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"Moral Pluralism and the Environment"

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Cost-benefit analysis makes the assumption that everything from consumer goods to endangered species may in principle be given a value by which its worth can be compared with that of anything else, even though the actual measurement of such value may be difficult in practice. The assumption is shown to fail, even in simple cases, and the analysis to be incapable of taking into account the transformative value of new experiences. Several kinds of value are identified, by no means all commensurable with one another—a situation with which both economics and contemporary ethical theory must come to terms. A radical moral pluralism is recommended as in no way incompatible with the requirements of rationality, which allows that the business of living decently involves many kinds of principles and various sorts of responsibilities. In environmental ethics, pluralism offers the hope of reconciling various rival theories, even if none of them is universally applicable.

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