THE SCOPE OF THE COMMUNITY

[illegible]

Philosophers variously conceive the moral community as including *some men* but *not* all, as including all men but no other beings, and as including all men and some other beings. Aristotle exemplifies the first category. He advanced a class conception of *morality* which effectively excluded slaves from the community. *This is entirely consonant with his metaphysical hierarchy in which each* lower form is the matter or means for some *higher form*. A slave, then, is his master's means, not an end in himself. To the contention that slavery is contrary to nature, Aristotle replied that although all men are rational, some by birth *participate* in the rational principle only enough to comprehend it, but not enough to possess it, and these are naturally slaves. Today we are likely to deplore Aristotle's *opinion*, and to interpret his argument not as rational, but as a *rationalization*. Viewed *historically*, however, *we may concede that slavery*

was relatively justified in ancient Athens. It was an anccepted institution; it would have been inexpedient to abolish it; and the labor of slaves provided the leisure of citizens which flowered in Athenian culture, including philosophy. We might even argue that Aristotle showed unusual insight merely to discuss the problem.

A modern view in sharp opposition to Aristotle's is expressed in Kant's practical formulation of the Categorical Imperative: "So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or that of another, always as an end, never as a means only." This imperative extends the moral community to the whole of humanity. What we may call Kant's anthropological conception of morality was appropriate to the modern world as Aristotle's class conception was to Athens. Science, applied to commerce and industry, was making slavery and even political tutelage inexpedient. Kant, moreover, as a student of geography and anthropology, was aware of the earth's geographic unity, its human diversity, and the consequent urgency for a universal ethic. His postulate of the rationality of all men, his Categorical Imperative, and his *Perpetual Peace* are alike philosophical anticipations of the moral unity of mankind which is required in the wake of the global voyages of discovery and trade.

Not everyone agreed with Kant. Some defended slavery on grounds like Aristotle's, that some men are born lacking intelligence or other traits comparable with rationality, and that such individuals in fact belong to a species somewhat nearer the animals than normal men. Kant, however, has been vindicated by modern research, which points to the biological unity of mankind. Today, class morality is an anachronism, intellectually and practically, and we can only offer psychological explanations for a reluctance to concede the moral unity of mankind desires, perhaps unconscious, to retain personal and group privilege, or cultural lag in institutions and ideas.

If some critics thought the Kantian scope of morality too wide, others think it too narrow. The Categorical Imperative is important for its omissions as well as its inclusions. The understood subject of "So act as to treat humanity..." is every man, which is proper, since every man is a moral agent. But granted that all and only men are moral agents, does it follow that the only entities within the scope of moral treatment are human beings, as the term "humanity" suggests? May it not include animals, for instance? In this respect, paradoxically, Mill's ethics is more universal than Kant's. Mill argued that the moral agent should strive to secure an existence as free from pain and as rich in enjoyment as possible, not only to all mankind, "but so far as the nature of things admit, to the whole sentient creation." It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than to be a pig satisfied; yet to be a pig satisfied is better than to be a pig dissatisfied. If Kant's conception of the moral community is

anthropological, then Mill may be said to verge on an ecological conception, one which recognizes man's obligations to all his fellow creatures.

Just as Kant's conception is appropriate to the new geography, so is Mill's to the new biology. As the former has led us to see that we live in a world-wide human community, so may the latter lead us to see that we live in a wider than human community. Basic to the new biology is the concept of the unity of life. Somewhat as the "unity of mankind" reveals the inadequacies of class morality, so may "unity of life" reveal analogous inadequacies in anthropological morality. It is still assumed that man is a higher species, not only in complexity, but also in value, and plants and animals are treated as mere means to human ends, despite the fact that philosophers cannot agree on criteria of value, and that to the parasite of amebic dysentery, man is a means. We stil believe that rationality distinguishes us, although rationality too is a biological adaptation to be judged by its fruits. It is hardly a mark of rationality for a species to subvert its own existence, yet many biologists hold that human survival depends upon a more intelligent and sensitive approach to the biosphere. The assumption is not that survival is the ultimate value—there are probably circumstances in which it is better for a man to die, and there may be circumstances in which it would be better for man to become extinct—the question is about human intelligence in present circumstances.

Given knowledge and rationality, responsibility is roughly proportional to power. A powerless infant has no responsibility; an omnipotent being, pace certain theologians, would be completely responsible; and we hold men and nations responsible in the degree of their capabilities. Man now has the power to exterminate various species of plants and animals. This new power imposes new responsibilities. Our paleolithic ancestors rightly hunted animals to feed and clothe themselves. When man struggled for existence against other species, he might without compunction have exterminated the locust. Now that man is the dominant species he can afford, indeed may be obligated, to ask whether the value accruing to the community from the use of pesticides offsets the injury it works to various species. Questions like this raise moral problems of great complexity and reveal deep conflicts in attitude. Everyone agrees that human interests, economic, scientific, and esthetic, must be taken into account. But some regard the proposed ecological morality much as Aristotle might have regarded Kant's anthropological conception, as absurd and sentimental, while others hold that the welfare of non-human species must also be considered.

Since only individuals suffer, Mill's principle of minimizing pain cannot apply directly to species, which are abstractions. But unity of life in the concrete signifies complex interspecific relations. To poison an insect population may not hurt the insects much, but it may paralyze the birds which feed on

them. To exterminate the wolves which prey on a population of deer will not only hurt the wolves, it is likely to lead to widespread death by starvation among the deer. To exterminate a species or destroy a habitat without taking such interrelations into account and considering alternatives, is irresponsible.

The wider view of the moral community has its precedents. Primitive religions almost uniformly incorporate a kind of ecological morality. Custom and ritual emphasize man's part in promoting harmony among sun, stars, rain, plants, and animals, a truly cosmic conception of the community. However questionable their rationalizations, many of these practices realistically tend to conserve the balance of nature necessary to tribal prosperity. This apparent concern for non-human entities may therefore readily be interpreted as an unconscious adaptation conducing to group survival. Indeed, my own concern may be similarly interpreted. But there exists today among "environmentalists" a fully conscious ecological morality which extends the moral community to include animals, and perhaps even plants soil, air, and water.

Although the theory of ecological morality–not to say of all morality–is still inchoate, it has a growing literature. An example is "*Los Ideales Basicos del Genero Humano,*", a contribution by the biologist Alexander Skutch to the *Revista de Filosofia de la Universidad de Costa Rica* (IV, 13, 1963). Skutch's ideals are fraternity, spirituality, chastity, and *ahimsa*. The basic obligations of fraternity are those of Kant's Practical Imperative. Spirituality is described as "... *la capacidad de que las sensaciones sean modificadas por la percepción de las relaciones,*" and also "... *el conocimiento y la apreciación del universo del cual somos parte.*" Chastity is "... *el ideal de usar nuestro poder de reproducción para producir hijas de la mas alta calidad, y en número compatible con la capacidad de la tierra para mantenerlos.*" As for the Hindu ideal of *ahimsa*, that of harming no living being, Skutch observes:

> *A pesar de que muchos individuos en occidente han simpatizado con este ideal, las religiones y filosofias occidentales lo han descuidado, como parece evidente por el hecho de que nos vimos obligados a regressar al oriente por su nombre.*

Ahimsa is obviously an ecological ideal, but in Skutch's interpreation, so are spirituality and chastity. If spirituality means the modification of sensations by the perception of relations, then the spiritual anti-vivisectionist will deduct from her pleasure in elegant furs the sufferings of animals in traps. And the chast man will not be deceived by the fairy power of unreflecting love when he perceives the relation between excessive population and the impoverishment of the earth. *Ahimsa* is an extreme ideal, but surely science and sympathy indicate a wider moral community.