



United Nations
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Organisation
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la science et la culture

Division of Ethics and
Global Change

Division éthique et
changement global

Narratives and Building Environmental Responsibility

With the participation of Professor J. Baird Callicott

J. Baird Callicott is University Distinguished Research Professor of Philosophy and formerly Regents Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Texas. He is co-Editor-in-Chief of the *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, taught the world's first course in environmental ethics in 1971 at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, and was President of the International Society for Environmental Ethics.

J. Baird Callicott is one of the founders of environmental philosophy and ethics.

Monday 4 June 2012

10.30 am – 5 pm

The debates will be held in English only

UNESCO Headquarters

1 rue Miollis, 75015 Paris, France

Room XIV, (level -2)

**Moderated by John Crowley,
Leader of the Global Environmental Change Team in the
Social and Human Sciences Sector**

Please register with

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PROGRAMME

10.30 am – 1 pm

Arrival of the participants

Welcome addresses and introduction by the Moderator of the Conference

Mr John Crowley

Social and Human Sciences Sector, UNESCO

Presentation by

Professor J. Baird Callicott

Followed by

General discussion with the participation of

**specialists in the history of natural sciences, philosophy and ethics of environment,
environmental protection; mass media representatives; representatives of UNESCO working
on issues of global environmental change**

3 pm - 5 pm

Continuation of the general debate and conclusion of the conference

Narratives and Building Environmental Responsibility Concept Note

Professor J. Baird Callicott will be the key-note speaker at the “Narratives and Building Environmental Responsibility” conference that will be held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris on 4 June 2012. He is one of the founders of environmentalist ethics and philosophy. The conference will start with the presentation by Professor Callicott of the foundations of our moral responsibilities towards the environment, especially in view of climate change. He will seek to reply to a number of questions: Why moral responsibility for Nature? For what parts of Nature are human beings responsible? What is the content of this responsibility and what are its limits? Who should benefit? How should our environmental responsibility be built and promoted through discourse and other narratives in order to attain its aims?

The second part of the conference will include debates with the participation of J. Baird Callicott and specialists in the history of natural sciences, philosophy, and ethics of the environment and environmental protection; mass media representatives; and representatives of UNESCO working on issues of global environmental change. The conference will be moderated by John Crowley who is leading the Team of Global Environmental Change in the Sector of Social and Human Sciences of UNESCO.

J. Baird Callicott is University Distinguished Research Professor of Philosophy and formerly Regents Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Texas. He is co-Editor-in-Chief of the *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*. In his early years of work in the University of Memphis, he participated in the American civil rights movement and in the activities of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference lead by Martin Luther King. Later he became interested in environmental philosophy and he held the position of Professor of Philosophy and Natural Resources at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point from 1969 to 1995. There he taught the world's first course in environmental ethics in 1971. From 1994 to 2000, he served as Vice-President and then as President of the International Society for Environmental Ethics. His other distinguished positions include visiting professor of philosophy at various universities, including Yale University, the University of California, the University of Hawai'i, and the University of Florida.

J. Baird Callicott further developed the Land Ethic of Aldo Leopold as presented in his book entitled *From the Land Ethic to the Earth Ethic: Aldo Leopold in the time of Climate Change*. He developed a philosophy of conservation and conservation values and ethics, based in part on the recent paradigm shift in ecology from what he calls the “balance of nature” to the “flux of nature”. In his book *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (1998), Callicott claims that wilderness areas should not be closed to humans but instead should serve purposes of biological conservation and should be reconceived more fittingly as “biodiversity reserves”. As part of his comparative philosophy analysis, J. Baird Callicott studied the influence of various cultures on the formation of environmental philosophy and ethics and was interested in the narratives about relationship between mankind and Nature in different religious traditions.

In order to construct a durable future, we should build environmental ethics. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the international community in the aftermath of the Second World War, proclaimed the right to human dignity and fundamental freedoms for all and inspired the great struggles of the second half of the 20th century: the movements for civil and political rights; for the liberation from colonialism, racism, xenophobia and related intolerance; for the prohibition of genocide and crimes against humanity; for the promotion of democracy and social justice; for women's rights and gender equality; for the rights of minorities and vulnerable groups, including national, ethnic, linguistic minorities, migrants, children and people with disabilities. The enumeration of the major social causes of the 20th and 21st centuries will not be complete without the ecological movement that, together with human rights, lay the basis of the notion of the sustainable human development. This concept places the human person at the centre of development and perceives the realisation of human potential as the final end and *raison d'être* of any progress. Sustainability, in its turn, means that human beings should try to achieve their development and technological and social progress in such a way that the precious ecological environment of the Earth be preserved and protected to ensure a dignified life for present and future generations. The intellectual foundation of such a vision of the world is environmental philosophy and ethics, born in the late 1960s and early 1970s together with the ecological



movement. The ecological concerns and their defenders have acquired increased importance in the 21st century when humanity is threatened by global environmental and climate change caused by human activities.

Over the last forty years environmental philosophy and ethics has succeeded in developing intellectual foundations of a non-anthropocentric outlook on human life which acknowledges the rights of non-human Nature and declares the intrinsic value of Nature. "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community", proclaimed Aldo Leopold, one of the most influential ecological thinkers. It is wrong when it tends to do otherwise. Thus the moral and ethical relations of human beings with Nature should be based not on uncontrollable use of natural resources with profound environmental consequences but on respect for the rights of all non-human species, protection of biodiversity and living in harmony with Nature. Thus, the anthropocentric concept of development, including models of economic production and distribution of material resources and goods, should be rethought and a new social contract with Nature elaborated.

