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*Environmental Ethics: Philosophical Issues
and Educational Perspectives*

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New Research and Teaching Perspectives on Environmental Ethics

Introduction

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The ethical dimensions of environmental issues have become increasingly critical. The interplay between human activities and the natural world raises profound questions that demand new insights and innovative approaches. Environmental ethics challenge us to rethink our responsibilities in a dynamic and evolving landscape of moral relationship between humans and the environment, addressing topics such as conservation, sustainability, biodiversity, and climate justice. It explores our responsibilities toward nature and future generations. As our understanding of these problems deepens, so too must our ethical frameworks and educational strategies evolve to address them effectively.

This special issue of *Relations* aims to present the latest theoretical advances, practical applications, and interdisciplinary approaches in environmental ethics, with a special focus on pedagogical innovations that improve the teaching and learning of environmental ethics in various educational contexts.

The two contributions in the first part of the issue (Sebo and Feltrin) deal with a central theme of environmental ethics: the problem of the extension of the moral community. Who are the *moral patients*, i.e. the

entities that are worthwhile in themselves (also as ends and not only as means) and towards which we have direct moral obligations? By now, in the 21st century, a perspective that limits the moral community to human beings alone is no longer a sustainable position, because it falls into speciesism, an approach that has the same defects as racism and sexism. Once we have overcome a conception that sees humans as the only beings with moral status and for whom we must protect the environment, what are the possible alternatives? Sebo and Feltrin present interesting and original answers to this kind of problems. Sebo, comparing his new book (*The Moral Circle*) with Birch's recent volume (*The Edge of Sentience*), believes that the extension of moral status to many invertebrates, plants and future artificial intelligence systems should be seriously considered, thus going beyond the usual paradigms of sentiocentrism. Feltrin proposes a "Cenozoic ecocentrism", a perspective that, in addition to sentient beings (senticentrism) and living beings (biocentrism), values ecosystems as wholes.

The three contributions of the second part (Muraca; Keto - Pulkki - Foster - Värri; McIntosh - Feltrin) instead focus on the didactic and pedagogical aspects of environmental ethics with original proposals. Muraca's article presents the theoretical background and structure, as well as pedagogical activities, of a course in environmental philosophy devoted to the critical analysis of the idea of nature and its meaning for environmentalism. Keto, Pulkki, Foster and Värri in their article formulate an educational philosophy on the nature of sociality that recognizes the intertwining of human and other realities, and ask how this type of multispecies approach can guide education towards an ecosocially sustainable transformation. McIntosh and Feltrin in their paper analyze the ethical consequences of human-centered education, which alienates students from ecological realities and perpetuates environmental degradation and social inequities. In response to these challenges, the article proposes an alternative ethical framework grounded in cross-species solidarity. Utilizing approaches such as wild pedagogy and self-rewilding, it emphasizes the importance of immersive, hands-on educational practices that cultivate empathy, multispecies kinship, and ecological consciousness.

By exploring different perspectives and interdisciplinary approaches, this special issue aims to push the boundaries of current knowledge on new perspectives of research and teaching on environmental ethics, offering innovative insights and methodologies to promote a more ethically informed and environmentally responsible society.

This special issue has been conceived by the scholars of the Environmental Ethics Team of Department of Humanities of Urbino University. The editors of this issue take part in it. This is the first international contribution by the Team, which promoted in 2022 the publishing of a book entitled *Environmental Ethics: Research Perspectives (Etica ambientale. Prospettive di ricerca*. Roma: Castelveccchi, 2023).

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