

# ETHICS PHILOSOPHY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND A BETTER WORLD

## How are we to live?

### Heteronomous Ethics

Something is good or bad, because **someone else says so**.

### Autonomous Ethics

Reasoning about **why** something is good or bad.

He says so.  
**Secular**

It's written in my Holy Book.  
**Religious**

## EXPANDING MORAL CIRCLE 1

### Sentientism: To whom should we apply ethics?

- Myself
- My friends & family
- Everyone in my country
- All living humans
- Future generations
- Nonhuman animals

Jeremy Bentham argued that the question driving the expansion of the Moral Circle should be:

### Can they suffer?

*Harming others is bad because it's harmful, and what's harmful is bad.*  
- Michael Allen Fox

## SCALE OF SUFFERING

### How do we know how much an animal can suffer?

#### Behaviour

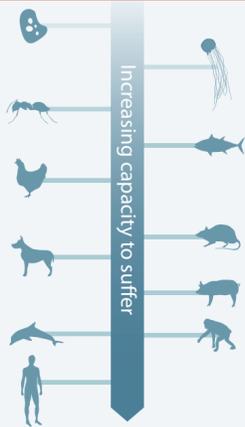
How does the animal respond to external stimuli, such as pain?

#### Neurology

Is the nervous system centralized? Are there opioid receptors present in the brain?

#### Evolution

Is the capacity to suffer evolutionary advantageous to the animal? Do any close relatives of the animal have this capacity?



## EXPANDING MORAL CIRCLE 2

### Should we go beyond sentientism?

#### Anthropocentrism

Humans only (Passmore)

#### Sentientism

All who can suffer (Singer)

#### Biocentrism

Everything alive (Taylor)

#### Ecocentrism

Ecosystems matter (Naess)

#### Gaia

Earth as an organism (Lovelock)

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS NATURE

### What are the attitudes towards nature?

#### Despotism

Short term (egoistic) self interest. Denial of environmental problems.

#### Enlightened Despotism

Believing that technology will fix all problems.

#### Stewardship

**Religious:** Caretaking of earth for God

**Secular:** Caretaking of our planet for future generations

**Beyond Anthropocentrism:** Believing in intrinsic value of nature

#### Partner

Being an equal partner with nature, conserving nature.

#### Participant

Having the lowest possible harmful impact on the planet. Treading softly on the earth; preserving nature.

#### Unio Mystica

Selfless harmony with nature.

## Basic normative ethical theories

### Utilitarianism

Calculating the best consequences of an action. The value of the consequences of an action is determined solely by the welfare of individuals.

*Eating meat from factory farms is bad, because it causes more harm to the animal and the environment than it pleases me.*

### Kantianism / Deontology

To act in the morally right way, people must act from duty (deon) and adhere to rules. Kant's categorical imperative: Act only according to that maxim by which you can also will that it would become a universal law.

*Stealing is bad, because it would be impossible to steal if everyone did it.*

### Ethics of Care

Caring for those who are dependent and vulnerable, being inspired by both memories of being cared for and the idealizations of self. Care involves maintaining the world of, and meeting the needs of, ourselves and others.

*The state is one big family, which should care for its citizens.*

### Liberalism

Maximizing individual liberty without harming others. The role of the state is primarily to protect individual liberty.

*Do what you want, but don't hurt others.*

### Green Liberalism

Do as you please, but without harming others – including nonhuman animals and future generations.

*I don't eat animal products from intensive farming because it harms animals and the environment.*

### Virtue ethics

Virtues are fundamental (not rules or duties). Ethics is about good character.

*Lying is bad, because it makes you a bad person. Honesty is good, because it makes you a good person.*

### Egoism

Me, me, me: one ought to always act in one's own best interests. An action is right if and only if it benefits the agent. That which is valuable and desirable is that which benefits oneself.

*I eat meat, because I like it.*

### Rights Theory

Rights protect individuals from harm done by others. Rights can be considered 1) God given, 2) part of the fabric of the universe, or 3) the result of collective deliberation.

*I can say whatever I want, because I have the right to do so.*

### Social Contract Theory

Social deliberation on moral rules by rational human agents: morals by agreement for mutual benefit.

*How would you change society if you were a woman in Iran? Or if you were a homosexual in Russia?*

### Capabilities Approach

Stimulating and facilitating capabilities (such as education, the ability to live to old age, engage in economic transactions, or participate in political activities), which lead to human flourishing and well-being.

*As a lesbian Islamic woman, I should be able to develop myself.*

## Examples of how we harm future generations

### Pollution

The introduction of contaminants into a natural environment (air, water, land) that causes instability, disorder, harm or discomfort to the ecosystem i.e. physical systems or living organisms. Pollution can take the form of chemical substances or energy, such as noise, heat or light.

### Depletion of Resources

Due to unsustainable usage, natural resources are being depleted, including e.g. fresh water, fossil fuels, and minerals. Humans are rapidly using up the Earth's nonrenewable resources.

### Overpopulation

The continuous rapid population growth of humans can lead to overpopulation when the number of humans exceeds the carrying capacity of the planet.

### Ocean Acidification

The ongoing decrease in pH levels and increase in acidity of the Earth's oceans, caused by the absorption of anthropogenic carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the atmosphere. About a quarter of the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere goes into the oceans, where it forms carbonic acid. This ongoing acidification of the oceans poses a threat to the food chains connected with the oceans.

### Desertification

Desert areas around the world are expanding due to overgrazing, deforestation, poor agricultural practices, and climate change.

### Biodiversity Loss

The rate of species loss is greater now than at any time in human history, with extinctions occurring at rates hundreds of times higher than background extinction rates.

### Overfishing

Overfishing ultimately leads to resource depletion, low biological growth rates and critically low biomass levels. For example, overfishing of sharks has led to the upset of entire marine ecosystems.

### Climate Change

The continuous rising emissions of greenhouse gasses (eg. CO<sub>2</sub>) leads to global warming and climate change, which will have a severe negative impact on the carrying capacity of the planet and threaten the life support systems of (present and) future generations.

### Deforestation

Destruction of (primary) forests by clear-cutting, which leads to desertification, soil erosion and biodiversity loss.

## HARM IMPACT SCALE

### How big is our harm impact?

Our harm impact consists of the direct and indirect harm done to others. Unfortunately, we cannot live without harming others, but we can and should try to keep our harm impact as low as possible.

### Things that increase our harm impact

**Consumerism, animal products, economic growth**

### Things that decrease our harm impact

**Veganism, voluntary simplicity, low carbon living, less children, earthships, transition towns**

Increasing amount of harm done



Eco-vegan minimalist



Westerner



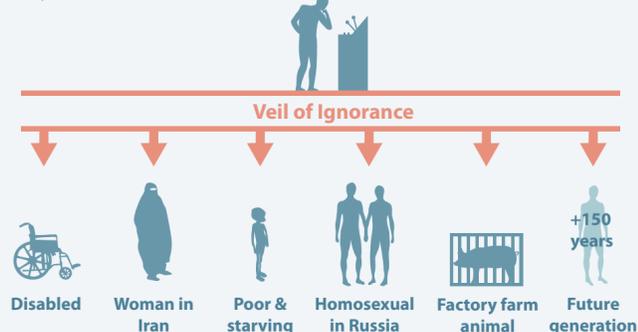
Celebrity

## UNIVERSAL SUBJECTIVISM

### How can we expand the moral circle?

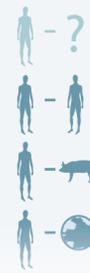
Imagine, you are standing at a control panel. You can set the basic rules and institutions of society (e.g. education, taxation, health care, law). Once you are done, you enter the society which you have created, but through a veil of ignorance, not knowing who you will be.

Imagine living in a worst off position, e.g. in a wheelchair, as a homosexual, or as an animal in a factory farm. How would you change society if you were in a worst off position?



## FOUR ETHICAL RELATIONS

### What are the most important relations in ethics?



#### Humans - God

The bulk of the history of philosophy has been preoccupied with metaphysics, theology and the supernatural.

#### Humans - Humans

Most current philosophy has an anthropocentric focus.

#### Humans - Nonhuman animals

Expanding the circle of philosophical reflection by applying ethics also to nonhuman animals (e.g. Singer, Regan).

#### Humans - Nature

Latest expansion of applied ethics focusing on nature, environmental problems and future generations.

## EQUATION OF STUPID

### How much can our planet handle?



$$\text{People} \times \text{Average Ecological Footprint} < \text{Carrying Capacity}$$

The "equation of stupid" tells us that our combined ecological footprint (amount of humans multiplied by the average ecological footprint) has to be smaller than the carrying capacity of the earth. If that is the case, we are living sustainably.

### Ecosystem collapse

Unsustainable (here we are now)

Sustainable

Making it better.

What we are doing

What we are trying to do

What we need to do

What we should do

Books by Floris van den Berg:  
• *Philosophy for a Better World*, 2013.  
• *Harming Others, Universal Subjectivism and the Expanding Moral Circle* (dissertation), 2011.

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