
Where Science Meets Society: A Sociological Case for Ecology

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Abstract

My paper investigates the applications and explanatory power of ecology in the social realm, specifically public policy decisions and the study of social behavior. As a sub-discipline of biology, ecology is relatively new and lacks the discernible set of objective laws possessed by the more classical sciences, such as physics or chemistry. My thesis is that, in the absence of an identifiable universal system, ecology may be able to supplement its limited objective truths through the aptness of its concepts to engage non-scientific pursuits and public appeal. Using a population-community approach to ecology, I focus on the history and uses of biodiversity. I make the case that biodiversity, as the study of populations, communities, and ecosystems, has been appropriately politicized to contribute to solutions for resource management and species protection issues. And that not only is the public consideration of nature consistent with the intent of early conservation biologists such as Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson, but that, contrary to dissenting claims, the current political agenda does not preclude a later re-orientation toward more rigorous science proper, nor is it damaging to ecology's scientific credibility. I argue that, while on a trajectory of becoming a more law-like science, ecology has been well suited to bridge values and scientific reasoning to a productive political end.

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