

INTRODUCTION

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Environmental philosophy plays an important role, directly and indirectly, in many parts of society, including land and wildlife management (Leopold, 1949; Minter, 2015), political activism (Abbey, 1968; Malm, 2020), and technological research and development (Baum & Owe, 2022; Donhauser et al., 2021). Environmental philosophy uncovers the ethical relationships existing between humans and the living and non-living world. It reveals the nuances of our scientific ecological concepts. And it tries to tell us how we might act – individually or collectively – to better achieve our environmental goals. The aim of this special issue is to explore the limits and ever-expanding outer edges of this increasingly important area of philosophical thought.

Environmental philosophy arguably goes back at least as far as Plato, who considered the issue of resource overuse in his work the *Republic* (Erck, 2022). The writings of Henry David Thoreau and John Muir are also central to the literature. However, modern environmental philosophy might reasonably be marked by the publication of Aldo Leopold's 1949 work *A Sand Country Almanac*. The focus in *Sand County* was on the destruction of wilderness and wildlife in the American West and on the development of a "land ethic" – a principle for how to determine what is right or wrong with respect to our interactions with the environment. "A thing is right," writes Leopold, "when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise"

(1949, p. 224-225). The publication of *Sand County* ushered in a new era of public concern for nature, and it paved the way for a new approach to environmental philosophy.

Another paradigm shift of sorts occurred in the 1960s, when a variety of different ways of thinking about environmental issues converged. In 1962, Rachel Carson published her book *Silent Spring*. In there, Carson detailed how pesticides like DDT were poisoning the environment *and* people, effectively bringing environmental concerns out of the wild and into people's homes. In 1968, Edward Abbey published his book *Desert Solitaire* (1968), highlighting what he saw as the imminent threat posed by "Industrial Tourism" to natural places and at the same time subtly advocating for civil disobedience as an appropriate response to environmental destruction. That same year, ecologist Garrett Hardin published a paper highlighting the tragedy of the commons from a game-theoretic and economic perspective, and Anne and Paul Ehrlich published their book *The Population Bomb*, predicting mass famine due to the human population boom. In 1969, Apollo 10 landed on the moon, and with "one small step for man..." our ecological footprint now extended literally even to the stars.

After the 60s, things moved fast. In the 70s and 80s, feminist perspectives started to gain traction in mainstream environmental discussions (d'Eaubonne, 1974; Merchant, 1980). During that same period, the "Deep Ecology" movement emerged (Næss, 1973, 1989). In the 80s and 90s, non-Western voices began to find purchase in modern debates (Guha, 1989; Burnett and wa Kang'ethe, 1994). And today, thanks to us humans *not* doing what we do best, our world is now ripe with a plethora of environmental issues, all in dire need of direct on-the-ground action and deep philosophical analysis. There are good questions about the nature of climate change and how we ought to respond to it – individually and collectively; concerns about the use of

robots, drones, and other new technology in nature; worries about the future of places like the oceans, the moon, and other planets; and unease about the role of governments and international legal systems in large-scale conservation and climate efforts. The contributors to this special issue have a shared interest in these recent developments, and a shared hope of using philosophy to better understand and care for our world.

One major theme of the special issue is the challenge of using the *law* to protect the environment. In recent years, several works have come out looking at the legal side of environmental issues (Friskies, 2008; Tenen, *forthcoming*). Welchman's (2024) paper looks at the case of the United Nations *High Seas Treaty*, a critical proposal that would effectively establish protected marine areas in international waters. Using the situation of the American eel as a case study, Welchman highlights the gaps present in current multi-nation marine governance frameworks and argues that adding the *High Seas Treaty* would give us a mechanism that allows us to protect the eels' important spawning grounds. Key to her analysis is the implementation of Jonathan Wolf's (2009) "layers of justice" approach to norms of international cooperation.

Rodeiro's (2024) article takes on a different aspect of the law. Channeling a definition of genocide developed by Card (2002), Rodeiro calls our attention to a seldom recognized form of genocide called "social death" – the destruction of a people's culture or way of life. Genocide of this form can be committed via the destruction of the ecosystems to which a culture is intimately connected. When that occurs, Rodeiro contends, this is a violation of core liberal principles, and as such, belongs to a class of environmental harms best addressed by mechanisms of Transitional Justice. Rodeiro considers several such mechanisms, including *lustration* – the removal of those in

civil service and political office who were complicit in wrongdoing.

The article by Simpson (2024) considers several definitions of wilderness including the one found in the Wilderness Act of 1964. In the case of the Wilderness Act, he argues that the law is inadequate for a number of reasons. One is that the language of the law is too imprecise, allowing for multiple interpretations. Another is that the definition of wilderness at the heart of the law doesn't appear to cover all cases of wilderness. Simpson argues that instead we might benefit from the adoption of a "spectrum" account of wilderness, one which he suggests might allow for the protection of more wild places.

Another major theme of the special issue is the relevance of different *levels of analysis* for problems in environmental philosophy. By "levels" we mean the different *points of view, layers, or perspectives* that have been relevant to various environmental concerns. Atkins (2024) looks at whether focusing on the *species* level or the level of *individual members* of a species matters for answering certain ethical questions. His paper addresses Purves and Hale's (2016) rather surprising argument that if some non-human animals owe their existence to climate change, then we can't really say that those animals are harmed by it.

Haramia (2024) argues that a significant difference has been overlooked between Singer's (1972) *shallow pond* ethical dilemma and other seemingly similar cases – namely a difference in the presence of *immediate vs. systemic* threats. This has implications, she argues, for our decisions about whether to endorse certain environmental movements or not, as it could turn out that those movements endorse all the right individual-level actions while at the same time supporting or maintaining systemic-level threats.

Beit-Arie's (2024) paper looks at a different kind of *levels* question. Beit-Arie asks whether we shouldn't think of

climate change as something more than just wrong – that is, if we shouldn't think of it as *evil*. They're not the first to tackle this question (Norlock, 2004). However, they do appear to be the first to look at it in depth and to consider what it might mean in practical terms.

Naturally, as new crises emerge, and as we extend our physical reach and presence into new and unfamiliar places, it makes sense to wonder how well the core concepts of environmental philosophy fare in new contexts. The last three papers of this special issue address this question. Lindquist (2024) considers our concepts of “litter” and “pollution” and asks whether they apply to various cases of space debris. He looks at objects such as satellites, intentionally crashed probes, and debris left on the moon, and he ultimately argues that the concepts of “litter” and “pollution” do not apply.

Kassaye's (2024) paper looks at the philosophy of the Ubuntu people of Africa. In trying to understand African environmental philosophy, Kassaye argues that we can see it as the blending of two seemingly contradictory ideas from Western environmental thought – anthropocentrism and relational ethics. A view like this, Kassaye believes, meshes well with Arne Næss's “total field image” of the environment (Næss, 1973), and paves the way for a new approach to environmental ethics that he dubs *relational anthropocentrism*.

The paper by Roman (2024) focuses on uncovering the conceptual origins of ecology. Roman looks at the work of naturalist Ernst Haeckel and argues that Haeckel set up his early theory of ecology with Darwin's theory of evolution and a version of natural monism as starting axioms. Understanding these foundational assumptions of ecology, Roman argues, helps us see how closely intertwined ecology is with environmental ethics.

Our hope with this special issue has been to bring together a diverse collection of authors from a variety of backgrounds whose work covers a wide range of environmental issues of contemporary importance. The authors in this issue range in experience from philosophers, to lawyers, to rangers, to historians. They also range from professors at major universities to PhD students and undergraduates. As you'll see, some of the articles in this edition are also published in Spanish. Our goal has been to present a special issue that not only covers the cutting-edge of environmental philosophy but that is accessible to a wide audience and has broad appeal.

We hope that philosophers, scientists, policy-makers, rangers, students, and anyone with an interest in environmental philosophy will find a wealth to ponder in this special issue. The issue offers new accounts of *ecocide* and *wilderness*; new analyses of *litter* and *pollution*; new insights into the roles of various *levels of analysis* in environmental philosophy; and much to consider when it comes to how we might try to live in harmony with nature in an increasingly interconnected and technologically advanced world.¹

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¹ I'd like to thank Gabriel Vasquez Peterson, Seth Goldwasser, and Susan Erck for their help as reviewers on this issue.

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