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Ecosystem health, as James Nelson argues, must be understood as having both descriptive and normative content; it is in this sense a "morally thick" concept. The health analogy refers (a) at the similarities between conservation ecology and medicine or plant pathology as normative sciences, and (b) to the ability of ecosystems to "heal" themselves in the face of disturbances. Nelson, however, goes beyond these two aspects and argues that judgements of illness in ecosystems only support moral obligations to protect them if they are attributed a "good of their own." But this latter extension of the analogy flies in the face of ecological science, which has been forced to abandon organicism. If one separates the question of the warranted assertibility of environmentalists' goals from the question of where values in nature are located, the search for an objective realm of value realism can be seen to be unnecessary. (Source: The White Horse Press)

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