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Perspective

"The 'future of conservation' debate: Defending ecocentrism and the Nature Needs Half movement"

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ABSTRACT

The Future of Conservation survey, launched in March 2017, has proposed a framework to help with interpreting the array of ethical stances underpinning the motivations for biological conservation. In this article we highlight what is missing in this debate to date. Our overall aim is to explore what an acceptance of ecocentric ethics would mean for how conservation is practised and how its policies are developed. We start by discussing the shortcomings of the survey and present a more convincing and accurate categorization of the conservation debate. Conceiving the future of conservation as nothing less than an attempt to preserve abundant life on earth, we illustrate the strategic and ethical advantage of ecocentric over anthropocentric approaches to conservation. After examining key areas of the current debate we endorse and defend the Nature Needs Half and bio-proportionality proposals. These proposals show how the acceptance of an ecocentric framework would aid both practices and policies aimed at promoting successful conservation. We conclude that these proposals bring a radically different and more effective approach to conservation than anthropocentric approaches, even though the latter purport to be pragmatic.

1. Introduction

With the popularization of the concept of ecosystem services, a longstanding ethical debate about the underpinnings of conservation has broadened to the conservation community at large (Marris, 2011; Kareiva and Marvier, 2012; Sandbrook, 2015; Holmes et al., 2016). Some ecologists, conservationist biologists, ethicists and social scientists have emphasized ecocentric values and the protection of nature for its own sake as prerequisites to successful conservation (Cafaro and Primack, 2014; Doak et al., 2015; Shoreman-Ouimet and Kopnina, 2016; Batavia and Nelson, 2017; Cafaro et al., 2017; Piccolo, 2017; Washington et al., 2017). Others have argued that preservation of nature for its own sake is just one of many positions and that a plurality of perspectives on the ethics of conservation should be welcome (e.g. Mace, 2014; Marris, 2014; Marvier, 2014; Tallis et al., 2014; Sandbrook, 2015; Holmes et al., 2016). Some authors have contended that anthropocentric motivation in protecting nature is inevitable or even benign for both vulnerable communities and ecosystems (e.g. Norton, 1984; Weston, 1985; Grey, 1993; Mikkelson et al., 2007; Ellis, 2017) and that there is a positive correlation between environmental protection and poverty reduction (Goodall, 2015; Islam, 2015). Conversely, other authors have claimed that the creation of protected areas disadvantages the most vulnerable human communities as it displaces them for the sake of preserving biodiversity (e.g. Peluso, 1993; Adams and Hutton, 2007; Fletcher, 2009; Büscher and Dressler, 2012; Holmes, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2014; Fletcher and Büscher, 2016; Büscher et al., 2016; Büscher et al., 2017).

To arbitrate these competing viewpoints a framework could be beneficial. In March 2017 the creators of the Future of Conservation (FoC) survey (http://futureconservation.org/) launched one such framework. The survey was set up by four academics and hosted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) World Conservation Monitoring Centre, where the lead author is based. The survey's creators stated aim was to distil the debate on conservation's underlying

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Role of corporations and capitalism		Protecting nature in order to improve human wellbeing (especially that of the poor)	Protecting nature for biodiversity's own sake
	Conservation should work hand in hand with this	**'New conservation'** • This is grounded on a belief that win–win situations (in which people benefit from conservation) can often be achieved by promoting economic growth and partnering with corporations. • Key authors within this movement have responded to criticism that they are 'doing away' with nature's intrinsic value by clarifying that their motive is strategic or pragmatic more than it is ethically founded (based on the claim that conservation needs to emphasize nature's instrumental value rather than its intrinsic value to better promote support for conservation). Key references, provided on the website are BI (2015), Kareiva and Marvier (2012), Kareiva (2014), Levin (2014), Marris (2014) and Marvier and Kareiva (2014).	**'Market biocentrism'** • Although support for conservation based on both nature's intrinsic value and market-based approaches is not common in the literature, a recent example is presented by E.O. Wilson's book *Half-Earth* (which advocates setting aside at least half of the Earth's surface as protected areas). • Noting the substantial decrease in per capita environmental footprint worldwide that this would require, Wilson supports free markets as a means of favoring products with maximum profit and minimum energy and resource consumption. • The pro-market strategy, it would appear, is to be used in order to buffer the 'human' half of the Earth against the need to exploit the 'natural' half. The only key reference, as provided on the website, is Wilson (2016).
	Conservation necessitates a move away from capitalism (and growth-based economics)	**'Critical social science'** • Here it is argued that the impacts of conservation on human wellbeing should be at the forefront of the conservation debate. • This involves being critical of the potential negative side effects of conservation activities for people who are economically poor or politically marginalized, as well as employing conservation initiatives with a primary goal of improving human welfare. • Critical social scientists tend to be skeptical of the ability of capitalism-based approaches to deliver benefits for both nature and people. Key references provided on the website are Büscher et al. (2012), Spash (2015) and Brockington and Duffy (2011).	**'Traditional conservation'** • Traditional conservationists generally support the protection of nature because of its intrinsic value and are critical of market-based approaches to conservation. Embracing markets, it is argued, means neglecting those species considered to have little economic value. Economic growth is viewed as a major driver of biodiversity loss. • Advocates often note that traditional conservation has for a long time considered human wellbeing, for example by trying to minimize negative impacts on local communities. • Protected areas, are generally favored as a primary conservation strategy. Key references provided on the website are Soulé (1985), McCauley (2006), Greenwald et al. (2013), Noss et al. (2013), Miller et al. (2014) and Wuerthner et al. (2014, 2015).
		Value center	

Fig. 1. A summary of the four conservation 'orientations' presented as the framework for the Future of Conservation survey (http://futureconservation.org/).

principles into four main orientations (http://www.futureconservation.org/about-the-debate): 'new conservation', 'traditional conservation', 'critical social science' and 'market biocentrism' (for summaries, see Fig. 1).

This classification is highly misleading and that the crucial opposition in the conservation debate is that between ecocentric conservation and the various anthropocentric perspectives. We argue, in contrast, that it is anthropocentrism that hinders an ecologically sustainable solution. We surmise that the anthropocentric assumptions of some critics lead them to perceive only the negative impacts of conservation on people (and in the short term), and fail to see the positive impacts that ecocentric conservation would have on nature, and humans who are a part of nature, in the short, medium, and long term.

Furthermore, we concur with those who argue that the most important 'battleground' in the debate between ecocentric and anthropocentric conservation is over protected ecosystems and their management (Wuerthner et al., 2014), and that the priority is to minimise anthropogenic extinctions (Kolbert, 2014). It is, therefore, important and illuminating to explore this debate. To do this we focus on the Nature Needs Half (NNH) and bio-proportionality movements, which are among the most ambitious protected-areas projects to gain widespread attention.

We will presently discuss the FoC survey and suggest alternatives, followed by the key issues in the NNH and bio-proportionality frameworks, before moving to a discussion of the relationships between social and ecological justice and issues, and how these in turn are illuminated by understandings of industrialization, population growth, and habitat destruction.

2. Critique of the future of conservation survey

2.1. Critique of the categories

Beyond our concerns with the questionnaire's propositions and the method by which it was distributed, we find the survey's underlying, four-fold typology, and representation of both practical and ethical issues, problematic. We will, therefore, discuss where we agree and disagree with the FoC survey's categories and their definitions.