Thank you, Johan,
for your invaluable guidance and support – and for having an unwavering faith in my attempt of “nailing marmalade to the wall”,

and thank you, Leo,
for always cheering me on.
Abstract

This study investigates “dark ecology” – an ecological theory formulated by Timothy Morton, based on an object-oriented ontology and claimed to offer a new perspective on how humans can and should coexist with other “objects” in the world in a better, less hostile way. Dark ecology is a critique of both an anthropocentric and a biocentric worldview, aiming to erase the dichotomy between human/nature and subject/object.

This essay performs an internal critique of dark ecology, analyzing and interpreting Morton’s books Dark Ecology (2016) and Being Ecological (2018) through the lens of two central concepts – “responsibility” and “agency” in order to extract the premises of importance to the theory. These premises are then presented in Aristotelian syllogisms, based on which the validity of dark ecology is evaluated. The aim of the essay is to find an answer to the question as to whether dark ecology is logically coherent and consistent – and thus can really be seen as a fruitful perspective on how humankind should act in relation to the environment or not.

The result from this investigation is that dark ecology is an invalid theory since it suffers from both incoherence and inconsistency. Based on this, it is concluded that dark ecology fails to achieve what it is presented to do. The answer to the research question of this essay, “Is dark ecology a theory that, if applied, leads to a change in humans’ relationship with the biosphere for the better?” is therefore “no”.

Keywords: dark ecology, object-oriented ontology, internal critique, political theory, speculative realism, ecological philosophy, environmental issues

Word count: 17 966
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Introduction

We humans impact the world around us now more than ever. The impact is so significant that it is argued by many scientists that we as a species have given rise to a new geological epoch: the Anthropocene, meaning “the recent age of man”. Unfortunately, this “age of man” is by no means a golden age. The Anthropocene has entailed not only ecological crises and problems in our time but has also irrevocably changed conditions on earth in a way that will continue to affect different ecosystems and spheres on earth – as well as humankind itself – in a negative way, long into a future that is so distant it may seem almost impossible to grasp. Following from this, the Anthropocene has brought new social, political, and ethical problems to the fore. Some say, to solve these problems, we must not only search to change our behavior, but in order to do so, re-imagine our way of understanding the world and our place in it. Timothy Morton, professor in literature and philosophy, along with a large number of other scholars, underline this: it is a question of radically changing our conceptions of time, nature, politics, justice, history etc. (Aisher and Damodaran, 2016).

Morton has thus proposed the concept of “dark ecology” as a re-imagining of our world and how we humans look at ourselves in it:

What is dark ecology? It is ecological awareness […] Ecological awareness forces us to think and feel at multiple scales, scales that disorient normative concepts such as “present,” “life,” “human,” “nature,” “thing,” “thought,” and “logic”. Dark Ecology shall argue that there are layers of attunement to ecological reality more accurate than what is habitual in the media, in the academy, and in society at large. (Morton, 2016:5, 159)

Based on an object-oriented ontology – the idea that the world consists of different objects existing on an equal ontological level – dark ecology is presented as “a logic of future coexistence” (Morton, 2016: title page), where man is no longer seen as being on top of the pecking order. Rather, humans are to be seen as an object like any other. Thus, the limit between “subject/object” is erased, as well as the limit between “human/nature”. This logic is

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1 In 2000, Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer presented the term “Anthropocene” and proposed that it be used as a name for a new geological epoch in which we find ourselves today. Their claim was that mankind’s geological and ecological impact is of such major proportions – and will continue to be so for a very long time – that it seemed reasonable to change the name of our current geological epoch to one that emphasizes humankind’s central role (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000). In 2016, the Anthropocene Working Group dated the start of the Anthropocene epoch to 1950, when a dramatic increase in human activity began (National Geographic). The term has not yet been officially accepted as a formal geological epoch, but many scientists argue that it should (Rafferty, 2023).
claimed to change humankind’s relationship to the environment to a less destructive one than we have today.

The idea of dark ecology has influenced several fields, there among art, philosophy and literature – but has also been criticized. It seems, however, to exist a gap in former research regarding dark ecology. There are several studies concerning the viability of object-oriented ontology, but there seems to be no systematic studies investigating dark ecology as a theory in itself, looking at the logical consequences of it. Are the logical consequences of the presented premises within dark ecology really what they are claimed to be?

In a time where it seems we are forced to re-evaluate our perspectives on the world as well as our politics, it should be of great importance to review new ideas that emerge and determine their usefulness for this new world that we need to create for ourselves and everyone else inhabiting it. There is an expectation within dark ecology that the theory will lead to certain consequences. This is what this essay will put to the test. An investigation of dark ecology will be performed, where the theory is analyzed in relation to two concepts deemed important in the context: “responsibility” and “agency”, and then evaluated. Using internal criticism, this essay seeks to interpret the consequences of combining the normative goal of dark ecology to offer humankind a perspective that will better our relationship with the biosphere, while at the same time assuming an object-oriented ontology. The essay seeks to answer the question: Is dark ecology a theory that, if applied, leads to a change in humans’ relationship with the biosphere for the better?

Literature and central concepts

Dark ecology

Dark ecology is a concept formulated by Timothy Morton, for the first time in Ecology without Nature (2007:181). Apart from also being the title of one of his later books (Morton, 2016) dark ecology can be said to be an encompassing idea that runs through Morton’s work within the ecological field\(^1\). It is a concept which is not easily summarized – very much

\(^1\) Including, but not limited to, books such as Hyperobjects (2013), Being Ecological (2018) and Humankind (2017).
illuminating this is that Morton’s own words to describe it are “weird” and “strange” (Morton, 2016:110, 127).

To offer an insight to what is meant by this arcane concept, we will look briefly at deep ecology, which can be seen as a preceding idea to dark ecology.

Deep ecology is an ecological philosophy formulated by Arne Naess in 1972. It is based on the claim that humans must change their relation to nature and look at nature as having an intrinsic value, rather than solely an instrumental value. In other words, deep ecology entails the belief that nature has a value in itself, rather than having a value only when it is of use to humans. This is where “deep” in deep ecology comes from – earlier environmentalisms, focusing on areas of use to humans, are seen as “shallow”, whereas an environmentalism that sees nature as having an intrinsic value is “deep”. Further, within deep ecology the self is seen as connected to and being a part of the environment – this is called “the ecological self”. This ecological self will follow an environmental ethic and practice a “biocentric egalitarianism”, i.e. holding each natural entity as inherently equal to every other entity (Madsen, 2023). In other words, deep ecology aims for a shift from an anthropocentric (human-centered) worldview, to a biocentric one – a worldview which acknowledges the biosphere as being equally important as human beings.

With dark ecology, Morton wants to go even further. Being based on an object-oriented ontology (further explanation follows under section “Object-oriented ontology”), dark ecology entails a worldview where the dichotomy between humankind and nature is erased, as well as the dichotomy between subject and object. Dark ecology is a critique against both an anthropocentric worldview, as well as a biocentric one (Morton, 2018:99). Dark ecology is presented as an appeal to a different logic, one that is based on ecognosis – ecological awareness. It is an ecological awareness that accepts that the world is dark and weird, and it entails “letting [oneself] become more susceptible” (Morton, 2016:129). Dark ecology thus also includes the “feel” of ecological awareness:

[E]cological reality requires an awareness that at first has the characteristics of tragic melancholy and negativity, concerning inextricable coexistence with a host of entities that surround and penetrate us, but which evolves paradoxically into an anarchic, comedic sense of coexistence (Morton, 2016:160).

Ecognosis also has to do with how objects are both what they are and what they appear to be, in other words being is seen as intrinsically connected to appearing (Morton, 2016:98).
Aesthetics and how it affects us is thus seen as somewhat of a key to understand how we connect with our surroundings and how objects may communicate with each other.

Dark Ecology (2016) claims to present “a logic of future coexistence”. It is also stated that dark ecology is not to be seen as hostile towards deep ecology, but rather as an even deeper form of deep ecology (Morton, 2007:78). The aim of dark ecology as a theory must thus be seen as an attempt to better humans’ relationship with the environment – or, the biosphere, as we will be defining it in this essay (see “Definitions”).

There is no way getting around the fact that a lot of things in dark ecology are, to say the least, complex and obscure. This essay will, however, make an effort to clarify the crucial concepts of dark ecology to illuminate the viability of this ecological philosophy. This is part of the investigation that will be performed in the analysis section.

Although obscure and complex, Morton’s ideas and concepts have been influential in several fields. As Graham Harman, an academic colleague and close friend of Morton puts it, Morton’s terminology is “slowly infecting all the humanities” (Blasdel, 2017). Dark ecology as a concept is for example reoccurring in literature studies, influencing modern eco critical perspectives (see for example Franch, 2023, Brockliss, 2018, Roberg, 2021), performance research (see for example Lonergan, 2020, Schaag, 2020, Prateek, 2020), and theology (see for example Haecker, 2021). Morton’s ecological philosophy is also part of a general debate in philosophy, mostly concerning the object-oriented ontology assumed in dark ecology (see for example Vivaldi, 2020, Brown, 2013, Lemke, 2017). Mark here that this debate is focused solely on the philosophical claims of object-oriented ontology rather than on its implications for ecological philosophy and politics.

In general, Morton is praised for offering new perspectives on how we engage with the environment. For example, in reviewing Morton’s Hyperobjects (2013), Bricker concludes that the book provides insights useful for scholars of humanist and post-humanist ethics, as well as philosophers and rhetoricians, regarding for example the role of language as a hyperobject3 (2015:364). Holmes (2012) praises Morton’s confrontation with the idea of nature as something separate from us humans:

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3 Concept formulated by Morton and treated especially in Hyperobjects (2013). The term is referring to things of such vast temporal and spatial dimensions that we have trouble comprehending them and the impact of them, for example global warming.
Morton’s unapologetic, witty, and hyperbolic zeal targets a monolithic and reified view of nature. [...] [His] significance for ecocriticism lies in arguing that there is no safe transcendental remove from which the social or the individual cogito can retreat in order to fully contemplate nature (2012:57-60).

In framing the climate crisis, Boulton (2016) deems Morton’s “hyperobject narrative” an important contribution to a reformation of climate frames, based not only on economy and science – which “underestimate the importance of deeper ontological, cultural, and psychological dimensions” (2016:781) – but including also the “feel” of global warming.

Morton’s work has also been critiqued in different ways. Boulton writes for example that Hyperobjects (2013) is difficult to read and confusing in some parts (2016:781). This is a re-occurring critique: in an article about OOO, although praising Morton’s contribution to the field, Umbrello (2018:184) writes that “Morton’s style was, to me, almost inaccessible and required considerable effort to understand even the shortest of phrases”. As stated above, an important and crucial part of the analytical work that will be performed in this essay is interpreting the material surrounding dark ecology, with the aim of rendering the ideas more accessible to the reader.

Boulton also illuminates other examples of the critique that Morton’s work has been met with:

Providing a visceral, ‘scary’ experience of what a climate-impacted world might be like is where the merit of Morton’s work divides opinion. Some criticize this as destroying human hope, while storytelling and neuroscience perspectives suggests Morton’s work may assist readers to better understand climate risk. Another uncomfortable aspect is his denuding nature, and the world, of its beauty—an OOO perspective that, for those not schooled in its nuances, does not discriminate between different forms of matter or life (2016:781).

Butina et al. (2020) present similar points of critique. In investigating the differences between deep ecology and dark ecology they conclude that both philosophies criticize the anthropocentric stance in modern ecological thought and illuminate the need to transform this thought. However, where deep ecology sees and engages in the subject’s active role, the philosophy of dark ecology is “more of an aesthetic praxis” (2020:4) and “orientates a person to the praxis of non-interference and passive, contemplative existence in the world of complex ‘strange’ objects” (2020:1). This passive coexistence with other objects in the world, Butina et al. claim, may be “just a fragile metaphor that deprives a person of the subject’s status” (2020:2). Casero and Urabayen (2023) are even more insisting in their critique. They criticize dark ecology for having an exclusive and proto-fascist character in being based on an "abject
lovecraftian foundation” (2023:1). This is in reference to what Casero and Urabayen call Morton’s “anti-speciesism”, which can be seen as their interpretation of the OOO-stance.

The critique that can be said to be of most serious consequences for Morton’s ecological philosophy seems to be the one concerning the object-oriented ontology and its consequences. In a review of Hyperobjects (2013), Bricker (2015) illuminatingly formulates what can be seen as the core of the critique against the combination of OOO and pro-ecological claims. If we accept this critique, it must be seen as a serious fault to dark ecology:

By flattening hierarchies of objects, OOO provides no template for ethical environmental action. In the face of this ethical impasse, human objects anthropomorphize nonhuman objects by writing human language onto them. We find mountains thinking, stones speaking, hammers wanting, and cigarettes demanding, and we act as if we can understand the desires of inanimate objects. Unfortunately, for those invested in OOO, this act of attributing human traits to nonhumans seems to strengthen the primacy of humanness and weaken the democratic coexistence that Morton theorizes (2015:365).

This quote illuminates a general idea that the OOO-stance seems to be a problem for the normative claim of dark ecology, since the ethics needed to perform environmental action is absent within the theory. There does, however, not seem to exist systematic research on the matter. Hendlin (2023) has written an article in which he investigates OOO and its relation to the ecological field. He illuminates several points of critique which have been of great importance for this essay, but where Hendlin writes about OOO in general and merely grasps its implications for dark ecology, this essay will dig deeper into the nuances of dark ecology, which Boulton for example (quote above) holds must be done as to not misinterpret the theory (2016:781).

In order to understand dark ecology, we will need to look closer at what we understand to be its first, and perhaps foremost, premise – the object-oriented ontology.

Object-oriented ontology

Object oriented ontology, or OOO (pronounced “triple-O”), is often coupled with speculative realism. In the words of Graham Harman, speculative realism is a philosophy that “has taken continental philosophy by storm”:

Opposing the formerly ubiquitous modern dogma that philosophy can speak only of the human-world relation rather than the world itself, speculative realism defends the autonomy of the
world from human access, but in a spirit of imaginative audacity (Edinburgh university press, 2024).

Speculative realism is thus a new form of realism that includes metaphysical ideas in its understanding of the world and can be seen as the soil from where object-oriented ontology has sprouted. It was during a speculative realism-event held at Goldsmiths College London in 2007 that the term object-oriented ontology was officially founded. It is both an umbrella term that Levi R Bryant – philosopher, speculative realist and object-oriented ontologist – came up with to include different positions, therein that of himself, Timothy Morton, Graham Harman and Ian Bogost, and a term that Harman has adopted in reference to his own position. (Wilde, 2020:2). Apart from being presented in the works of these four men, such as the successful blog of Levi R Bryant “Larval subjects”, Harman’s Object-oriented ontology: A new theory of everything (2018) or Bogost’s Alien phenomenology, or, what it's like to be a thing (2012), OOO has spread through different areas of research, both within and outside of the academic diaspora: Lemke (2017:134) states that “OOO’s ideas have […] proliferated to various non-academic forms of publishing and blogging and have attracted a lot of interest among younger scholars. Today, OOO has repercussions mostly in philosophy, archaeology, architecture and art.”

The general idea of OOO can be seen as a prolongation of Kant’s division of noumena and phenomena – the thing in itself and our perception(s) of it. It is a materialist view which holds that “things exist in a profoundly ‘withdrawn’ way: they cannot be splayed open and totally grasped by anything whatsoever, including themselves” (Morton, 2016:16). In other words, objects are seen as impossible to know fully – the only thing we can know is how we experience them. For example, we cannot know what a chair really is, the only thing we can know about the chair is how it feels to sit on, what it looks like, how it sounds when it scrapes against the floor etc. These sensations are what Kant calls phenomena, while the object in itself – which we can never get to know fully – is the noumena.  

OOO is a so-called “flat” ontology meaning that it presents all objects as existing on an equal ontological level: “A main aim of this philosophical program of ontological flattening is to champion the independent existence of objects, not relying on human apperception for their existence” (Hendlin, 2023:317). In other words, OOO does not rank objects according to

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4 Also considered to have been officially founded with the speculative realism-conference held at Goldsmiths College in 2007 (Shaviro, 2015)

5 This is a simplified description and use of the terms, for further reading see for example Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy on “Kant’s Transcendental Idealism” (Stang, 2016).
some logic regarding their characteristics; an object that is artificial is just as much an object as an object that is organic – a computer is an object just as a human being is an object. Thus, there is an equality between objects – no object is to be seen as more important or valuable than any other based on ontological differences, because such differences do not exist. Or, as Graham Harman formulates the first tenet of OOO: “All objects must be given equal attention, whether they be human, nonhuman, natural, cultural, real or fictional” (Harman, cited in Hendlin, 2023:316).

Although influential within several fields, OOO has also been issued with critique. Among others, Lemke (2017:133) deems it a philosophy that recreates the very thing it is so eager to escape: “OOO’s promise to break once and for all with subject–object dualism results in a revived form of subjectivism.” This critique concerns an idea that subjectivism can never be escaped. Åsberg et al. endorse this critique in a (feminist) intervention with all speculative realisms, including OOO:

The curious return of the god---trick⁶, in approaches that call themselves ‘speculative’ today is the starting point of our collective intervention. Because whereas the speculative thinkers of OOO and ‘speculative realism’ or ‘speculative materialism’ claim they are a ‘new Breed of thinker’ where ‘no dominant hero now strides along the beach’, in the reception of ‘the speculative turn’ and OOO, we precisely do see that happening. The move to the object is, we claim, not a move away from but rather a renewed move towards the Subject (with a capital S) (2015:164).

There is also a critique regarding what flat ontologies do to our ability to generate knowledge about the world. Knudsen expresses worries with all flat ontologies, pointing out that the erasure of depth in ontology has implications for, among other things, our ability to “account for structure and power, for trends, shifts and patterns” in social sciences. He also holds that deconstructing dichotomies (such as nature/society) “makes us blind to manifest ontological differences” and that, by placing all knowledge on the same level, there is a risk of us not being able to assess what is sound knowledge (2023:7). Kafka (2015:1) writes that “actor-network theory, object-oriented ontology, speculative realism, and so on have enriched our understanding of the world around us. This enrichment, however, has been accompanied by a

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⁶ The “god-trick” is a term coined by Donna Haraway in 1988. It refers to objective claims as a trick, where power relations are made invisible under an assumed “neutrality”. It is based on a claim that all knowledges are “situated” – formulated by subjects with different power positions in the world, in a time and in a place – even “objective” or “neutral” ones. Making an “objective” claim and ignoring the situatedness of the knowledge is thus speaking from the position of a god and not as a human subject – a trick to render one’s own truth an “objective” truth (Rogowska-Stangret, 2018).
curious impoverishment of our understanding of ourselves and others.” In “Object-oriented Philosophy: The Noumenon’s New Clothes”, the philosopher Peter Wolfendale sets out on a 400-page meticulous critique of OOP (Object-oriented Philosophy) – too long and complex to repeat in detail here – and condemns OOP of being an “intellectual equivalent of high-sugar, low-nutrition junk food” (2014:403).

The critique that will be of most importance for this essay is the critique regarding the consequences of OOO on the relationship between humans and the environment/the biosphere. In this area, as mentioned earlier, an article by Yogi Hendlin (2023) seems to be of most interest and importance. The claim of the article is that “[t]he object-oriented ontology group of philosophies, and certain strands of posthumanism, overlook important ethical and biological differences, which make a difference” (2023:315). Hendlin also claims that “ontological flattening entails epistemological narcissism [and] fails to take into account plural (interspecies) perspectives” (2023:315). He finds that: “OOO’s ‘ontological flattening’ of all life (e.g., humans, rhinoceroses, orchids, amoebas), things (artifacts and ecological features), ideas and fantasies into one lumped group of ‘objects’ inexorably involves an ethical flattening” (2023:328) and offers an example to illuminate the absurdity of this: “Applying a philosophical trolley problem7 in an OOO world with random objects and beings provides no compass for deciding if an animal life is more valuable than a light bulb.” (2023:328).

This critique towards OOO, along with the passivity it may entail, seems to be of great importance when looking at humankind’s ability to relate to the environment in a non-destructive way. Thus, we ask ourselves how this critique relates to dark ecology. Are there elements of dark ecology that may “save” the theory from the pitfalls connected to OOO as mentioned above?

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7 The trolley problem is an ethical thought experiment, formulated to explore the moral philosophy of intentional actions and their unwanted effects. The problem is most often described as a situation where a trolley is rushing towards five people tied to the railway that will die if you, standing next to a railway switch, do not pull the lever. If you choose to pull the lever, the trolley will change paths and not run over the five people. However, along the other railway track, there is another person tied down to the tracks. The dilemma concerns whether you will perform an intentional action that will kill one person, or if you will choose not to act, thus letting the trolley kill five people.
Method

Research design

This essay will investigate the concept dark ecology to determine if it is, as it claims to be, a theory that can change human’s relationship with the biosphere for the better. The source of material that will be subjected to an internal critique is Timothy Morton’s work about dark ecology, primarily his books Dark Ecology (2016) and Being Ecological (2018). A content-based idea analysis will be performed, as described by Beckman (2005), meaning that dark ecology will be regarded as presenting a collection of different arguments – or premises. The purpose of the analysis will be to test and criticize the validity of this collection of arguments (2005:12). In order to test and criticize the collection of arguments, the analysis will first engage with describing and interpreting them – an especially important part of the analysis in this essay, since the arguments expressed within dark ecology may be difficult to grasp, partly because of how they are expressed, partly because they may be complex in their character.

This idea analysis will be an internal critique, meaning that no other values than those existing within dark ecology will be treated and evaluated (Beckman, 2005:72). The aim is to show that the chain of argument following from “P1: The world exists of different objects on the same ontological level” can be seen as both logically inconsistent and incoherent with the conclusion “C: Humans will prioritize the well-being of the biosphere”, depending on different interpretations of the arguments.

The internal critique will be grounded in Aristotle’s logical theory – his syllogisms, which we normally refer to as “deduction” today. Syllogisms consist of a number of premises, leading to a conclusion. A syllogism must meet three criteria to be a (valid) syllogism:

1. The premises must necessitate the conclusion
2. The syllogism cannot contain idle premises
3. The conclusion of a syllogism cannot be a repetition of one of the premises


Important to notice here is the difference we will mark between the knowledge we can obtain from performing a deduction (syllogism) as opposed to performing an inference. Harman (2002:173), for example, states that deduction can only say something about the relation
between premises, whereas inference says something about the world. This is how we will make use of these terms as well. In other words, a syllogism can be false in relation to what we know to be true of the world (knowledge obtained from inference) but can still be logically correct (knowledge obtained from deduction). This is the difference between what Woods (2002:42) calls sound syllogisms and valid syllogisms. We will use these terms as does Woods. A sound syllogism will thus be understood in this essay as a syllogism which is empirically correct, and a valid syllogism will be understood as a syllogism which is logically correct. Sound arguments can be invalid, and vice versa. For example, this syllogism is valid, but unsound:

P1: All women are presidents
P2: Hannah is a woman
C: Hannah is a president

Since all women are not presidents, this syllogism is not true in relation to empirical knowledge. However, the syllogism fulfils all three criteria and there are no fallacies to be found. It is thus logically correct.

This syllogism, however, is invalid, but sound:

P1: Humans can either be dead or alive
P2: Humans live first and die later
C: Humans die eventually

This syllogism is not logically correct – it does not fulfil the third criterion of syllogisms since the conclusion here must be considered a mere repetition of P2. This is called a circular argument, which is a common fallacy in argumentation (Woods, 2002:42). Aristotle listed a large number of fallacies that can be made in trying to perform a valid syllogism (Eemeren et al., 2014:77–78). This essay will make use of a simplistic understanding of Aristotle’s very much nuanced description of fallacies and primarily focus on two different forms of fallacies, in accordance with what is custom within internal critique according to Beckman (2005:72): inconsistency and incoherence. These are not Aristotle’s own terms but can be said to rely on Aristotelian logic.

In this essay, inconsistency will be understood as a contradiction between either two (or more) premises or a contradiction between one (or more) premise/s and the conclusion of the syllogism. A contradiction is to be understood as two (or more) statements (premises or
conclusion) impossibly being correct at the same time. In following example, there is a contradiction both between the premises, and between one of the premises (P2) and the conclusion. This syllogism is thus inconsistent.

P1: The cat is white
P2: The cat is not white
C: The cat is white

Regarding inconsistency, it seems that most sources are unanimous regarding its meaning (see Beckman, 2005:72, Eemeren et al., 2014:273, Harman, 2000:174 and Woods, 2000:43).

Incoherence, on the other hand, seems to be trickier to define. Beckman (2005:72) defines it in the slightly fuzzy terms of “normative claims that […] can’t be reverted to a set of coherent principles and values”\(^8\). Harman, on the other hand, speak of incoherence in terms of having beliefs and intentions that clash (2000:180), which we claim can be interpreted as an inconsistency in a person’s overall understanding of the world, as opposed to an inconsistency in argumentation.

Neither of these explanations of “incoherence” quite seem to capture what we are going to be looking for in the analysis of the arguments in dark ecology. Rather, we will understand “incoherence” as some kind of fallacy in relation to Aristotle’s first criterion for syllogisms: that the premises must necessitate the conclusion. We will be looking for coherence in the argumentation, especially regarding the relationship between premises and conclusion, meaning that we will look carefully for “leaps” in the chain of argument, and conclusions that do not directly follow from the premises given. See following example:

P1: The cat is white
P2: The park is filled with mud
C: The cat will be dirty

Here, there is a logical “leap” – the two premises do not necessitate the conclusion, since we do not know where the cat is – we cannot assume that the cat is in the park. Thus, this syllogism has a fallacy of the kind that we refer to as “incoherence”. For the syllogism to be coherent – and thus valid, we can imagine adding a third premise to complete the syllogism: “P3: The cat will visit the park”.

\(^8\) My translation of: “normativa påståenden som […] inte kan återföras till en samling sammanhängande principer och värden”
Some missing premises will be defined as *enthymemes* which is an Aristotelian term. Breitholtz (2021:1) describes enthymemes as premises understood to be so obvious by the creator of the syllogism that they are not deemed necessary to express. Syllogisms with missing enthymemes will also be classified as incoherent in this essay. An example of an enthymeme in a syllogism is presented here:

P1: The cat is white  
P2: The cat got dirty  
C: It will be difficult to get the cat clean

The logic of this syllogism is dependent on a third premise to be coherent. This fact could be the enthymeme “E1: Cats do not like water”. But, illuminating what we understand to be the problem with enthymemes, one could also imagine the logic being based on the enthymeme “E2: It is difficult to get white fur clean”. We will not accept the need to *suppose* a logical fact in order to fill a leap in a syllogism, since this, as proved, can depend on who is supposing. Further, if an enthymeme is contradictory to one of the premises or the conclusion, that would render the syllogism invalid.

All syllogisms deemed either inconsistent or incoherent will be deemed invalid. Inconsistencies will be marked in red and incoherences will be marked in yellow. This reflects the fact that inconsistencies are deemed as more severe logical problems than incoherences. Different nuances of red will be used in cases where there are several inconsistencies within a syllogism. The intention then is not to hierarchize between different inconsistencies, but simply to make it possible to differentiate between them and see between which premises (or conclusion and premise/s) the inconsistency is to be found.

As stated above, this essay will investigate the validity of the arguments and conclusion expressed in dark ecology – and not their soundness. The critique will thus leave aside any possible objections regarding the truthfulness of arguments and assumptions found in Morton, such as whether the world can be seen as ontologically flat or not. What is of interest to our analysis is how this statement relates to the idea that this perspective will lead to humans prioritizing the well-being of the biosphere. However, if the argumentation of dark ecology is found to be invalid, this must be seen as a problem for the theory also in relation to the world outside of theoretical arguments – the theory would then have to be presented in a different way to be seen as fruitful to use in ecological politics. Whether this should be considered possible or not depends on the kind of fallacy that is (potentially) found: as stated above, an
inconsistency in the theory is deemed to be a more serious problem for the theory than an incoherence, and if this inconsistency is between two arguments deemed crucial for the theoretical structure of dark ecology, one must assume that changing only the presentation of the theory will not suffice to render it valid – and thus, fruitful for ecopolitical decisions. With an aim of being as generous as possible in the interpretation of dark ecology, two different syllogisms will be presented, reflecting different interpretations of the studied material. However, if neither of these are deemed valid, the theory will be considered to not live up to its claim of bettering humans’ relationship with the biosphere. Thus, the answer to our research question: “Is dark ecology a theory that, if applied, leads to a change in humans’ relationship with the biosphere?” will be “no”.

To perform this analysis, we will first need to clarify which premises can be found within dark ecology. The analysis will thus first engage with investigating the material to extract the premises to be presented in the syllogisms. This part of the analysis will not engage with evaluating the material as incoherent/inconsistent or invalid – but only describe and interpret the material in order to formulate the premises. This investigation will be guided by questions in relation to our units of analysis which are described below. When these questions have been answered, syllogisms will be presented, interpreted and evaluated in the results section. All syllogisms build on “P1: The world exists of different objects on the same ontological level” and are concluded with “C: Humans will prioritize the well-being of the biosphere”.

In order to extract the premises for the syllogisms we will make use of two different dimensions as our units of analysis – responsibility and agency. These dimensions will be the lenses through which we will look at the material in order to get an overview of the premises that are distinctive for dark ecology as a theory. These dimensions are chosen because they are deemed crucial for what dark ecology aims to do: to change how we as humans connect with our environment. Important to notice here is that these dimensions are not explicitly a part of dark ecology, but as opposed to responsibility and agency being external values or concepts, we argue that dark ecology must be regarded as assuming these concepts as fundamental categories.

This is also a crucial point in general regarding the analysis: the definitions and the analytical framework presented in this section are chosen and formulated in order to logically test the ideas within dark ecology in a comprehensive and logical way. These tools may differ from Morton’s own set of definitions and an evaluation of how the two sets differ from each other will have to be made when needed. One could also here note a cause of objection regarding
these analytical assumptions and definitions that differ from those of Morton’s own: in the case of dark ecology, which aims to offer “new perspectives”, one can imagine this analysis being accused of using “traditional” understandings of concepts to evaluate something that cannot be understood with “traditional” truths about the world. In other words, the analysis could be accused of measuring dark ecology with a measure tape that is faulty in relation to the complexity of the mass that is to be measured. We argue, however, though this may be the case, that this is not be seen as a fault of the analysis, but rather of how dark ecology is presented. We here rely on Karl-Otto Apels discourse ethics, which acknowledges an understanding of the world as relying on a fundamental possibility for shared experience and knowledge. It is thus *intersubjective*. Apel also argues that our understanding of the world must be based on the idea that knowledge does not depend on empirical knowledge but can exist before being empirically proved. Thus, Apel’s discourse ethics assumes an *a priori* understanding of knowledge (Papastephanou, 2016:180-182). Apel also holds that all statements entail a responsibility for the speaker to be able to justify the statements to the “ideal communication community”. As Vandevelde (2010:155), referring to Apel’s own words, puts it:

> ‘I anticipate an “ideal community” that would basically be capable of adequately understanding the meaning of [my] arguments and judging their truth in a definitive manner.’ This does not entail that I must be factually understood in order for my claim to be intelligible and make sense.

This ideal communication community is also to be anticipated in the real world (Vandevelde 2010:158). The analysis in this essay can thus be seen as a judgement of the intelligibility of the claim of dark ecology. We argue that the concepts used – responsibility and agency, must be seen as basic concepts in the world, so basic that claiming that “dark ecology does not assume traditional ideas of responsibility and agency” would be turning away from the ideal communication community, rendering the theory impossible to criticize except possibly for the speaker himself. Note here that in defining central concepts, we have aimed to do so in the most generous way in relation to the premises of dark ecology.

Lastly, Beckman concludes that when using dimensions as units of analysis, this is best done if the dimensions are exhaustive and mutually exclusive (2005:25). Whereas there may exist dimensions apart from responsibility and agency that are of importance to the goal of dark ecology, responsibility and agency are deemed to be of such a basic character and covering perhaps not all possible angles of the matter, but so many, that any other concept would have to be treated more as a parenthesis than an equally important dimension. Regarding the
dimensions being mutually exclusive, one must notice here that they are, indeed, closely connected – but not overlapping. In short, responsibility concerns a mental idea of why and how we must act, whereas agency concerns a physical and/or psychological ability to act. This will be clear when these dimensions are more thoroughly defined in “Definitions”.

Definitions

Morality and ethics

This essay will use “morality” and “ethics” interchangeably, as is common practice among ethicists (Grannan, 2023). The terms will refer to the idea that certain actions are to be seen as “good” and others as “bad”.

Biosphere

Biosphere will be understood as a:

relatively thin life-supporting stratum of Earth’s surface, extending from a few kilometres into the atmosphere to the deep-sea vents of the ocean. The biosphere is a global ecosystem composed of living organisms (biota) and the abiotic (nonliving) factors from which they derive energy and nutrients. (Thompson et al., 2023)

“Biosphere” will be used to denote all the things in our environment that we normally regard as “nature” i.e. objects that are not human made and which we usually refer to when we speak in terms of “saving the environment”.

Environment

In the analysis, we will refrain from using “environment” in the way we usually understand it – a good that we put a certain value to. This understanding of the word will be replaced by the term “biosphere”. “Environment” will instead imply everything that is “around” us, thus referring both to forests and to cities, for example. This definition thus operates within an object-oriented ontological logic.
Responsibility

Responsibility may refer to several different things. Usually, one distinguishes between moral responsibility and causal responsibility (Wolf, 2015:127). The form of responsibility that will be treated in this essay is first and foremost what one calls moral responsibility. It involves attributing certain qualities to an agent:

The judgment that a person is morally responsible for her behavior involves—at least to a first approximation—attributing certain powers and capacities to that person, and viewing her behavior as arising (in the right way) from the fact that the person has, and has exercised, these powers and capacities (Talbert, 2019).

These qualities, or “powers and capacities”, are often thought to include moral competence – “the ability to recognize and respond to moral considerations”. Usually, one considers adult human beings as having the qualities needed to be judged as morally responsible for their actions, whereas “non-human animals, very young children, and those suffering from severe developmental disabilities or dementia (to give a few examples) are generally taken to lack them” (Talbert, 2019). As opposed to this, Malle and Schultz (2014) argue that moral competence should be understood in relation to which capacities it consists of. By defining these capacities, they open the possibility for other beings than adult humans to be considered to have moral competence. For now, it will be left unsaid in this essay who or what can have moral competence, but nonetheless, moral competence will be seen as a crucial ability for being able to exercise moral responsibility.

There are other designations of what we in this essay refer to as moral responsibility – Morton, for example, uses “formal responsibility” (2016:9) – a term which have not been found in any other scholarly sources regarding definitions of responsibility in the research of this essay. The notion can, however, possibly be interpreted as the responsibility of a designated person or professional role, such as “the formal responsibility of a policeman”. However, as we will see in the analysis, this does not seem to be the context in which Morton uses the term – rather, it seems that he is in fact referring to the traditional understanding of “moral responsibility”. Worthy of mentioning is also Woods (2015) critique of the term “moral responsibility”. She calls for a rebranding of the concept, making use of the term “deep responsibility” which differentiates between causal responsibility and other types of responsibility which do not necessarily have anything to do with morality. Though we find
her critique of the use of ”moral responsibility” interesting, we do not find it completely convincing⁹, at least not sufficiently so for us to abandon the more commonly used term ”moral responsibility”.

As stated above, moral responsibility can be distinguished from *causal responsibility*. The notion of causal responsibility does not include any attribution of moral competence or other qualities to an agent but concerns only causal processes (Talbert, 2019). According to our definition of moral responsibility, if we assume that a dog for example lacks moral competence, it can be viewed as causally responsible for peeing on the floor, but not morally responsible for doing so.

The division between *retrospective responsibility* and *prospective responsibility* will also be of importance for this essay. *Retrospective responsibility* will be defined as being (morally) responsible for acts that have already been committed, whereas *prospective responsibility* will be defined as a form of (moral) responsibility expected of someone to be committed. The concept of prospective responsibility generally seems to be coupled with the responsibility or duty of a certain (professional) role (see for example Talbert, 2016, or Zsolnai, 2000:71). This essay will refrain from this, somewhat narrow, understanding of the concept. Rather prospective responsibility will be defined as a direct opposite of retrospective responsibility – thus referring to responsibility that is expected of someone regarding future acts.

Another division can be made between *individual responsibility* and *collective responsibility*. Where *individual responsibility* treats responsibility in relation to separate individuals, *collective responsibility* does so in relation to groups or collectives. The concept of *collective responsibility* has, however, been criticized and debated – some critics claim that it would be impossible to associate moral agency with groups, other that the notion violates principles of individual responsibility and fairness (Talbert, 2019).

Despite possible complications with *collective responsibility* as a concept, this essay will accept it as a form of responsibility that exists and is different from *individual responsibility*, based on the case of global warming and along the lines of how Morton argues – we claim that the global warming cannot be said to be the fault of specific individuals, but rather

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⁹ We argue that the examples of different kinds of responsibility presented in relation to the “Self-Disclosure View” can in fact all be seen as having to do with morality, as opposed to what Wolf (2015:129) claims. We will, however, not go further into this here, since it can be seen as part of another discussion.
humans as a group. Thus, collective responsibility will simply be understood as the idea that a group has a responsibility for a common matter.

Other forms of responsibility exist too, such as legal responsibility, or responsibility as a virtue (Talbert, 2019). Since these forms of responsibility are closely intertwined with strictly human and societal matters, they are considered of lesser interest for this essay than the (possible) forms of responsibility concerning other organisms/objects as well. Thus, they will not be treated.

Lastly, there is a large debate connected to responsibility regarding determinism and the existence of free will. It is commonly assumed that the existence of free will is a prerequisite for the existence of moral responsibility (Talbert, 2019). Since this issue of whether there is something as a free will or not is too great of a philosophical question to be treated here, this essay will simply assume the existence of free will, at least to some extent.

To conclude, the essay will treat responsibility as including following notions:

1. **Causal responsibility:** Responsibility in relation to strictly causal events where the agent does not necessarily have any moral capacities

2. **Moral responsibility:** Responsibility assigned to an agent which possesses moral capacities, such as adult human beings
   aI) *retrospective responsibility:* concerns acts that have been committed
   aII) *prospective responsibility:* concerns acts that are to be expected in the future
   bI) *individual responsibility:* concerns separate individuals
   bII) *collective responsibility:* concerns groups/collectives

**Agency**

Agency is a philosophically debated concept and can be defined in different ways. In general terms, agency is the manifestation of a capacity to act. Usually ‘agency’ is also thought to include some sort of intentionality:

In a very broad sense, agency is virtually everywhere. Whenever entities enter into causal relationships, they can be said to act on each other and interact with each other, bringing about changes in each other. In this very broad sense, it is possible to identify agents and agency, and
patients and patiency, virtually everywhere. Usually, though, the term ‘agency’ is used in a much narrower sense to denote the performance of intentional actions (Schlosser, 2019).

This is the case in what is seen as the standard conception of action. Two claims are at the core of this standard conception, the first being that the notion of intentional action is to be seen as more fundamental than the notion of action and the second being that there is a close connection between intentional action and acting for a reason (Schlosser, 2019).

The standard conception of action has however been criticized for being too demanding and focusing only on human forms of agency since it explains agency in terms of desires, beliefs and intentions – different kinds of mental representations. The critique underlines the fact that there are beings capable of exercising agency that do not have representational mental states (Schlosser, 2019).

Thus, the standard conception of agency can be seen as merely one definition among other possible ones. Barandiaran et al. for example, propose a minimal definition of agency (2009:378), which allows for a larger set of organisms being considered agents. They identify three conditions to be met for a system (non-living or living) to be defined as an agent: it must define its own individuality, it must be the active source of activity in its environment, and it must regulate this activity in relation to certain norms (2009:367). Following this definition, they claim that even very simple organisms can be seen as agents and that for some organisms and systems their agency is simply actions performed in order to uphold their existence (2009:375). In this essay, we will include this notion of agency, calling it minimal agency. The standard conception of agency will further on be defined as intentional agency.

Other forms of agency could possibly also be distinguished within the field, for example mental agency, shared agency, collective agency, relational agency, and artificial agency (Schlosser, 2019). These forms of agency will not be treated in this essay. Mental agency, which refers to the actions we perform mentally, such as thinking, dreaming, judging etc. is left outside the analysis since it – although possibly nuancing the analysis a little bit, is not considered as offering any greater insights nor affecting the conclusions of the analysis. One could claim that feeling responsible is a form of mental agency, but since responsibility is – and should be, for the sake of what we want to investigate in this essay – treated separately, we will not confuse the reader with mixing up these concepts. Shared agency as well as collective agency refer to agency of two or more individuals. While this may seem like an important form of agency to treat in an essay about the environment and environmental
action, it is important to distinguish here that this essay is not interested in nuancing how human agency may function. What is of interest is rather how agency may differ between different objects on a very fundamental level. This essay will touch upon the concepts of relational agency and artificial agency (agency as something that occurs in relation between two or more subjects and agency that an artificial intelligence may have), but like other forms of agency excluded from the analysis, these terms and their implications are seen as secondary to the investigations of this essay. Thus, to simplify and streamline the analysis, we will settle for the larger, and indeed blunter, terms “intentional agency” and “minimal agency” since they are deemed possible to “stretch” in order to cover aforementioned nuances if, and when, needed.

However, within intentional agency it is important to further distinguish between what we will call conscious intentionality and automated intentionality. This is because automaticity seems to play a role in our performing of actions: empirical research (see for example Bargh et al., 2001) has shown that pursuing a certain goal can be primed, so that the goal is pursued without the agent being aware of all the routines performed along the way to reach that goal. This essay accepts both these forms of intentional agency and hold that agency can be both intentional on a conscious level: in order to obtain a goal, we are performing the actions needed on a conscious level, and automatic: in order to obtain a goal, we are performing the actions needed automatically, on an unconscious level. Thus, the essay applies an understanding of intentional agency as dual-processed. The processes are both seen as intentional in the meaning that our intention in both cases is to obtain a certain goal – a goal that is a mental representation (Schlosser, 2019). Important to emphasize here is that automaticity is not to be confused with minimal agency where there is no mental representation involved. Rather, automaticity can be seen as “sub-routines” that serve a higher goal – for example, when driving a car there are sub-routines such as pushing down the gas pedal, steering etc. Thus, what separates intentional agency from minimal agency is that both forms of intentional agency include a mental representation of a goal, whereas minimal agency does not.

To conclude, the essay will understand “agency” as including following possible notions:

1. **Minimal agency**: the ability of an entity to perform actions “in accord with a certain goal (or norm)” where the goal is *not* necessarily a mental representation, but could be
an intrinsic goal, such as “to exist”

2. **Intentional agency**: the ability of an entity to perform actions “in accord with a certain goal (or norm)” where the goal is a mental representation…
   
a) ... on a conscious level
   
b) ... on an automated level

**Analysis**

The analysis will focus on our two dimensions of analysis – “responsibility” and “agency” one at a time, starting with “responsibility”. First, the material will be described and interpreted, in order to extract premises for our syllogisms. This description and interpretation will be guided by three questions. When these questions have been answered, the premises will be presented in syllogisms in the results section, where they will be evaluated as invalid or valid, based on whether they have any fallacies of the kind mentioned above – incoherence or inconsistency, or not.

**Responsibility**

With our definitions of responsibility in mind, we will now investigate responsibility within dark ecology. Three questions will guide our analysis:

1. **Who is considered to bear responsibility?**
2. **What kind of responsibility is this?**
3. **Does this entail any complications in relation to object-oriented ontology?**

We will start with examining the first question:

1. **Who is considered to bear responsibility?**

The answer to this question is quite clearly stated within dark ecology. It is claimed that we as humans bear an apparent responsibility for causing the Anthropocene – and by doing that, harming the biosphere. This is because we, as a species and individuals, understand global warming:
I am responsible as a member of this species for the Anthropocene. Of course I am formally responsible to the extent that I understand global warming. That’s all you actually need to be responsible for something. You understand that this truck is going to hit that man? You are responsible for that man. (Morton, 2016:8-9)

This “understanding” is, however, not described as something that has always been there in humans:

Ecological facts are, at present, very often facts about the unintended consequences of human actions. Exactly: the vast majority of us had no idea what we were doing, on some level. (Morton, 2018:18)

Here, there is a slight uncertainty regarding whether humans are to be seen as responsible also when they do not understand the consequences of their action. This quote illuminates this ambivalence: “You, the human, made the plutonium, or you the human can understand what it is — therefore you are responsible.” (Morton, 2016:161). It seems that either simply “making” the plutonium, or making it and understanding the consequences of that, is to be seen as rendering one responsible. Further discussion regarding this will follow in relation to question two: “What kind of responsibility is this?”. For now, we may however still state that humans are clearly pointed out to bear responsibility.

Are other objects also seen as responsible for causing the Anthropocene? It does not seem so – no notion of other objects bearing responsibility is to be found within the material. On the contrary – other objects are explicitly made free from blame: “it wasn’t tortoises that caused global warming.” (Morton, 2016:19), “The Sixth Mass Extinction Event: caused by the Anthropocene, caused by humans. Not jellyfish; not dolphins; not coral.” (Morton, 2016:13).

From this, we can draw the conclusion that humans are the only object responsible for harming the biosphere by causing the Anthropocene.

Moving on to question number two:

2. What kind of responsibility is this?

It is stated that humans are “formally” responsible for the Anthropocene. How can we understand this in relation to our set of definitions?

10 Using here Morton’s term, although “produce” would probably be a more correct term regarding plutonium since it is an element and not man ”made”.
As can be seen in the first quote under question 1, the formal responsibility seems to be dependent on the understanding of one’s action (although, as we saw, this is not entirely clear-cut). This understanding does not seem to concern only an understanding of causal processes, but also some idea that one’s action have been morally wrong. This can be identified in how formal responsibility is outspokenly distinguished from causal responsibility in the following quote – but also in how the metaphor of humans as “criminals” is used:

[I]n this case formal responsibility is strongly reinforced by causal responsibility. I am the criminal. And I discover this via scientific forensics. Just like in noir fiction: I’m the detective and the criminal! I’m a person. I’m also part of an entity that is now a geophysical force on a planetary scale (Morton, 2016:8-9).

A criminal must be seen as someone who has done something that is regarded as morally wrong. Thus, we will interpret that “formal” responsibility implicates the same things that we have defined as “moral responsibility”. It must thus also be assumed that within dark ecology, humans can be understood as having some sort of moral competence. What humans have done to the biosphere is seen as a morally bad act, and we are responsible for it – both because we caused it and because we understand the consequences of this action. Regarding the question whether “understanding” is needed for moral responsibility, we will assume that this is the case since “formal responsibility is strongly reinforced by causal responsibility” as stated above, implying that simply causing an action is not enough to be held formally/morally responsible for it – it is but one factor, although important. The quote about the plutonium can thus be read in another light: “You, the human, made the plutonium, or you the human can understand what it is — therefore you are responsible.” (Morton, 2016:161). It can be seen as an implication of collective responsibility. Even though you yourself did not make the plutonium, you, as a member of the human race – who created plutonium, understanding the consequences of that action, are also responsible for what happens with the plutonium – even though it wasn’t your hands that made it.

The tension between individual responsibility and collective responsibility is treated in several places. In Being Ecological, Morton states that “individuals are in no sense guilty for global warming” (2018:31). It is repeatedly illuminated also in Dark Ecology with a metaphor of starting a car:

[E]very time I turned my car ignition key I was contributing to global warming and yet was performing actions that were statistically meaningless. When I think myself as a member of the human species, I lose the visible, tactile “little me” […] (Morton, 2016:19).
The responsibility can thus be deemed a collective one. The responsibility spoken of within dark ecology is also clearly a retrospective one – the deed has already been done; humans are to blame. However, the responsibility must also be seen as a prospective one. In Dark Ecology (2016) the focus is put on how we must move on from the destructive ways that steer politics and economics today, according to Morton stemming from when societies became agricultural:

Humans should act to change their material conditions, but those conditions aren’t an Easy Think Substance. Those conditions might be wasps, mycelium, spores, and leopards. We are lazily used to our ontology coming with an easy to discern, snap-on ethics or politics and vice versa, rather than as complex Legos we have to assemble. Consider how we might recover from agrilogistics. The point would not be to dismantle global agriculture and replace it with yet another top-down solution. Instead we need many toy structures, many temporalities (2016:143).

In other words, it is assumed that we can and should change actions that have been proved detrimental to the biosphere, creating actions where the well-being of the biosphere is prioritized instead. It is thus to be seen as a responsibility of changing the actions we will make in the future.

To conclude regarding question two, we have found that the kind of responsibility found within dark ecology is a moral responsibility, reinforced by causal responsibility. It is to be seen as collective, as well as retrospective and prospective.

We will now move on to question three:

3. Does this entail any complications in relation to object-oriented ontology?

Seeing as humans are singled out as responsible for causing the Anthropocene, one may ask oneself if this can be seen as consistent with the object-oriented ontology. If we assume a flat ontology, can objects then be singled out from each other in this way?

An important distinction must be made here. An object-oriented ontology may be a flat ontology, meaning that objects exist on an equal level. One must conclude that objects are not, however, to be seen as identical. According to Morton, the specificity of an object exists in relation to the different phenomena coupled to it:

A hammer is a certain something, a very specific something — and yet it’s not a hammer exactly. It’s all kinds of things to all kinds of beings. It’s a landing strip for a fly. It’s a surface
for dust to collect on. It’s a hammer when I start using it for my hammering project. But a hammer doesn’t just wait around in outer space for someone to grab it. Hammers happen when you grab a metal-and-wooden thing for hammering in a picture hook (Morton, 2018:61).

It seems that we may not be allowed to conclude that a hammer is indeed a hammer (since it can also be for example a landing strip, depending on who is using the “hammer”), however, we are allowed to conclude that a hammer is an object that is unique and different from other objects. Thus, it should be possible to single out humans and hold them responsible for climate change, as opposed to, say, hammers.

We also concluded that humans are both morally and causally responsible for the Anthropocene, in a collective, retrospective and prospective way. There does not seem to be contradictory to claim that a group of certain objects have affected other objects in the past and will continue to do so in the future. Thus, holding humans causally, collectively, retrospectively and prospectively responsible for certain actions must not be seen as clashing with an object-oriented ontology. However, claiming that these actions have been morally wrong and that humans bear a moral responsibility to act in a different way seems to be problematic when combined with OOO.

As stated in “Definitions”, morality and ethics are understood as based on an idea that there are actions which are “good” as well as actions that are “bad”. This is a simplistic understanding of morality and ethics, but it serves our purpose here. If we as humans are seen as having a moral responsibility for the Anthropocene, global warming and harming the biosphere – and changing how we act in the future, one can conclude that these actions have been “bad”. However, this must entail some kind of logic about what about it that is bad. If we look at the matter from an anthropocentric point of view, the moral claim can be said to be “what is good for humans is (morally) good”. According to this claim, the logic would then be to rank things of use to us as humans as more desirable to protect than other things, in other words: objects of use to humans are “good”. According to that logic, it is very clear why we should care more about having clean water than protecting the bacteria living in our drinking water. Another logic could be one following a biocentric claim: “what is good for the biosphere is (morally) good”. Following form this, it would be morally logical to hierarchize the world by differentiating between biosphere and not-biosphere, ranking the first one as better than the second one. Another ethical logic could be based on the claim that “all living things are better than all dead things”. Further, one can imagine different moral nuances in all
these claims – a creature that is able to feel and sense things may be ranked as higher up in the scale of “protect-worthiness” than a bacterium, for example.

This sort of moral logic seems to be absent within dark ecology. Remembering the criticism directed at OOO and the absence of ethics, this is what Hendlin (2023:323), for example is grasping at as well:

If all objects have a similar “level” of experience and are equal ontologically, then there is no reason to care about species going extinct more than one’s local fast-food joint going out of business.

We argue, however, that a flat ontology does not necessarily entail also an ethical flattening. What seems to be the problem is rather that ontological differences are often what moral logics are based on (the difference between humans and other objects, or between living objects and non-living objects). Since this is not the case within dark ecology, one must ask oneself if there exists a moral logic based on something else. This is what Levi Bryant, object-oriented ontologist claims as well, referred to by Hendlin:

OOO’s Bryant (2012) stresses that just because ontologies are flat does not mean that ethics are too. It is not that speculative philosophers do not have any conception of ethics, but that they need to add an ethics because their flattened ontology provides no orientation (2023:330).

Does such an “add-on” ethic/moral logic exist within dark ecology?

It is stated that a choice always must be made, regarding what to rank highest:

Because of interdependence, when you take care of one entity or group of entities, another one (or more) is left out. Biocentric ecological philosophy is quite wrong to claim that the AIDS virus has the same right to exist as an AIDS patient. You have to choose. Obviously I’m going to choose the AIDS patient (Morton, 2018:98).

The choice, stated as “obvious”, is, it seems, driven by a moral logic that favors a human being over the AIDS virus. What claim underlies this logic is however not clear – it seems to be one that favors humans over other objects. But why? Perhaps this quote is best seen as reflecting a general “problem” that Morton addresses, regarding the ranking of different objects:

The problem is that there is no other way for us as humans to include nonhumans within rights language than to bring them under the human umbrella under which we are sheltering. The difficulty is, many of the tools we have for making correct decisions are contaminated in advance with anthropocentric chemicals […] (Morton, 2018:81).
To choose the AIDS patient over of the AIDS virus may thus be the fault of us being human beings and not able to escape our anthropocentric worldview. This, however, does not solve the question of a moral logic, rather it can be seen as an example of how we fail to act according to that logic, how we fail to make correct, uncontaminated decisions. But what are these “correct decisions” mentioned above – and why are they “correct”? There does not seem to exist a clear answer to that question.

Moreover, although it is claimed that there is no way getting around the fact that choices must be made in ecological politics and philosophy, it is stated that, relying on an object-oriented ontology, one cannot discriminate between different objects. Here, this is explained in an analogy of the world and its components as being a piece of art:

“Because there are so many more parts in the artwork than there is the whole of it, by definition, and by definition you’re not allowed to discriminate either way — parts are more important than wholes, or vice versa, or one part is more important than the others — because that’s finding a definite purpose, and the experience doesn’t have that going for it. That would ruin it. This is due to that feature of OOO theory which we’ve already met (and which I’m advocating here), in which there is always a multiplicity of parts that exceed the whole, rather than the whole swallowing the parts perfectly.” (Morton, 2018:96).

It may be unclear here what Morton means when he says that there is “a multiplicity of parts that exceed the whole”. This is an important feature of OOO and is further explained as following:

Since there is only one whole and a multiplicity of parts, and since no object is more real or more significant in some metaphysical sense than another one, the whole must indeed be less than the sum of its parts, however paradoxical we may believe this to be (Morton, 2016:113).

In other words, a “whole” (singular) is one ontological object, whereas “parts” (plural) are several ontological objects. Thus, the whole is less than the sum of its parts. And since finding a purpose of an object depends on who is deciding – a hammer is a hammer only to the human – no one is not allowed to verify or evaluate an object’s worth based on that, because that would imply ascribing value to things only from one perspective. A human one, for example.

Hierarchies are also criticized in relation to ecology:

Agricultural religion (Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and so on) is implicitly hierarchical: there’s a top tier and a bottom one, and the very word hierarchy means the rule of the priests. By framing ecological action this way, you have been sucked into a gravity well, and it’s not an especially ecological space down there. In many ways, it’s not helping at all (Morton, 2018:78).
Thus, it seems that not only is a moral logic missing from dark ecology – it is also seen as detrimental. But what then, are humans morally responsible to save, or rather, based on what logic should we prioritize the well-being of the biosphere? Why is harming the biosphere regarded as “bad”? No answer is (yet) to be found.

To conclude regarding question number three, we have stated that singling out human beings as responsible for causing the Anthropocene and with that harming the biosphere is in line with an object-oriented ontology. Labelling this responsibility as a causal, collective, retrospective and prospective one also seems to be coherent with the object-oriented ontology. However, there seems to be a contradiction in claiming that this responsibility is also a moral one and still upholding an object-oriented ontology. No obvious solution to this contradiction is presented.

Having extracted these premises from dark ecology, we can now present this prototypical syllogism:

**Prototypical syllogism**

P1: The world exists of different objects on the same ontological level

P2: These objects are not to be hierarchized nor discriminated in relation to each other

P3: Humankind, having seen the world as hierarchical, is as a collective causally and morally responsible for harming some of these objects and is morally responsible to stop doing that

P4: This moral responsibility entails deciding which objects are “good”, thus discriminating objects

C: Humans will prioritize the well-being of the biosphere

As we can see, there are several things that are unclear here. The earlier discussion about the absence of moral logic is portrayed by how P2 and P4 are contradictory (marked in bold and red). There is also a leap to be found between the premises and the conclusion. This deduction is thus both inconsistent (the clash between P2 and P4) and incoherent (the leap between premises and conclusion, the conclusion being marked as yellow). We can imagine (at least) two possible premises that could have filled out the space to erase the leap:
The biosphere is good

Humans will act on their moral responsibility

However, since there is no moral logic, P5 is missing, and P6 is also left outside of the discussion.

We have now, thus, proved that the general critique directed at OOO seems to be a problem also to dark ecology. However, there are elements to dark ecology which we have not yet examined. Therefore, we will draw no final conclusions yet – why we have labelled this syllogism “prototypical”, but continue our investigation, now within the dimension of agency to see if there are premises to be found there that would solve the problems of the theory illuminated in this section.

Agency

To understand how the concept of agency functions within dark ecology, three questions will guide the analysis in this section:

1. Who is considered to have agency?

2. What kind of agency is this?

3. Based on this, what implications are there for the ability of humankind to act in a non-harmful way towards the biosphere?

We will begin by looking at question number one:

1. Who is considered to have agency?

Within dark ecology, it seems we cannot assume that only humans have agency:

The division between act and behave, which is based on a medieval Neoplatonic Christian doctrine of soul and body, structures how we distinguish between ourselves (the ones we allow to act) and nonhumans (the ones we only believe to be behaving, like puppets or androids). But are we Neoplatonic Christian souls? Isn’t being a person a little bit about being paranoid that you might not be a person? Can you get rid of the ambiguity without tearing something? (Being Ecological 2018:81).
The argument here seems to be that nonhumans have the ability not only to behave, but also to act. Non-human agency is also referred to in relation to Kant’s theories:

When we study the history of reactions to Kant, it becomes peculiarly evident that something like an animism—an awareness of nonhuman agency, consciousness, affect, significance beyond the human—bursts out of his Pandora’s box […] Kant saw the power and independence of that little raindrop and immediately closed the lid on what he saw, just as he was fascinated with animal magnetism […]. Animal magnetism is to all intents and purposes the Force (think Star Wars): an all-pervasive energy that causally connects both animate and inanimate objects (Morton, 2016:94-95).

From this we can conclude that all objects are believed to have some kind of agency – a raindrop as well as an animal. To understand what is meant by this, and what kind of agency is really referred to here, we will move on to question two:

2. What kind of agency is this?

The logic of the agency presented above can be understood in the light of how causal processes are believed to function within dark ecology.

Within dark ecology, it is argued that our common understanding of causal processes – mechanical causality – is based on a presumption that “some kind of god-like being” (Morton, 2018:86) is at the start of the causal chain setting things in motion. This, Morton does not hold to be true:

Some boss doesn’t start the machine, and some conductor doesn’t need to “intend” everything all the time—as any concert musician will tell you (my father, for example), the conductor is never actually driving the music like that anyway (Morton, 2018:84).

Here, interpreting “some boss” as our human minds creating intentions, it seems that Morton does not believe that intentional agency exists, at least not in our traditional understanding of it.

To illuminate further what he means, Morton offers an example of two persons’ abilities to stack cups:

Consider an actual scenario. The fastest cup-stacker on Earth (a young boy) competed with David Eagleman, a neuroscientist, on his show, The Brain, which ran on PBS in America in 2015. They are wired up to brain scanners. The neuroscientist’s brain is working overtime and he loses. The boy’s brain is hardly working at all. It’s as if he is a zombie. He isn’t intending to
stack the cups and there isn’t a puppet master inside his head pulling the strings. Something else is happening. His ability to stack the cups is all in his “body” (Morton, 2018:84).

According to the standard definition of agency, this example can be seen as illuminating the difference between intentional agency on a conscious level and intentional agency on an automatic level. It seems reasonable to think that the agency of the boy cup stacker is manifested on an automatic level – probably because he has done this task so many times that he does not need to consciously create the actions needed to stack the cups – the only thing needed for him is the intention to reach the (mentally represented) goal of stacking all the cups and, in order to do this, his body creates the needed action automatically. The neuroscientist, on the other hand, probably has not engaged very much in the action of stacking cups – thus he needs to act on a conscious level, where he needs to be aware of every sub-routine included in the task, creating more brain activity.

This example, however, is used to illustrate that agency can (and does) occur without intention, without our brains controlling our actions. Based on this, it is argued that we do not understand causal mechanisms, that our idea of causality as “mechanic” – where our intentions create and drive action, is wrong. Although this example can be interpreted as an expression of automatic agency – and not something that we cannot explain with traditional understandings of agency, we will continue the investigation of what this example is argued to indicate within dark ecology.

As stated above, within dark ecology, causality is not believed to be a mechanical process. Rather, it is thought to be an aesthetic one. This is, according to Morton, a logical consequence of the OOO-idea that all objects are withdrawn, meaning that we can experience them in different ways, but never know them fully:

You can’t know a thing fully by thinking it or by eating it or by measuring it or by painting it . . .

This means that the way things affect one another (causality) cannot be direct (mechanical), but rather indirect or vicarious: causality is aesthetic (Morton, 2016:16).

It is argued that the gap between the object in itself and the phenomena of it is impossible to grasp – it is a “fundamental, irreducible gap” that can’t be located, neither by experience nor by science (Morton, 2016:93). Everything we know about the world – data, ideas about causal mechanisms etc. are therefore to be understood as information about phenomena – we can know what a chair, for example, looks and feels like but never what it really “is”.

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Here, it is not entirely clear what Morton means that the aesthetic experience does in relation to the gap between object and phenomena – is the aesthetic experience our (only) way of communicating with objects in themselves? Or is it a way of closing the gap between object and phenomena? Both? It is stated that being and appearing are inextricably intertwined (Morton, 2016:98). But what does this mean? What does it entail for our way of understanding the world and causality – and thus the agency of different objects?

One could interpret it as meaning that, since we can never know anything about the object in itself, we base our actions on how objects appear, and the causal reaction created is also an appearance. This may be difficult to accept. If we have an apple placed on the edge of a table and then push the apple off the edge, it seems counter-intuitive to believe that the causal chain of events – the apple falling from the table and landing on the floor, is not mechanic, but aesthetic. One could argue that pushing the apple off the edge, watching it fall and hearing the thump when it lands on the floor is just our way of experiencing the causality – we can never know if what is happening is “actually” happening, it may be only our human way of experiencing the world that tells us this. This can of course be true. The question is, though, if this leads us anywhere except from the dead end of claiming that we can never see or understand the universe, that “everything is an illusion”. This would entail that we can never know anything “for real”. And still, when pushing an apple off the edge of a table, the reaction is more or less the same every time we repeat the action. So, even if our experience is just an experience of how objects and causality appear, we can accept what happens as a truth of how things really are in order to gain a basic understanding of the world to build further knowledge on – a theory of gravity, for example. Thus, it would not matter what we call the causality – mechanic or aesthetic, because how it affects us and our ability to say something about the world would be (more or less) the same. Claiming that causality is aesthetic rather than mechanic must then be seen as rather pointless.

A slightly more generous interpretation of what Morton means when he claims that causality cannot be direct (mechanic) but must be indirect (aesthetic) would be that the beginning of the causal chain is fuzzier than we usually claim it to be, but that the events that follow can perhaps be seen in our traditional way of understanding causality. Following from the argument that there exists no such thing as a “conductor” at the beginning of causal events, we must ask ourselves what then supposedly drives our intentions. To find an answer to this, we will investigate further the notion of an “aesthetic experience” and how it may affect us.

The “aesthetic experience” is described as a “solidarity with what is given”: 
The aesthetic experience isn’t really about data—it’s about data-ness, the qualities we experience when we apprehend something. [...] The aesthetic experience is about solidarity with what is given. It’s a solidarity, a feeling of alreadiness, for no reason in particular, with no agenda in particular—like evolution, like the biosphere (Morton, 2018:88).

The “beauty experience” is used as an example of how the aesthetic experience works. It is stated that the “beauty experience” is an example of connection to the world where the causal direction is unclear:

In the beauty experience, there is some kind of mind-meld-like thing that takes place, where I can’t tell whether it’s me or the artwork that is causing the beauty experience: if I try to reduce it to the artwork or to me, I pretty much ruin it (Morton, 2018:88).

It is argued that art can be a way for humans to understand that nonhumans influence the world as well, rather than being mere blank objects that subjects (humans) exert influence on:

[…] art is actually a tiny but still recognizable fragment of the kind of larger world, the mostly nonhuman world of influences and designs that go beyond us and violate our idea of who “owns” what and who is running the show, such that causality seems to have something animistic or paranormal about it. It’s not a glue that falsely fixes bourgeois dichotomies such as subject and object (Morton, 2018:97).

The “mind meld-like thing” that takes place in the beauty experience is called “tuning” or “attunement” and denotes an experience of connecting to an object in a way that goes beyond (common) logic: “Attunement is the feeling of an object’s power over me — I am being dragged by its tractor beam into its orbit” (Morton, 2018:119).

Again, we can conclude that all objects are seen to have the potential to act – they possess an agency of some kind. It is, however, not clear how this agency is to be classified. Since we have concluded that intentional agency is explained to be somewhat of a misunderstanding within dark ecology – that there is no “boss” that drives action, we must assume that the agency that is referred to is then perhaps agency in the minimal definition of the word. The question is, though, if this definition can be applied to the type of agency all objects supposedly can perform. Remembering the three criteria of the minimal definition regarding what a system (or object) must be able to do in order to be defined as an agent (define its own individuality, be the active source of activity in its environment and regulate this activity in relation to certain norms (Barandiaran et al., 2009:367)), it does not seem that say, an artwork, would fulfil these criteria. The “agency” of objects within dark ecology seems to be too passive:
Is how you relate to a beautiful artwork active or passive? You certainly don’t want to eat it, because that would get rid of it, and you like it. But it’s not clobbering you either. It’s affecting you, but in a nonviolent way (Morton, 2018:128).

It seems, with our definitions, we cannot classify objects as having agency. What happens in the aesthetic experience must be called something else. “The force” that emanates from objects can perhaps be called “influence” instead. But is this to be seen as the only agency there is – are humans also to be seen only as “influencing” the world, rather than “acting” in the world? It may seem so at first – the idea of a “conductor” is debunked, also regarding the agency of humans. Instead, the term “alreadiness” is put forth to explain how and why we do things:

> Alreadiness hints at our tuning to something else, which is a dance in which that something else is also, already, tuning to us. Indeed, there are some experiences in which it simply can’t be said which attunement takes priority; which comes first, logically and chronologically (Morton, 2018:86).

However, we may still claim humans to be agents according to the minimal definition – it seems reasonable to claim that humans fulfil the three criteria of minimal agency. As we recall from the “Responsibility” section, OOO does not entail that we cannot differentiate between objects regarding their features. It may then be reasonable and within the logic of dark ecology to assume that some objects have a different form of agency than others. Thus, we can conclude that humans – along with other entities which fulfil the three criteria of minimal agency, could perhaps be seen as having agency in the minimal sense of the word. Their agency must, however, be seen as influenced by all the objects emanating power around them – this is to be understood as the process of “tuning”:

> Copying, mimicry, influencing and being influenced by, being tuned and tuning, things we do all the time in our environments, with other people, as we grow and learn to be adults and participate in activities—something causal is happening when these attunements happen […] (Morton, 2018:103).

The process of tuning seems to be of great importance within dark ecology to explain how we should understand our connection to the world – and how we should act because of that connection. Can the concept of tuning perhaps be the missing piece we have been searching for in the argumentation – can it explain why dark ecology is a perspective that will guide us humans to a less hostile relationship with the biosphere?

We will investigate this in relation to question three:
3. Based on this, what implications are there for the ability of humankind to act in a non-harmful way towards the biosphere?

The argument within dark ecology seems to be that instead of assuming an overarching idea of a hierarchy between objects to guide how we prioritize between them, we are to be guided by the tuning process – which is the “ethics of the trickster world”:

It is radically undecidable whether we are reducible to nonsentient, nonconscious, nonperson status—or whether things that aren’t us, such as foxes or teacups, are reducible upward to conventional personhood. I might be an android—this android might be a person: that’s the best we can do. Deleting the hesitation by reducing either one to the other is what is called violence. [...] the ethics of the trickster world, has to do with respecting that subjunctive, hesitant, might-be quality. It has to do with attunement (Morton, 2018:116-117).

From this, it can be understood that tuning with an object will lead to prioritizing the well-being of that object. Some questions come to mind regarding this:

1. If different people tune with and care for several objects, which ones should we then prioritize as a society?
2. How can we assume that we will not tune with and care for things that are of less importance – and may even be destructive – to the biosphere? A beautiful opera house? A spaceship? A view without wind turbines in sight?
3. Is it not reasonable to believe that tuning with human objects and wanting to prioritize their well-being may come more natural to us than tuning with other objects?

Regarding question number one, it illuminates the problem of relegating ethics to an individual level – on which attunement must be assumed to exist. What if people attune with different objects? How are we to decide on a communal level which objects are worthy of prioritization? Via democratic instances? According to Morton we must pursue politics that are “playful” and “good enough”:

We need a politics that includes what appears least political — laughter, the playful, even the silly. We need a multiplicity of different political systems. We need to think of them as toylike: playful and half-broken things that connect humans and nonhumans with one another. We can never get it perfect (Dark ecology, 2018:113).
This brings us to question number two: Why would these half-broken systems prioritize the well-being of objects that belong to the biosphere? Why not malls and building complex for multi-billionaire companies?

It seems that attunement with “lifeforms” is preferred over attunement with other objects, which can be derived from this quote:

A lifeform is like that must-have eighteenth-century equivalent of the iPod and Bose speakers, the Aeolian harp. It’s a string instrument that you place in an open windowsill. It resonates to the breezes that veer around the house. The haunting, harmony-rich, phasing sound this attunement system produces is strangely contemporary, as if Jane Austen characters were listening to a drone piece by Sonic Youth while they sipped their tea and played cards and wondered about the intentions of Mr Bingley in Pride and Prejudice (Morton, 2018:102-103).

It is even implied that attunement as a process intrinsically has something to do with “ecology”:

When we study attunement, we study something that has always been there: ecological intimacy, which is to say, intimacy between humans and nonhumans, violently repressed with violent results (Morton, 2018:105).

Are we then to understand that attunement can only happen with objects we usually see as being part of an ecological system – in this essay, part of the biosphere? Or is “ecological” to be understood here as the interplay between different objects – all objects? We will assume that this latter interpretation is what is implied here. This would mean that attunement would be possible between objects of all kinds. However, regarding the quote above – where a lifeform is compared with “must-have eighteenth-century […] iPod and Bose speakers” it seems that the attunement with “lifeforms” is something stronger/better/more influential than attunement with other objects. We can note here that using the word “lifeform” seems contradictory to earlier arguments about how it is an expression of violence to classify objects as “living” or “not living”\(^{11}\), but we will ignore this contradiction for now – following the argument proposed. The argument here is that attunement with objects classified as “lifeforms” would be a stronger influence on humans than an object not classified as a “lifeform”. From this, we can conclude that it is reasonable to assume that we as a society

\(^{11}\) See for example earlier quote: “It is radically undecidable whether we are reducible to nonsentient, nonconscious, nonperson status—or whether things that aren’t us, such as foxes or teacups, are reducible upward to conventional personhood.” (Morton, 2018:116-117) or “A rigid and thin concept of Life is what dark ecology rejects.” (Morton, 2016:137)
would prioritize the well-being of objects connected to the biosphere, rather than, say, a beautiful opera house.

This leads us to question number three: why would we prioritize other “lifeforms” over (the well-being of) humans?

The only answer to be found in connection with this is an encouragement to change how we care for things. What is promoted is a “playful care” (Morton, 2018:132) – caring in a way where we “care/less” – which would render us “carefree” (Morton, 2018:131). This is understood as solving the question of us (humans) probably being more inclined to tune with/care for human lifeforms: “Expanded care, care with the care/less halo, is more likely to include more lifeforms under its umbrella, because it is less focused on sheer survival.” (Morton, 2018:103).

We will not touch upon the (somewhat dubious) logic that transforms “careless” to “carefree”, but accept this argument. However, the running point here is that what is promoted is expressed in normative terms – we should care less/differently, in order to include other lifeforms than human beings in our sphere of caring. This is very much different from “we will care less/differently”. There seems to be no answer to question three, regarding why we would prioritize other lifeforms over the well-being of humans, that is not dependent on a normative claim. Thus, the process of attunement does not seem to offer us the logical argument that is missing. In other words, also if a person has tuned with, say, a species going extinct because of global warming, there seems to be no logical reason for this person to stop driving their car to work in order to earn money to buy food for their child. However strong the attunement with the species going extinct may have been, it seems reasonable to assume that the attunement with one’s own child is stronger. In other words, there seems to be no logical argument within dark ecology as to why we would change our behavior that is detrimental for the biosphere – even assuming that our actions are influenced by different non-human objects through the process of attunement.

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12 Of course one may be willing to do everything in one’s power as a parent to stop climate change because of the well being of the child – but those motives are anthropocentric and not part of the argumentation presented in this analysis.
Results

It seems we have followed the investigation of the premises of dark ecology to its end. Thus, we can present these final syllogisms, building on the one from the “Responsibility” section. The syllogism in the “Responsibility” section was as follows:

*Prototypical syllogism*

P1: The world exists of different objects on the same ontological level
P2: These objects are not to be hierarchized nor discriminated in relation to each other
P3: Humankind, having seen the world as hierarchical, is as a collective causally and morally responsible for harming some of these objects and is morally responsible to stop doing that
P4: This moral responsibility entails deciding which objects are “good”, thus discriminating objects

C: Humans will prioritize the well-being of the biosphere

After the investigation made in relation to agency, we can see that P4 can perhaps be nuanced. A new syllogism may look like this:

*Syllogism 1 (generous interpretation)*

P1: The world exists of different objects on the same ontological level
P2: These objects are not to be hierarchized nor discriminated in relation to each other
P3: Humankind, having seen the world as hierarchical, is as a collective causally and morally responsible for harming some of these objects and is morally responsible to stop doing that
P4: The prioritization of which objects are “good” is not based on a set hierarchy, but is based on “tuning”
P5: All objects can tune with each other
P6: Humans tend to tune “better” with objects seen as lifeforms (interpreted as the biosphere)
P7: Historically, humans have prioritized themselves (human lifeforms)

P8: Humans **should** down-prioritize the caring for human lifeforms

C: Humans **will** prioritize the well-being of the biosphere

This syllogism is branded as “generously interpreted”, meaning that the premises that the material has been interpreted in a generous way to present the premises for this syllogism. Even so, we can still see the problem mentioned above, marked here in bold and yellow: there is an incoherence between P8 and the conclusion, where P8 states a normative fact, and the conclusion is descriptive. For this syllogism to be without fallacies, a premise stating something of the likes of “because of attunement with objects that are part of the biosphere, humans **will** down-prioritize the caring for human lifeforms” is needed. This premise, is, however, not to be found within the material. This syllogism is thus evaluated to be invalid.

As stated, this syllogism is based on a generous interpretation of the material. Here follows another one, which is based on a more critical interpretation of the material:

*Syllogism 2 (critical interpretation)*

P1: The world exists of different objects on **the same ontological level**

P2: These objects are not to be hierarchized **nor discriminated** in relation to each other

P3: Humankind, having seen the world as hierarchical, is as a collective causally and morally responsible for harming some of these objects and is morally responsible to stop doing that

P4: The prioritization of which objects are “good” is not based on a set hierarchy, but is based on “tuning”

P5: All objects can tune with each other

P6: Some objects are “lifeforms”, thus existing on an **ontologically different level** than other objects which are not “lifeforms”

P7: Humans tend to tune “better” with other lifeforms (interpreted as the biosphere), meaning that other objects than lifeforms are **discriminated**

P8: Historically, humans have prioritized themselves
P9: Humans should down-prioritize the caring for human lifeforms

C: Humans will prioritize the well-being of the biosphere

In this syllogism, we can see that the incoherence from “Syllogism 2” is still there, marked in bold and yellow. In this syllogism we have also included the problem we ignored in earlier discussion regarding the use of the word “lifeforms”. As we can see, marked in bold and red, there are two inconsistencies as well in this syllogism, both between P1 and P6 and between P2 and P7. This syllogism is thus both incoherent and inconsistent. It is therefore evaluated to be invalid.

One can also notice a possible enthymeme in both these syllogisms – one stating that “E: humans are the ones in charge of the politics, impacting the existence of other objects to a large degree”. If politics are guided only by human attunement with objects, this would imply that human attunement with objects is seen as more important than other objects’ attunement with each other. This would imply that, also when assuming attunement as a way of prioritizing in politics, dark ecology is still stuck in an anthropological perspective – thus clashing with the OOO-premise and rendering both syllogisms inconsistent.

Conclusion

In this essay, we have investigated “dark ecology”, a theory based on an object-oriented ontology which claims to present a “logic for future coexistence”. An internal critique of this theory has been made, which has included interpreting and analyzing the premises of importance for dark ecology and evaluating the validity of the syllogisms that have been based on these premises.

Two final syllogisms were presented of which both were deemed invalid. The first one, based on a more generous interpretation of the material, was proved to be incoherent, and the second one, based on a more critical interpretation of the material, was proved to be both incoherent and inconsistent. A possible enthymeme was also pinpointed, which would render both syllogisms inconsistent. Both syllogisms were evaluated to be invalid.
The answer to our research question: “Is dark ecology a theory that, if applied, leads to a change in humans’ relationship with the biosphere for the better?” – must, because of this, be “no”.

A nuance to this answer must however be inserted. The investigation of this essay has been focused on logical coherence and consistency of dark ecology, and though the theory is deemed faulty regarding this, we do not exclude the possibility of dark ecology influencing the thoughts and actions of people in a, for the biosphere, positive way. We do however state that it is reasonable to demand of a theory to be valid for society to accept it as a viable ground for political action and for building further knowledge on.

Regarding the interpretations of the material, we do not exclude that other interpretations than those we have made are possible, leading perhaps to other conclusions. We have, however, been as meticulous and transparent in our interpretations as possible – why we also presented two different final syllogisms. Syllogism 1, based on a more generous interpretation of the material, is to be seen as presenting a less serious problem of dark ecology than Syllogism 2. However, both syllogisms struggle with the problem of the enthymeme, which also has serious consequences for the logic of the theory. We argue it to be improbable that a mere development of dark ecology would solve these logical problems.

Solving the climate crisis and changing humankind’s detrimental relationship to the biosphere is a big and important question, linked to a huge field of research. This essay has been but a small contribution to this field, dissecting a theory that to some may seem obscure and strange. Some would probably claim the endeavor of this essay as an endeavor of low priority when it comes to solving a crisis that is so acute as the climate crisis – so real and seemingly far from obscure ideas. We argue, however, that ideas about what we are and how we are as humans in relation to the world are always important, but perhaps even more so now when we have to rebuild our societies to remedy the damage caused by the Anthropocene. Which theories can we rely on to guide us through that process?

There is yet a lot of research to be done for us to be able to answer that question.
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