

PEOPLE, NATURE AND RESTORATION

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There are two main themes in the environmental ethics literature on restoration: the degree to which a restored environment is natural, and its value as compared with an "original" environment. Australian philosopher Robert Elliot has argued that human modification (including restoration) of necessity results in a less natural environment - for instance, an area of rainforest that has been cleared and then replanted is not as natural as the original. He also argues, by analogy with fakes in art, that the restored environment (eg the rainforest) is of less intrinsic value than the original because it lacks natural origins and continuity with the original. This is not an argument against restoring environments (or works of art) that have already been damaged. It is designed to combat the claims of developers that if an area is exploited and then "restored" nothing of permanent value is lost. Natural environments, in this view, are irreplaceable (and probably unsubstitutable too). The debate that has followed from this claim raises particularly interesting issues in New Zealand law, specifically the Resource Management Act 1991, where "environment" is defined in law as including humans; "natural character" is a key though undefined concept; and the intrinsic values of ecosystems are listed as a matter of national importance. Issues in restoration are also very relevant to the emerging concept of ecological integrity.