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The Bioethics of Biodiversity[1]

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ABSTRACT What is there in the diversity of life that is morally relevant? This paper aims at reviewing the main features of biodiversity and its conservation from the standpoint of value and ethics. Biodiversity is framed within conservation biology and environmental ethics. It is claimed here that biodiversity loss is the main problem within the global environmental crisis. Facts and numbers on biodiversity in time and space are analysed in order to highlight what is at stake. Some usual arguments against conservation are critically analysed. The causes and meaning of the biodiversity crisis are put into context. In particular it is shown that the Sixth Great Extinction Spasm is now under way due to human activity, whatever the figures of extinction rates considered. Further, it is shown that there are growing reasons to consider that this extinction spasm started quite early in human history. The value of biodiversity is scrutinised from an ethical standpoint. Starting from an anthropocentric perspective, its wide instrumental value for human purposes is reviewed in its potentialities and limitations. It is argued that biocentric ethics extend the scope of indirect moral significance of biodiversity within the well-established ethical view based on the satisfaction of interests. But biodiversity is a holistic environmental entity, whose eventual direct moral standing will suffer from the same theoretical difficulties that affect ecocentric environmental ethics. Cosmic evolution and the quest for complexity are invoked as the probable key to legitimate the intrinsic value of life, nature and biodiversity.

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