

Sustainability Ethics

SOS110

March 17, 2014

Introduction to Ethics

What is ethics?

- study of right or wrong
- laws of generalizable moral reasoning exists (code of conduct)
- Learn from case studies of moral failure
- Individual scale!



Sustainability Ethics

What you do at the individual scale is often not enough in sustainability!

- Asks what is right or wrong at the **group** or system scale (i.e., context matters!)
- For example: Norms, or what is accepted by society as right or wrong, influence individual behavior (e.g., eating insects)
- Also, institutions impact behavior (e.g., religion, legal systems, the media, art, culture, economic system, etc.)

Sustainability Ethics, Continued

- More complex!
 - At the group or societal scale, the 'Right action' may be determined by the majority or leaders of a group
- Groups can succeed in cooperating if they can:
 - Communicate with each other
 - Identify strongly with each other (oppose other groups)
 - Reciprocate with each other (punish or reward)
 - Feel consequences of failing to cooperate
- There are particular sustainability related dilemmas that inhibit cooperation among groups...

Dilemmas of Sustainability Ethics:

1. Intergenerational Equity
2. Moral Luck
3. Weak vs. Strong Sustainability
4. Environmental Externalities

1) Intergenerational Equity

- Equity, or fairness, among multiple generations
- What, if anything, does the present generation owe the future?
- Challenge of delayed gratification...

<http://youtu.be/jVQ8biAVeU0>



2) Moral Luck



- Moral luck is a distinctive way of thinking about the relation between luck and responsibility.
 - Luck plays a role in moral development
 - A good life requires fortune-dependent goods (health, friends, \$)
- Principle: We are only morally responsible for factors that we can control
- Result: adverse outcomes might result from even the best intentions.
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=cbcGbflpFzI

3) Weak vs. Strong Sustainability

Different perspectives about the of nature...



Weak sustainability:

- natural capital can be used up as long as it is converted into manufactured capital of equal value

Strong sustainability:

- The existing stock of natural capital must be maintained and enhanced because the functions it performs cannot be duplicated by manufactured capital

4) Environmental Externalities

- The cost or benefit that affects a party who did not choose to incur the cost or benefit



- https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=IH7Zv-6ZF5s

Class Activity

- Break up into project groups
- Brainstorm how **your group project** relates to the sustainability ethics challenges we discussed today.
- **Pick two** (intergenerational equity, moral luck, weak vs. strong sustainability, environmental externalities) and create post on Top Hat for each choice

Top Hat Post Instructions

- Find the 2 topics of choice under 'Discussions' on Top Hat (<https://app.tophat.com/e/808071>)
- Create 2 posts that explain how your group project relates to the topics you chose in under **600 words**. Be as specific as possible.
- Only one post per topic per group!
- **Include names of group members** present today as well as the **problem you are assessing** in the post (does not count towards word limit)
- Posts are due by 5pm today on Top Hat.