethically well grounded, and environmentally friendly one.

In my presentation I argued that whereas in the past many individual ecological tragedies (e.g. the loss of the dodo, the Carolina parakeet and the woolly sloth) from the earth’s community were local and the result of the unwise judgments of a few groups of humans in parts of the world isolated from other parts of the human community, today’s eminent tragedies (or good decisions) will be shared by the entire interconnected race of human persons. This is a necessary consequence of there being almost no isolated, unconnected areas left.

With this in mind I explored the ethical grounds for a sharing of ecological burdens and suggested that several doctrinal essentials need to be adopted universally if rationally defensible sharing of workable solutions is to occur. These include:

1. The acceptance of a duty to understand all earths’ cultures on a deep and philosophically profound level (a view drawn from Primal Cultures --called P)
2. The acceptance of the duty to refine philosophical frameworks in ways that make them rationally compatible with projects needed for saving the natural resilience and complexity of earth (which requires a modification of the traditional Western approach --called W)
3. The acceptance of the duty to take less than one can from earth’s bounty so that one’s work uplifts humanity—where humanity is

considered as a temporally and spatially inclusive whole. This tack requires drawing from the best of both W and P.

I concluded by urging that Philosophical positions should be taken seriously only if they can produce reasons that support the carrying out of the responsibilities that humans have for the appropriate care of earth.

In a closing personal “manifesto” I affirmed my conviction that the problem of the ecological incompatibility of (1) earth’s survival and (2) the ever increasing human population load on earth, must be publicly and openly acknowledged and not ignored. For while children are precious and desired by all cultures, the very survival of future children depends on moderating the number brought into earth’s communities at any given time. Without a modification of the reproductive choices human beings make and are able to make, the saving of earth as a planet inhabitable by humans will not be possible, and a collective and tragic disservice will have been done, to all of humankind.