3

ENCOUNTER WITH THE ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

MODULE THREE

SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 PREFACE TO THE MODULE

The topic addressed within this module is "encounter with the environment: social and ecological issues". As the central aspect of the Educ8 project is the prevention of polarization, radicalization, and extremism, the mentioned topics are presented as a possible polarization point. Two broad themes are included. The first is the questions about the value of the environment and our relationship with it. The second is animal ethics. Topics related to the status of the environment and our treatment of animals are often very polarizing. They are tightly intertwined with our gut-feeling reactions, and firmly held beliefs and campaigns related to animal ethics can even lead to violence in some cases. This is indicative of both main parties in the debate. That is why one of the aims of the module is to show that it is possible to deal with the mentioned topic in a more nuanced way, a way that avoids merely *pro et contra stance*.

The educational methodologies involved in the module include experiential learning, holistic learning, biographical learning and the use of stories, critical thinking, and philosophy with children. The main goals and learning outputs are the following:

- to know and understand the main ethical approaches or perspectives in environmental ethics and animal ethics,
- to recognize and appreciate the importance of our similarities and interconnectedness with animals and the rest of nature,
- to be able to analyze and evaluate the main arguments and lines of thinking that are at the core of animal ethics and environmental ethics,
- to understand the unity of the ecosystem and its moral importance,

- to use techniques of experiential and holistic learning to establish an ethical connection with animals and the rest of nature,

- to be able to reflect on our own, human perspective considering the topics that are discussed in animal and environmental ethics.

3.2 INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND ANIMAL ETHICS

3.2.1 ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Environmental ethics is the branch of ethics concerned with the value of the environment (or ecosystem), our relationship with it (primarily our duties towards it), and applying ethical norms to practical problems concerning the environment. It is tightly connected with ecology and environmental law. As part of the development of environmental philosophy (in the previous five decades), environmental ethics was predominantly inspired by the widespread perception of an "environmental crisis". *Time* magazine's pick for the "Man of the Year" in 1988 was Earth itself, reflecting both its significance as well as the scope of its endangerment (Frodeman & Callicott 2009). Things have worsened since then. For example, the UN reported in 2019 that around "One million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, many within decades, more than ever before in human history" (UN 2019)

Figure 3.1
River
Source: © shaiith / Adobe Stock

3.2.2 ANIMAL ETHICS

Animal ethics is a domain of practical ethics or bioethics that deals predominantly with nonhuman animals' moral status and the ethics of our practices that include them. It harbors numerous topics, as well as various approaches. In Section 3.3, the dominant approaches will be briefly presented. Each of these approaches represents an answer to the so-called animal question: the question at the heart of animal ethics, i.e., the question about the moral status of nonhuman animals and our relationship to/with them (Strahovnik 2013)

[1] The term 'nonhuman animals' is used in order to hint to or illuminate the often-missed fact that humans are also animals. (In the remainder of this educational materials we will stick to such a usage most of the time, except when sources that we are using refer back to the more traditional humans - animals dichotomy.)

3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ENVIRONMENT

As outlined above, environmental ethics is the field of ethics concerned with the value of nature (ecosystem, environment) and our relation to it. One way of thinking about environmental ethics is to question what is or what should be included within the circle of our ethical or moral concern. Should it include nonhuman animals? Should it include entities that are not sentient? Should it include entities that are not even alive? There are several answers and stances that one can adopt. Schematically they can be represented in the following way:

View	Who/what is included in the circle of moral concern?
Rationalism	All and only rational or autonomous beings.
Anthropocentrism	All and only humans.
Sentientism	All and only sentient beings.
Biocentrism	All and only living beings.
Ecocentricism & Ecoholism	All natural entities, living or non-living.

The egocentrism or ecoholism view is part of the so-called deep ecology movement or philosophy. Usually, one can articulate three reasons to conserve natural environments. They can be stated in the following way:

- Preserving natural environments is in your economic self-interest.
- Preserving natural environments is in the long-term interests of humanity, even though it may not benefit you personally.
- Nature is intrinsically valuable, independent of its effect on humans

Deep ecology stresses the importance of the third reason. One of its pioneers was Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), a conservationist, forester, and philosopher considered the father of wildlife ecology and guardian of wilderness systems (Lutz Warren 2016).

Figure 3.2
Aldo Leopold bow hunting, Chihuahua, Mexico, January 1938, *Courtesy of the Aldo Leopold Foundation and University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives.*

The motto of his land-ethic was:

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." (Leopold 1987, 224)

Figure 3.3
Land ethics
Source: ©rick / Adobe Stock

Ecoholism also emphasizes the biocentric equality principle, according to which the well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves, and this value is independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.

3.4 ANIMAL ETHICS OR ANIMAL QUESTION

Animal ethics is a domain of practical ethics or bioethics that deals predominantly with the moral status of nonhuman animals[2] and the ethics of our practices that include them. It harbors numerous topics, as well as various approaches. In what follows, the predominant ones are briefly presented (see A, B, C and D below), with the central concept being the title of each subheading.[3] Each of them, in a way, represents an answer to the so-called animal question: the question that is at the heart of animal ethics and pertains to the question about the moral status of nonhumans and our relationship to them. Most of the concepts, approaches and concerns can also be applied to nature in general and are thus an integral part of environmental ethics. (Strahovnik 2013)

3.4.1 SUFFERING OR THE ABILITY TO SUFFER

Probably, the most direct way to approach the animal question is by acknowledging the needless **suffering** that nonhuman animals undergo due to many of our practices and thus recognizing their **ability to feel pain** as an important similarity with human animals. This idea has been most clearly expressed by philosopher Jeremy Bentham when he said that concerning nonhuman animals

> "the [relevant] question is not, Can they reason?, nor Can they talk?, but, Can they suffer?".[4]

This points to one of the most central aspects of ethics. A writer, social reformer, and one of the first to argue for some form of animal rights, Henry S. Salt added to this a very simple line of thought:

> "[P]ain is pain ... whether be inflicted on man or on beast; and the creature that suffers it, whether man or beast, being sensible of the misery of it while it lasts, suffers evil".

Similar ethical considerations can be traced back in the history of philosophy, for example, to Pythagoras, Plutarch, and Porphyry, who stressed the characteristics that nonhuman animals share with humans, in particular sentience (the capacity to feel, perceive or experience), followed by the fact that humans can, for the most part, refrain from eating meat and that it is a matter of basic justice that we withhold from causing nonhuman animals unnecessary suffering.[6]

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[2] The term 'nonhuman animals' is used in order to hint to or illuminate the often-missed fact that humans are also animals. (In the remainder of this section such a usage will prevail most of the time, except when the original sources refer back to the more traditional humans - animals dichotomy.

[3] Strahovnik 2013.

[4] Bentham 1998, 26.

[5] Salt 1892, 24.

[6] Engel and Jenni 2010, 9–12.

In ethics, such considerations are most often stressed by utilitarian approaches since it is indeed very hard to find sensible reasons for the exclusion of animal suffering and pain from of our
consideration of well-being.

Such a view can be called "ethical humanism" and consists of a claim that all and only all human beings deserve moral consideration[7] , which results in a "sad" consequence that nonhuman animals lack moral standing and that the moral status of our actions remains unaffected by more or less anything we do to them.

Figure 3.4
Pigs in a stable
Source: © Matthias Zomer / Pexels

The prevalence of ethical humanism throughout most of the history of our ethical thought and practices results in a state we are facing today: over 80 billion nonhuman animals are killed annually, predominantly for food and as part of various testing and experimenting methods, having to endure a miserable, painful, and frustrating existence before their end.[8] Similar considerations can be expressed in the language of **interests.** The characteristic of those nonhuman animals that can feel pain and pleasure (sentience) represents an important ground for the attribution of interests to them, especially **the interest in avoiding pain and suffering.** Sentience is thus the most sensible and, at the same time, also the sole acceptable characteristic for drawing the line around a set of beings whose interests count morally (at least to some extent).[9] A sentient being is capable of feeling pleasure and pain and is thus having at least a minimal interest to avoid pain; if a being is not sentient and cannot feel pleasure or pain, it cannot be hurt or harmed by our actions.

[7] Engel and Jenni 2010, 14.
[8] Singer 2009; 2006; Mason and Singer 2006.
[9] Singer 2011, 50.

All this results in a conclusion that as far as the suffering of animals is concerned – even in the absence of a precise standard of how to compare and weigh different interests of human and nonhuman animals – we should substantially change our practices (meat production, intensive animal breeding, experiments on animals, uses of animals in zoos, etc.) that involve the latter. One way to overcome such a situation is to open our hearts to this suffering (empathy) and perceive or experience nonhuman animals in a way that recognizes the moral relevance of their sentience.[10]

3.4.2 RIGHTS

Another approach to the animal question includes an appeal to ***the rights of nonhuman animals.***[11] The rights in question are rights in the moral sense and not (necessarily) also rights in the legal sense. Philosopher Tom Regan argues that (at least some) nonhuman animals have **negative rights** of non-interference, such as **the right not to be killed, not to be harmed,** or not to be tortured. Most of our existing practices involving nonhuman animals involve at least some kind of severe violations of such rights and are in this regard considered morally wrong and unacceptable. The rights approach is based on the ascription of **intrinsic (inherent) value** to all sentient beings, that is, living beings that are experiencing subjects of life (e.g., with perceptions, beliefs, wishes, motives, memories, etc.) and whose lives can fare well or poorly over time. As such, they have "an individual experiential welfare, logically independent of their utility relative to the interests or welfare of others". This is a foundation for their rights and morally obliges us to abstain from actions that would importantly hamper the lives of such beings. Although there are several important differences between the interests-based and rights-based approaches, the practical consequences of both are very similar. Both use the same (or at least very similar) criterion for the inclusion into the moral community in its widest sense; regarding the normative implications, both approaches see the majority of existing practices involving nonhuman animals as unacceptable and unjustifiable, since we mostly appeal only to arbitrary and ungrounded differences about the status of sentient beings to justify unequal treatment. The rights-based approach focuses principally on securing **the well-being of nonhuman animals** (experiences of pleasure and pain) and sees the attribution of protective rights to them as the best way to implement this general aim.[12][13]

[10] Cf. Strahovnik 2013.

[11] Regan 2004.

[12] Regan 1989, 38.

[13] Cf. Strahovnik 2013.

Figure 3.5
What are you looking at?
Source: © Josiah Farrow / Pexels

What is the difference?

The crucial point in the rejection of ethical humanism is related to the search for distinguishing characteristics between humans and nonhuman animals. Such a characteristic would then supposedly define the (proper) set of beings that share equal minimal moral status. The problem arises when we appeal to some morally irrelevant characteristics or differences as relevant and justify our unequal treatment or attitude. This should be rejected, and such approaches often claim that

> "in our attitude to members of other species, we have prejudices which are completely analogous to the prejudices people may have with regard to members of other races, and these prejudices will be connected with the ways we are blind to our own exploitation and oppression of the other group. We are blind to the fact that what we do to them deprives them of their rights;
>
> we do not want to see this because we profit from it, and so we make use of what are really morally irrelevant differences between them and ourselves to justify the difference in treatment".[14]

[14] Diamond 1991, 319.

This is a basis for an argument from analogy that puts ***speciesism*** (i.e., regarding human beings (as a species) as the only ones that deserve a moral status or as deserving a special moral status as opposed to other species but with no particular justification backing this up except for species membership) on a par with racism or sexism.[15]

Figure 3.6
A cat companion
Source: ©Pixabay / Pexels

However, the analogy with racism alone is not enough to discard ethical humanism, since its proponents might appeal to some other characteristic other than a mere species membership to justify the (moral) disparity between human and nonhuman animals. Several candidates for such a difference can be proposed, including linguistic abilities, language and/or speech, rationality, reasoning and responsiveness to reasons, ability to agree to social and moral rules, possession of an immortal soul, life in the "biographic sense of the word", moral autonomy, the capacity to reciprocity, empathy, the desire for self-respect.[16]

All such attempts fall prey to the following simple dilemma. They face a very difficult task to find and defend a distinguishing characteristic such that either (i) **only human beings have it** (in this case, many human beings will actually not have it, as is the case with moral autonomy, rationality, etc., e.g., in cases of persons in a coma or small children) or (ii) **all human beings have it** (but in this case also at least some nonhuman animals will have it, e.g., capacity for sentience). An example of the first would be the ability to agree to social and moral rules, which psychopaths lack who but are nonetheless treated as having the same moral status as others.[17]

[15] Cf. Strahovnik 2013.
[16] Engel and Jenni 2010, 19.
[17] Engel and Jenni 2010, 20–21.

The example of the former would be the capacity to experience pleasure and pain, which all human beings have, but at the same time, it is utterly clear that some nonhuman animals also have it. If one would focus on some other characteristics (e.g., the capacity for speech), then an open question would be why this capacity is morally relevant at all. Since there seem to be no convincing candidates, such an argument from analogy indeed seriously challenges ethical humanism.

3.4.3 ABOLITION

There is also another approach to the animal question that understands the previously mentioned approaches (focusing on animal well-being, prevention of needless suffering, etc.) as deeply mistaken. The main issue is that they merely focus on how we should treat nonhuman animals and not on a more pressing issue that **we should not treat and use them at all.** Such a view is called abolitionism, since it advocates the abolition of the use of nonhuman animals.

In a consumer society, a supposedly misguided perspective that only focuses on the pleasure and pain of the nonhuman animals gives rise to the talk about "free-range meat", "cage-free eggs", "happy meat", and alike. The final purpose of such movements is merely better treatment of animals. Abolitionism takes a more radical stance of seeing any use of animals as morally unacceptable and claims that any "humane treatment" or "humane consumption" is merely an illusion.

Figure 3.7
Dinner
Source: © Kirsten Bühne (left), © Lukas (right) / Pexels

Abolitionism also appeals to the sentience and consciousness of beings as setting the limits for our use of animals as a means or a resource. It advocates a full abolition of any use of sentient animals following the "zero tolerance" principle.

It also notes how the so-called humane treatment of animals in food production goes in many cases hand in hand with the economic interests of the food industry, since the facts reveal that certain measures that are part of the more "animal-friendly" production processes are actually reducing the costs (fewer dead animals as a result of diseases and aggression between them, reduced costs for medical treatments, etc.) and offering an opportunity to sell the meat at increased prices (since environmentally aware consumers are prepared to spend more on free-range steak).

However, the important question is not whether animals suffer less because of this but whether it is morally acceptable that they suffer and are used at all. Abolitionism also advocates the abolition of most domestic pets since, in many cases, we are providing them with a merely sad existence given their nature, making them dependent on us, and – in the case of carnivorous pets – there is a question of the use and suffering of other animals raised to become pet food. The main impediment in all this seems to be that we regard animals as property, therefore as things, while we should move towards considering them as persons in the sense that they deserve a proper kind of moral consideration. Thus, if we really are morally concerned with animals, we should neither eat, wear, nor use them in such ways.[19]

[18] Francione 2009.

[19] Cf. Strahovnik 2013.

3.4.4 CARE AND COMPANIONSHIP

There are several other ethical approaches to the animal question that falls outside of the broadly utilitarian or rights-based approaches. Most of these approaches focus on changing **our relationship towards nonhuman animals** and eliminating some deeply rooted posits that stand in the way of such a change. In this respect, British philosopher Mary Midgley argues for eliminating **barriers** that our culture has put between humans and nonhuman animals and are the foundation of our mostly unacceptable attitudes to them. Those central barriers include confusion in our understanding of concepts like belief, emotion, understanding, language, and relations between them, a distorted view on morality that includes concentric circles of the ethical importance of others and our relation to them, where we are at the center, excessive abstraction in moral thinking and reasoning, and an oversimplified view that compassion and empathy are limited in "volume" and that we have to conserve it only to the ones near and dear to us.

Figure 3.8
A flying companion
Source: © Skyler Ewing / Pexels

From such a perspective, both the proponents of the animal liberation movement and their opponents fall prey to a common mistake of excessively generalizing the issues, leading to the reduction of all our moral relations to a simple and abstract model or ethical relevance. Animal liberation, equality of interest perspective, and the animal rights movement can be successful only in combating some of our excuses for our current treatment of animals; they cannot, on the whole, represent a new basis for establishing **an inclusive model of ethical community** with a radical change of our beliefs and attitudes.[21] The way to achieve this is to develop an enhanced concern for nonhuman animals based on our common evolution and different ways of our living together.[22]

[20] Midgley 1983.
[21] Cf. Strahovnik 2013.
[22] Engel and Jenni 2010, 33–34.

Figure 3.9
Be kind
Source: © Brett Sayles / Pexels

Similarly, the ethics of care approach emphasizes that our concepts of duty, moral principles, autonomy, and individuality must be replaced with morally even more central concepts of **relationship, companionship, sensitivity for the world around us, and care.** It calls attention to the importance of our focus and sensitivity for the suffering of animals, which is being inflicted on them because of our social and economic system. We need to reject an image of an autonomous, isolated, independent moral agent with rights and freedoms formed in the Enlightenment and replace it with a notion of mutually dependent and interconnected beings (ecosystem).[23]

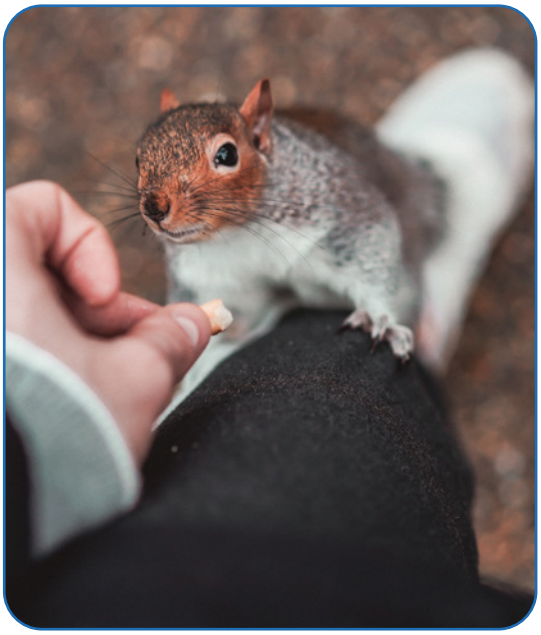

Figure 3.10
Let's share a snack
Source: © Luca Nardone / Pexels

[23] Engel and Jenni 2010, 35–36.

For a philosopher Cora Diamond, our relationship with nonhuman animals can be framed as a relationship of our fellow-creature or a companion, which may be sought as company.[24] Such a notion of a creature is not a biological one but a moral one and one that is crucially connected with our understanding of ourselves. "The response to animals as our fellows in mortality, in life on this earth [...], depends on a conception of *human* life. It is an extension of the non-biological notion of what human life is".[25] As such, it takes us beyond moral notions of rights, justice, or interest, towards respect, dignity, companionship, and mutual dependence.

What establishes this relationship between nonhuman animals and us is a sense of vulnerability and mortality, which we share with them as connected to being a living body. [26] When we perceive and treat nonhuman animals as objects, we fail to see injustice as injustice on the level of relationship with them, and we stick to interests and rights. We can shift this perspective only by recognizing our common vulnerability. The very notion of (in) justice requires a level of established compassion and a loving relationship towards a being that can suffer injustices.[27]

This brief reflection and overview of some of the most common approaches to animal ethics is a supporting framework that you, as teachers and educators, can use to address these issues with your students at the level appropriate to their age. It is meant to give you a platform for framing and discussing different questions with them and to include several experiential and holistic aspects to these topics.

[24] Diamond, 1991, 328–329.
[25] Diamond 1991, 329
[26] Diamond, 2008, 74.
[27] Cf. Strahovnik 2013.

3.5 QUIZZES RELATED TO THE TOPIC AND GUIDANCE FOR ASSIGNMENTS

3.5.1 QUIZZES

There are three quizzes for students embedded in the animated video, each consisting of two questions. All questions allow for multiple answers. There are no correct or incorrect answers. The main aim is to stimulate students to consider various perspectives and dimensions embedded in ethical issues. It is also possible for a given student not to choose any answer. In such a case, this student must explain this and try to provide an answer of his or her own. As a teacher or instructor, you can use these questions as a starting point for discussion. You can also designate to your students' various further assignments, such as writing a short reflection on the topic, drawing a picture of the answers that they think are the right ones, re-writing the original story in a way that another answer would be the right one, etc. You will also find ideas for such additional assignments in the subsequent section.

The **first quiz** consists of two questions. Both are directly related to the contents of the animation. The first question asks students to think about the right thing to do in a depicted situation. The second one is more general and pertains to the issue of compassion towards people and animals, since one of the points of dispute among students in the video is if they are related.

You can pose additional questions, such as the following. What do you think would happen if they just left the bird alone? Have you been in a similar situation yourself? What is compassion, and could we feel compassion towards animals?

QUIZ 1

Q1: What do you think Pieter-Jan and his friend should do? (multiple answers possible)

- ☐ Leave the bird alone because they should not interfere with nature.
- ☐ Leave the bird alone since they do not know if it needs or wants their help.
- ☐ Leave the bird alone since it might be dangerous for them.
- ☐ Help or get some help for the bird since it appears hurt and in pain.
- ☐ Help the bird since birds are important for the ecosystem.

Q2: Do you think having (or lacking) compassion for animals is related to compassion for human beings? How? (multiple answers possible

- ☐ Having compassion for animals means also having compassion for people.
- ☐ Having compassion for people means also having compassion for animals.
- ☐ One can feel compassion for people but have no compassion for animals.
- ☐ One can feel compassion for animals but have no compassion for people.
- ☐ I do not know or don't want to answer.

The questions in **Quiz 2** are more general, although they are related to the animation. The first one concerns eating meat and other uses of animals. The second one concern the ethical acceptability of having animals as pets. As above, you can use these as impetuses for further discussion by asking questions, such as: Is eating meat always impermissible? Does it matter what animals we have for pets, for example, is having a domesticated cat at home the same as having a bear or a tiger?

Q3: Do you think it is ethical to use animals for food and other products that we use? (multiple answers possible)

- ☐ Yes, since there is nothing wrong with this if they feel no pain?
- ☐ Yes, since we are dependent on eating meat.
- ☐ Yes, since people have always eaten animals and use them in other ways?
- ☐ No, since this causes animals needless suffering and pain?
- ☐ No, since we can live without eating meat.

Q4: Is having animals as pets ethically acceptable? (multiple answers possible)

- ☐ Yes, since we take care of them, and they have comfortable lives.
- ☐ Yes, since this benefits these animal species, e.g., we create new breeds of dogs.
- ☐ Yes, since they keep us company.
- ☐ No, because pets do not live freely.
- ☐ No, because it is unethical to own a living being.

Questions in **Quiz 3** are even more general than the previous ones. They concern questions about the value of the natural environment or ecosystem, including the value of animals. They represent a basis for a general discussion of these topics in a way that interconnects various perspective and classes that the students might have had (e.g., biology, social science, religious education, etc.).

Q5: Why are animals important or valuable? (multiple answers possible)

- ☐ Because we are dependent on them.
- ☐ Because they are in an important sense like us, e.g., they feel pain and are vulnerable.
- ☐ Because they are our companions.
- ☐ Because they are an essential part of the whole ecosystem.
- ☐ Animals are not particularly valuable or important.

Q6: Why is the preservation of the natural environment important? (multiple answers possible)

- ☐ The natural environment has value on its own.
- ☐ The natural environment is beautiful, and we can enjoy its beaty.
- ☐ Our own existence is depended on the natural environment, and it makes our lives better.
- ☐ The natural environment is something we must preserve for future generations.
- ☐ The natural environment is not particularly valuable or important.

3.5.1 GUIDANCE FOR ASSIGNMENTS

In the Student's Book, there are four assignments. This part provides you with some guidance on how to assist students and assess the assignments.

Assignment 1

The assignment asks students to categorize the stated problems as having to do with environmental ethics (EE) or animal ethics (AE), and some can fall under both. There are four problems described, and they can be categorized in the following way: soil degradation (EE, also AE), animal experimentation (AE), water scarcity (EE, also AE) and loss of biodiversity (EE and AE). In the second part, the assignment asks for possible solutions to these problems or changes in our behaviors. Allow students the freedom to suggest "out of the box" ideas while at the same time asking them to elaborate on them if possible.

Assignment 2

This assignment asks students to categorize the claims or views of Pieter-Jan, Lindsay, Sarah, and David into four categories (A, B, C, or D – see below).
Usually, one can articulate three reasons to protect and preserve natural environments. They can be stated in the following way:

- A. Preserving natural environments is in our economic self-interest.
- B. Preserving natural environments is in the long-term interests of humanity, even though it may not benefit you personally.
- C. Nature is intrinsically valuable, independent of its effect on humans.

There is also the view (D) that claims that the natural environment (including animals) has no value and should not be part of our moral concerns. The solutions can be formed in the following way.

Lindsay: This is just a wild bird. Let's leave it alone.	**D**
Sarah: Let's pick up the bird gently and take it to the vet so that it will no longer feel pain. They can help this poor fellow, and then if somebody is willing to adopt it and take it to their home, this would solve the situation.	**C**
Pieter-Jan: I want to help this bird. We must do something.	**C**
David: Yeah, but it's just a bird. It is not like you could benefit from it.	**A, also D**
Sarah: It is lovely here in the middle of all these trees. They are also a home of a sort. Just look around. We are almost in the middle of the city, and there are so many animals and plants here.	**C, also B**
David: These trees are like air conditioning, just free.	**A**
Sarah: These trees are beautiful. I hope it stays that way, and no one will build something here. The trees are living beings just like us, even though they do not think or feel.	**C, also B**

Assignment 3

Assignment 3 asks students to think of and write down differences between human beings and animals and their importance or relevance. In the final part, they must also think of similarities. Guide them if they need help and try to discuss how the proposed differences and similarities matter from the ethical point of view (e.g., it might be that some animals can fly but humans cannot fly, but in which way is this important for the status, relationship with and treatment of human beings and animals).

Assignment 4

The assignment called "Animal Room" is intended to make students aware of and reflect on the use of animals and animal-based products in our everyday life. You can help them by guiding them to the relevant resources to find information about such products (e.g., https://animalsmart.org/feeding-the-world/products-from-animals). The second part asks students to reflect on our widespread use and reliance on animals.

3.5.2 IDEAS FOR ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Below are three additional assignments or activities for students that you use (cf. Strahovnik 2020). Make sure they understand the instructions. You can easily adapt activities in a way that it is possible to include the entire class or group.

The network

Step 1: In the first step, choose one animal and write it down on a piece of paper. If you are doing this assignment alone, do this for at least 10 animals. If you are doing this in a group, each member writes down one or two animals.

Step 2: In the next step, find out or think about and write for each initially selected animal another animal such that one is somehow depended on the other (as a source of food or symbiosis, etc., e.g., like fox feeding on mice or songbirds). Write each animal down on a separate piece of paper.

Step 3: In this step, first find an empty wall or big presentation board, poster or space on the floor that you can use. If you are doing this alone, select one of the animals in the pieces of paper. If you are doing this in a group, select the persons that would start and he or she selects the animal. Then put the piece of paper with the initially selected animal in the center and two other animals (dependent on the first selected one) in a way that connect them by drawing a line or gluing a piece of string in between the pieces of paper. A line thus represents an interconnection and dependence. Once this is finished, continue with another animal or with another person selecting another animal. Again, draw lines or glue strings to mark the connections between them. You (and others) can always think of more connections to add. Repeat this step so that all persons get their turn, or you run out of animals on pieces of paper. If needed, do some additional research on dependencies between animals using internet sources (e.g., Wikipedia) or a relevant book (e.g., atlas on animal life).

Step 4: Once you have completed creating this visualization of the network of interdependence, prepare stickers with a human figure drawn on them or just with the letter H (for humans). Now place this sticker next to any animal in the created network on which we depend (either for food, pest control, pollination, etc.). Try to think very broadly.

Step 5: Now look at the created network again. Next, count what is the largest number of steps that separate a given animal from interconnection with human beings and write it down (e.g., mosquitos are not directly related to humans, that is, we do not depend on them, but we are depended on birds and bats that feed on mosquitos since they also control other pests and pollinate plants (e.g., mangos and bananas that we then eat).

Figure 3.11
Spider's web
Source: © Pixabay / Pexels

Bill of animal rights

Step 1: Name a few of your favorite animals. If you are doing this in a group, each person should choose one or two animals (wild, domestic or a pet animal) and, one by one, they should say what their favorite animal is and briefly explain why. Then either write down the animals or draw them animal on a piece of paper (preferably small).

Step 2: Think of and write down three ways in which the selected animals interact with humans. Write down how these interactions/encounters look like, but from the perspective of the animal and not humans. (e.g., tiger (that is kept in a zoo): "I mostly see humans walking past my cage. Every few days the keepers of the zoo bring me a piece of a dead animal for me to eat. I also see them cleaning my enclosure when they lock me away in a small chamber."

Step 3: One they have completed the previous task, instruct students try to devise a bill of rights that would protect their selected animals (i.e., the animals that you described). You should think of and write down at least five rights that would protect their selected animals on a separate, large piece of paper, leaving enough room so that they could also glue pictures or names of the animals on it in afterwards. These rights could also be very specific; try to think from the perspective of the animals involved.

Step 4: Now, look at the entire large piece of paper. If you are in a group, you can discuss what you have written down. Why have they chosen these rights? How and why are they important? Are they important for every animal that their group represented? Are they important to animals in general? Are they relevant for humans too?

Step 5: Find room for the poster(s) with the lists of rights in your room, the classroom or in the school hallway, and display them there so that others also can observe them.

Figure 3.12
White antelope in the desert
Source: © Pat Whelen / Pexels

A caring companion

Step 1: First, think of the animal that you first hear this morning, perhaps on your way to school or out on a trip. Perhaps it was your dog if you have one. What was the animal saying? What could it say to them if it could speak? What was the first animal you saw this morning? What did it look like? If you are in a group, share this with others and invite them to do the same.

Step 2: Think of by yourself or discuss with others in which way animals are our companions. Can only pets be our companions, or are wild animals also interacting with us? In which way? Are we interacting with them (this could be in any way or form, e.g., feeling amused when we see a squirrel hanging down and swinging on a thin branch on the tree in our garden or at the park)?

Step 3: After the reflection or discussion activity above, you and your friends, family or schoolmates could decide together on a joint "Caring Companion" project that would involve interaction between animals and humans. There are several possible ideas that you can follow (from more basic to more elaborate ones), for example, building feeding stands for animals and then observing them from a distance, arranging visits to the local animal shelter and providing company for animals there or volunteering in their activities, organizing a pet day at the local home for the elderly where you arrange a session for joint time with pets, and similar (Make sure that you follow all relevant regulations and have in mind the well-being of the animals and also the possibilities for implementation). Make this part of your regular school activities and establish some sort of tradition.

3.6 GLOSSARY

Abolitionism: a view that argues for the complete abolition of the use of animals by humans.

Animal ethics: a field of ethics that investigates the moral status of animals, their values and the ethical status of our practices that include them

Anthropocentrism: the belief (and associated practices) that only human beings should be included in the circle of our moral concerns (values, duties, etc.) (also ethical humanism)

Biocentrism: the belief (and associated practices) that all living beings should be included in the circle of our moral concerns (values, duties, etc.)

Care ethics/ethics of care: a moral theory that takes care, that is caring about individuals as the central ethical consideration

Deep ecology: a view that the natural environment or nature as a whole has a special, intrinsic or inherent value and that we should change our relationship to nature

Ecocentrism/ecoholism: the belief (and associated practices) that all nature, all natural entities, living and non-living should be included in the circle of our moral concerns (values, duties, etc.)

Environmental ethics: the field of ethics concerned with the value of environment (or ecosystem), our relationship with it (primarily our duties towards it) and the application of ethical norms to practical problems concerning the environment.

Land ethic(s): a holistic and eco-centered approach in environmental ethics first developed by Aldo Leopold, which argues for a change in the relationship between humans and nature so that the human being ceases to be a conqueror of nature or land, but only part of it. It argues for respect for the whole ecosystem (animals, plants, soil, water, the land itself, etc.).

Rationalism: the belief (and associated practices) that only rational beings should be included in the circle of our moral concerns (values, duties, etc.).

Sentientism: the belief (and associated practices) that only sentient beings, meaning beings that can feel pleasure and/or pain, should be included in the circle of our moral concerns (values, duties, etc.).

Utilitarianism: a moral theory that claims that the morally right action (or our duty) is the action that brings about the most utility/value (usually understood in terms of net surplus of pleasures over pain, happiness, or well-being of individuals).

3.7 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

Characters featured: students David, Sarah, Pieter-Jan, and Lindsay, one older male student, pet shop owner.

> I.EXT School playground. We see four kids walking home from school. Suddenly alongside the fence, Pieter-Jan spots a black rook (bird). It appears injured and scared.

Pieter-Jan: Look at this bird, guys! It seems that it needs help. There is something wrong with one of its wings and part of its foot is missing.

Sarah: We could take it back to school and the biology teacher can look at it.

David: The teacher's parking lot is already empty.

Lindsay: It is just a wild bird. Let's leave it alone.

Pieter-Jan (reaching for the bird): I will try to pick it up. C'mon, little birdie.

Lindsay: No!!! Just leave it. We should not intervene in nature. What if the bird is just lost?

Pieter-Jan: I can't just leave it and pretend that I did not see it. If you don't want to be a part of this, just go on.

Lindsay: Birds can carry bird-flu and my mother always tells us not to get near them. Leave it here.

Pieter-Jan reaches down to pick up the bird again, Lindsay is very uncomfortable with this. Pieter-Jan says to Lindsay: That is not very kind of you. Those who have no respect for animals will end up having no respect for people.

Lindsay (very angry and upset): That's it. I won't hang out with you anymore. I am going home. You and your stupid animals. You are stupid, just like this bird. You always find something and you are always in trouble. Here is some logic for you. There were dictators who loved animals but were very kind towards the animals. (Lindsay leaves the group. Pieter-Jan looks sad because she left.)

David (after a moment of silence, he doesn't really know what to say): These big black birds live in the countryside, in large fields. They have no place in the city. Perhaps this is why the bird is sick.

Sarah: Well, once this area was an open field. And then the city expanded. The pollution also. This is just as well the home for birds as it is for us. Remember, last month we were talking at our Environment class about Aldo Leopold. He said that we have destroyed the wilderness and the land without asking it.

David: Well, it is perhaps because you cannot have a good conversation with the land. Believe me, I have tried last time when I fell on a pile of dirt with my mountain bike. And the same with animals. They cannot speak and that is the difference between them and us human beings.

Pieter-Jan: Us or them, it doesn't matter. We must do something.

Sarah: Let's pick up the bird gently and take it to the vet. They can help this poor fellow and then if somebody is willing to adopt it and take it to their home, that would solve it.

Pieter-Jan (reaches to pick up the bird): OK. I will gently pick it up and carry it in my sweater. There is a pet store down this street. Maybe they can help us.

> *II. EXT City streets. Kids are walking together with Pieter-Jan holding the bird in front of him. The conversation continues.*

An older kid, passing the group (ridiculing them): Hey! Where are you going with the bird, Pieter-Jan? Will have it as a pet? Or will you eat it? I heard that your mother is a vegetarian. Are you too? Some day you will turn into monkeys. Or sheep… they only eat grass.

Pieter-Jan gets furious and wants to rush to the other boy. Sarah stops him by grabbing his shoulder.

Sarah: Ignore him Pieter-Jan. Be better. Let's just go on.

(They continue walking for a bit.)

David: But… perhaps there is a point. There are wild animals and there are pets. And wild birds are not pets and we are not obliged to take care of them. We do not intervene when a lion wants to eat a gazelle. They are on their own.

Pieter-Jan: I just want to help this bird and not all other animals.

David: Yeah, but it's just a bird. It not like you could benefit from it. A dog could at least bring you your slippers in the morning and bark at the intruders. And a cat… well, cats really don't do anything. But at least they can be cute.

Sarah: My great-grandfather often tells me this story. During the war he had to hide from the Nazis and he lived in a really tiny room in the attic of a large apartment building. It was more like a closet than a proper room. His friends brought him food whenever they could, but days pasted not seeing anybody. The room had no windows and the only light he could saw was from the hallway if the doors were slightly open.

But this could be dangerous. One night my great-grandfather heard a tiny noise above his head. First a little screech, followed by an even quieter sound of flapping. At first, he had no idea what the sound is, but after a few evenings, he figured it out. It must have been a small bat, retuning back to its hiding spot underneath the roof. He or she must have entered through a small gap between in the roofing and then use its wings to continue along the wooden beam to the spot above his head. Once he paid enough attention, he could hear the bat coming and going, several times a night. He told me that the bat companion, even though he never saw it, was making his days more bearable. And that he waited every late evening to wish good luck to the bat in hunting insects. Animals are our companions.

David: Having a companion can really is important. I enjoy nothing more than hanging out with you guys.

Pieter-Jan: Me too, David. We are almost there. And the bird is much calmer now.

III. EXT Children arrive in front of a pet store. They aim to go inside.

Pet store keeper (holding his hand in front of him): No, no, no. Don't bring this inside. It might infect our animals. And we do not have permission to take in wild animals from the wilderness.

David: Aren't all animals wild?

Pet store keeper: Don't be smart now.

Pieter-Jan: But surely you must know somebody who can help the bird. It is injured and needs a bit of care.

Pet store keeper: OK, OK. I will call the vet that works with us and see what she can do. Just stay outside and try to keep the bird in a shade.

Sarah: Thank you. You are very kind.

(The kids move in a nearby park, under the shade of trees.)

David: It is getting late guys. I will have to go home soon.

Sarah: I guess it won't take much longer. It is lovely here in the middle of all these trees. They are also a home of a sort. Just look around. We are almost in the middle of the city, and there are so many animals and plants here. I heard that in Sri Lanka there is a giant fig tree that was planted 300 years BC, which means that it is now 2300 years old. Imagine feeding and cooling generation after generation of children.

David: Well, I have to admit that I like the cool air of the shade of these trees. It's like air conditioning, just free.

Pieter-Jan: I hope that the birdie will be OK and that it will be able to fly among these trees. And I wish Lindsay was here.

Sarah: You can call or message her!

Pieter-Jan: I can try… (Reaches in his pockets for a smartphone and starts typing.)

Sarah: Well, what did you write?

Pieter-Jan: I told her that we are sharing the planet anyway… so why not sharing this park bench too.

Lindsay approaches: Sorry, guys. I really didn't want to react as I did. And I checked … black rooks… yes, this little guy is called a black rook … don't carry bird-flu.

Sarah: These trees are beautiful. I hope it stays that way and no one will build something here. The trees are living beings just like us, even though they do not think or feel.

David (looking at the bird in Pieter-Jan's hands): Hi, birdie. You are looking around as well, just like we do. You like it here, don't you!?

(In the distance the pet shop owner approaches.)

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