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# **The value basis of forest use - beyond classical ethics**

**An essay**



This study came into being in interaction with several colleagues

- The main points on how people adopt values and attitudes comes from Bart Nooteboom (2007), discussing the firm and the building of trust among its clients
- We have since long been applying frames (PhDH Thesis by Lisa Holmgren 2007), but Karin Beland Lindahl's thesis (Dept of Urban and Rural Development) on a specific conflict in Swedish Lapland made me notice that a paper by Perri 6 setting frame theory in a wider perspective
- The original aim of this paper was to see whether Evolutionary Ethics could contribute to a better understanding of how forestry and environmental actors form, employ and change moral values. The seminal work was Campbell 1996. However, a close reading of Joyce's (2006) *The Evolution of Morality* made a mess of the outline given in the Pre-conference proceedings – and caused a late change of the title

## **The role of prescriptive ethics in forestry: three current cases making the issue tangible**

- Ongoing PhD project: Model Forests in Russia, Ukraine and Sweden (R Axelsson P Angelstam, Fac of Forestry, SLU)
  - Basic ethical issues not discussed; current law taken as standard
- PhD 2008: A forest policy controversy in Swedish Lapland (K Beland Lindahl, Fac of Natural Resources and Agriculture)
  - Differently framed perceptions of objective issues due to differing basic values among actor groups (forestry professionals, environmentalists, reindeer herders)
- FSC in Sweden: SSCN (main env. NGO) partner in the creation of the standard; now leaving the Board in protest
  - Internal conflict: basic values vs result oriented pragmatism

# New inputs in meta-ethics

- Classical moral philosophy:
  - Moral systems created through deductive reasoning
  - Deontic: rules either “given” (Ten Commandments) or deduced from basic principles (“Goodness”); actor oriented (“My duty”)
  - Utilitarian: casuistic evaluation based on optimising outcome, population oriented (greatest good for largest number of people)
- Evolutionary/empiricist perspective: genetic predisposition (“conscience”) for moral judgements favouring pro-social behaviour
  - Campbell 1996: Utilitarian vindication of deontic rules ( Moral principles have developed to favour to common good of the group)
  - Constructivism, non-cognitivism: (Moral beliefs are socially constructed value statements; :
    - Motivate certain actions
    - Cause feelings of guilt when moral motivation is weak or deficient
    - Cause esteem when moral motivation is strong
    - Warrant sanctions on persons deficient in moral motivation

## Evolutionary Ethics:

### Richard Joyce (2006) *The Evolution of Morality*

- Agrees that humans have an innate disposition for making moral judgements. Disagrees that EE provides moral norms. Tries to refute several scholars claiming the contrary
  - Robert Richards (1986) first to formulate an EE (after Spencer). Evolution has designed us to be moral. Morality = prosocial behaviour. Joyce: “ought” does not follow from “is”
  - Richmond Campbell (1996) Moral beliefs are advantageous. Non cognitivist. Joyce: that does not make them justified. Moral rules must have an epistemic justification. Cannot be just “useful fiction”.
  - Dennett (1995) Moral judgements are expedient devices to help us reach decisions. Fiction argument again
  - William Casebeer (2003) builds on Aristotelian, goal oriented virtue ethics. Teleology provides normativity
- Joyce seems to search for moral objectivity

## Richmond Campbell (1996) Can biology make ethics objective? *Biology and Philosophy* 11:21-31

- Non-cognitivist understanding of moral judgement
  - Moral judgement = value judgement
  - Adoption of values mainly a non-cognitive process
    - Biological basis
    - Socially constructed values
    - Personal experience
    - Cognitive processes
    - Importance of “framing”
- Moral beliefs
  - Motivate certain actions
  - Cause feelings of guilt when moral motivation is weak or deficient
  - Cause esteem when moral motivation is strong
  - Warrant sanctions on persons deficient in moral motivation
- A person may switch frames depending on social environment

## **Forest ethics – is the moral philosophy approach dysfunctional?**

- Most people accept the ethical standpoint of their social environment and may switch views depending on context
- For people with strong convictions, these are emotionally rather than cognitively motivated, and unlikely to change easily
- Scholars of normative ethics first choose basic values, then try to create a cognitively meaningful motivation
- Politicians rarely base their policies on a clear-cut platform of environmental ethics, but rather mix arguments and even contradict in order to create workable compromises
- Forest managers meet a medley of incompatible opinions, and are supposed to observe “rational choice” within legally sanctioned benchmarks

## **Approach 1: Reflexive governance, joint learning, arenas for stakeholder participation**

- The Model forest approach, creating arenas ([www.imfn.set](http://www.imfn.set))
- Pro-active management, targets over legal and certification minima:  
State-owned Sveaskog 5 mi ha
- The building of an FSC standard

## Approach 2

- Forest ethos rather than forest ethics:  
Create a value base acceptable to a large group of citizens,  
steered by desired outcome
- This requires a myth (in the academic sense) <> a narrative
- The traditional myth in Sweden & Finland: The Nation's green gold.  
A happy marriage of land owner, industry, state and worker's  
interests

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interests
- Ethos requires a 'mythology'. The old mythology is breaking up  
  
AND ....

... the new mythology is already there

The “unity of nature” myth

Forestry’s response is its own myths

SFM and multiple use,

But do they sell well enough?

The “unity of nature” myth may be popular, but is it tenable? Alan Marshall (2002) in *The unity of Nature. Wholeness and disintegration in ecology and science* is puncturing some core ecological myth

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A recent SSCN report (2008) inventories Swedish company land under FSC, and identifies gruesome shortcomings, causing this leading ENGO to leave the Board of FSC Sweden

## Can moral be based on “fiction”?

- Joyce is merciless in his criticism of “moral fiction” as a basis for practical ethics
- But from a social constructivist view, all moral systems are “fiction”. “Truth claims” can only refer to internal consistency
- McIntyre’s ‘Moral communities’ may have difficulties in interacting well enough to satisfy Habermasian standards for deliberative democratic processes but ...

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- McIntyre’s ‘Moral communities’ may have difficulties in interacting well enough to satisfy Habermasian standards for deliberative democratic processes but ...
- Should we continue to work creating a “comprehensive narrative” of forest land use and forest operations, which can meet a wide public acceptance, yet not violate sound scientific knowledge?

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- Green ideas changed the thinking of people on five continents within a few decades
- Yet, the green narratives are seriously deficient in their social content
- And the urban youth is increasingly abandoning “Nature” – perhaps is environmental activism to loose importance
- Time to think of a new narrative, proactively?

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