

## The Value of Species

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cites Karr and Dudley (1981), but there have been copious amounts of literature on the subject since then (Karr and Chu 1999, Karr 2000), culminating with a multi-authored definition of *ecological integrity* in Pimentel and colleagues (2000). Related work continues today after 20 years of collaboration by the 250-plus members of the Global Ecological Integrity Group (GEIG), although during the last decade, much emphasis has been on the legal dimensions of the concept. (The phrase *biological integrity* first appeared in 1972 in both the Clean Water Act [33 U.S.C. §1251 et seq. 1972] and in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement [[www.epa.gov/glnpo/glwqa/1978](http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/glwqa/1978)].)

The reasons for our obligation to respect ecological integrity are similar to those that Rolston advocates in support of organisms and, ultimately, all life on Earth: “Viewed in depth, these ecosystems remain today the source and support of individuals and species alike” (p. 167). Therefore, the defense of the biological integrity of ecosystems represents the true meaning of sustainability (Bosselmann 2008). There is also a growing number of articles and books and even a new journal linking human rights to ecology in law (Taylor 1998, Westra 2006)—many works originating from the meetings of the GEIG.

Ignoring the importance of ecological integrity in the development of environmental thought in his book has led Rolston to bypass an extremely important international document: the Earth Charter, which he helped to draft with Steven Rockefeller, among others. The document (considered “soft law” at this time) cites ecological integrity as one of its most important principles.

In the final pages of *A New Environmental Ethics*, in chapter 7, “Earth: Ethics on the home planet,” Rolston does return to the topic of integrity: “We are Earthlings. Our integrity is inseparable from Earth[’s] integrity” (p. 220). I am convinced that most environmentalists, including each and every member of the GEIG, would gladly join with me in saying *amen* to that.

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## SAVING SPECIES AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN

**The Value of Species.** Edward L. McCord. Yale University Press, 2012. 184 pp. \$25.00 (ISBN 9780300176575 cloth).

Much has been written during the last decades about the rapid decline of biodiversity and its

consequences, and many accounts have been given of the reasons to preserve species diversity. Most of these accounts are either focused on trying to demonstrate the intrinsic value of species—a value that all species have, independent of our own human perspective—or, more recently, on demonstrating the utilitarian value of biodiversity—in particular, with respect to the ecosystem services that species provide or support. *The Value of Species* travels along another line of argument, a line that has been rather neglected so far.

Author Edward L. McCord’s main argument for protecting all species on this planet—without regard to their usefulness for us—is that saving species is a question of realizing (in both senses of this word) what it means to be a human being. This is basically an anthropological argument for conservation, albeit one rooted in a long philosophical tradition reaching back to Aristotle. McCord, director of the University Honors College at the University of Pittsburgh, seems to be an ideal person to convey such an argument, having been educated in anthropology, philosophy, and law and teaching interdisciplinary courses in environmental science, *inter alia*, at Yellowstone National Park.

McCord’s personal experiences, his own history as a naturalist (from childhood onward), and his love for nature were the main motivation for writing *The Value of Species*. He openly admits that he is not just a neutral analyst of philosophical and scientific views on species conservation; he writes as an advocate for the very matter. This explains why the book is not written in a difficult scientific or philosophical language but in a very readable style that can be understood by a broad audience interested in the issue of biological conservation.

Nevertheless, McCord conveys important philosophical distinctions that are often neglected in conservation discourses. One of these distinctions is that protecting species is (mostly) something different from protecting individuals of a species. Whereas

a number of ethical arguments for the latter exist (e.g., in terms of avoiding suffering or harm to individuals), it is difficult to argue for the value of species (being classes or lineages) as objects for moral consideration. McCord, however, is interested in demonstrating the value of just this. He argues for the consideration of an inherent value of species, “a value that arises from something that all people should find notable in nature of the thing that is valued, regardless of its practical uses” (p. 7). Many if not most efforts to protect species by means of emphasizing the economic value of nature and ecosystems are seen critically by McCord. One obvious reason for his skepticism is that those species not deemed of practical use to humans are beyond protection with this strategy.



Furthermore, the current system of property values (and its legal implications) and the dominant value of money in Western societies are seen by the author as a decisive force for the accelerated extinction of species. A substantial part of the book deals with this issue, moving deeply into politics and law. However, the most interesting and crucial theme of the book remains the one that McCord states in his introduction: “Beyond seeking legal or economic solutions [for the preservation of species], we must first and foremost resolve the crisis of who we want to be as humans”

(p. 5). This perspective points to the very old idea of *eudaimonia* (the idea of a good, a well-lived, flourishing life as a major goal) and forms the basis of virtue ethics.

The concept of *eudaimonia* has recently found a kind of revival in ethics and is a promising approach toward orienting human relationships with nature. It appeals to what are the dimensions of good human character and virtue. Avoiding both the endless discourse about direct obligations to nature and the limitations of economic and ecological arguments for conservation, *eudaimonia* connects directly to the intuitions that most people have about nature. As McCord shows convincingly, such aspects of human character are not just temporary preferences but are basic anthropological attributes, and the main human attribute that he aims at is our essential intellectual curiosity and wonder. The complexity, history, and evolutionary uniqueness of each species, beyond the aesthetics and our practical needs, is unendingly fascinating.

Caring about the continuing existence of all species on Earth is, therefore, in our rational self-interest as real human beings. Contributing to and tolerating the human-driven extinction of species deprives us of our future ability to experience the miracle, wonder, and curiosity that each species bestows on us—an ability that is not only in one’s individual interest but is of societal interest to maintain. McCord’s approach to the value of species is certainly a promising one that I highly favor. I wonder, however, whether his argument linking intellectual curiosity with species reaches far enough and whether he makes sufficient use of the idea of a “good life.”

McCord’s well-written book is a highly recommendable contribution to the discourse on the value of species. It provides inspiring ideas, because the author was willing to travel beyond the current mainstream of the conservation discourse. The whole concept of *eudaimonia*, applied to human

relationships with nature, broadens our perspective in favor of biological conservation and touches on the question of personal identity as it relates to nature—an aspect that still needs to be explored in full.

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## CRYSTALLIZING THE ANIMAL WELFARE STATE

**Why Animals Matter: Animal Consciousness, Animal Welfare, and Human Well-being.** Marian Stamp Dawkins. Oxford University Press, 2012. 224 pp., illus. \$24.95 (ISBN 9780199747511 cloth).

In *Why Animals Matter: Animal Consciousness, Animal Welfare, and Human Well-being*, author Marian Stamp Dawkins challenges her readers to radically rethink their attitudes toward animals, and she justifies this challenge on two pretexts. First, there is a pressing need to feed an ever-expanding global population, which causes us to focus on food production and environmental protection without proper consideration of animal welfare. Second, we are singularly confused about the consciousness of animals and inconsistent in how we view and treat different groups of animals within our society. Given these two concerns, Dawkins, professor and medal recipient of animal behavior at Oxford University, aims to simplify our approach to understanding animal welfare so that clear and persuasive solutions can be found.

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