

When, if ever, do environmental entities have moral status?



## The Simple Argument

- 1 All natural entities have moral status (intrinsic value or rights).
- 2 Old-growth forests (one natural entity) are natural entities
- 3 Thus, old-growth forests have moral status



Validity



But what is the basis of premise #1?

You could claim **moral intuition** is the basis but the problem is that same intuition can foster counter-intuitive examples...

Imagine a scenario in which a mining company needs to destroy an outcropping of trees. You might object that the loss of trees is an immeasurable loss of value. But the trees would be indistinguishable, equally as visually appealing, and not harm or disrupt the ecosystem.

The intuition supporting the simple argument is not as robust as we would like...

## A HIGHER-LEVEL ARGUMENT

- 1 Humans are members of earth's community of life in exactly the same way that all other living things are members.
- 2 Human beings and all other living things constitute a dynamic system of interlinked and interdependent parts.
- 3 Each living thing is a "teleological center of life, pursuing good in its own way."
- 4 Human beings are not superior to other species.
- 5 Therefore, all living things have equal moral status.



Lacks Validity,  
but...

If we do accept premises 1 - 3, then it is not unreasonable to accept Premise #4

But on the other hand, it might not strictly follow that if we are part of an independent community in which all members are seeking their own good, that the seeking places all beings on an "equal" footing. We could accept Premises #1 -3 and reasonably reject Premise 4.

But if we interpret Premise #4 as supporting **species egalitarianism** then, as critics have pointed out, we ought not to consume carrots nor meat - both have moral status!