

Ethics and the Environment: The philosophy of Aldo Leopold, Factors that necessitate environmental ethics

Environment as an ethical element

What are Environmental Ethics?

Environmental ethics is a branch of ethics that studies the relation of human beings and the environment and how ethics play a role in this. Environmental ethics believe that humans are a part of society as well as other living creatures, which includes plants and animals. These items are a very important part of the world and are considered to be a functional part of human life. Therefore, it is essential that every human being respected and honour this and use morals and ethics when dealing with these creatures.

“In environmental philosophy, environmental ethics is an established field of practical philosophy “which reconstructs the essential types of argumentation that can be made for protecting natural entities and the sustainable use of natural resources.” The main competing paradigms are anthropocentrism, physiocentrism (called ecocentrism as well), and theocentrism. Environmental ethics exerts influence on a large range of disciplines including environmental law, environmental sociology, ecotheology, ecological economics, ecology and environmental geography.”

Global warming, global climate change, deforestation, pollution, resource degradation, the threat of extinction are few of the issues from which our planet is suffering. Environmental ethics are a key feature of environmental studies that establishes the relationship between humans and the earth. With environmental ethics, you can ensure that you are doing your part to keep the environment safe and protected.

Every time that a tree is cut down to make a home or other resources are used, we are using natural resources that are becoming more and more sparse to find. It is essential that you do your part to keep the environment protected and free from danger. It is not as difficult to do as you may think so long as you're willing to make a few simple and easy changes. With the rapid increase in the world's population, the consumption of natural resources has increased several times. This has degraded our planet's ability to provide the services we humans need. The consumption of resources is going at a faster rate than they can naturally replenish.

Environmental ethics builds on scientific understanding by bringing human values, moral principles, and improved decision making into conversation with science.

What Causes Environmental Pollution?

The acts of humans lead to environmental pollution. The stronger demand for resources is also a factor that contributes to the problem as we all need food and shelter. When these

things are so desired and need the natural balance of the environment is disturbed. Engineering developments are resulting in resource depletion and environmental destruction.

There are several environmental issues that have created havoc on our environment and human life. If ignored today, these ill effects are sure to curb human existence in the near future.

The major environmental issues include Pollution, Overpopulation, Industrial and Household Waste, Acid Rain, Climate change, Ozone Layer Depletion, Urban Sprawl, Genetic Engineering, Deforestation and Global Warming. These environmental issues have taken a toll on our environment and we've already started seeing some disastrous effects in the form of the effect of health on humans, rise in sea level, depletion of non-renewable resources, melting of glaciers, extinction of species, polluted landfills, toxic dust, decreasing soil fertility, rise in air and water pollution and many more. Human beings are considered to be the most intelligent species living on earth. This could be why it is the only species on earth that has civilized itself over the decades to a large extent. Today, human beings boast as being superior to all other animals, but what is the use of such great intelligence when environment ethics are not followed?

Cutting down trees is something that many humans do for their own benefit without any concern for the animals, which are dependent on trees for survival. Using fossil fuels erratically, industrialization, pollution, disturbing ecological balance, all these are attributable to human activities. Just because we are in possession of all of these natural resources does not mean that we can use those resources in any manner in which we choose without keeping anything for future generations.

Environmental Ethics and Environmental Philosophy

Environmental ethics has produced around environmental philosophy. Many scientists have taken up the belief of the philosophical aspect of environmental hazards, thus giving rise to environmental ethics. Currently, environmental ethics has become a major concern for mankind.

The industrialization has given way to pollution and ecological imbalance. If an industry is causing such problems, it is not only the duty of that industry but all the human beings to make up for the losses. But how long an artificial and restored environment will be able to sustain? Will it be able to take the place of natural resources? Environmentalists are trying to find answers to these difficult questions, and all these together are termed as environmental ethics.

It is the responsibility of all to ensure that environmental ethics are being met. It is somewhat difficult to make adjustments that are necessary to ensure that you are following all environmental ethics.

Ethics plays an important role in our society today, and environmental ethics and business ethics must be considered. This has become more prevalent in today's society. Both oil and coal are bad, but not only for the environment, but for all living creatures, including plants and animals. Both are highly toxic in their natural raw state. They pollute the air and ground and water, and whether or not they are helping to create these natural disasters should be irrelevant. They are both finite and will not last forever, and the sooner we rid ourselves of the need for these two demons, the better. While oil and coal companies continue to promote their products, and the best yet is clean coal, which is an unethical definition of something that just isn't possible, their ethics come into question, especially environmental ethics. Most of the world's ills are derived from both of these, with oil spills, mining accidents, fires, and now climate change and global warming.

Ensure that you are doing your part and following all environmental ethics that are out there.

Environmental Ethics and Its Principles

There are several approaches or principles to determine how we are to value our environment. It is such a huge field, and it is so vast that it is difficult for one principle to cover all the ground. Many theories have emerged over the years, and each one has stressed on various principles of environmental ethics. The list below states all the principles that have been predominantly found in those theories.

1. Anthropocentrism

It suggests that human beings are the most important beings. All other living beings are but accessories that would assist in their survival. Now, there are two further divisions of anthropocentrism. They are weak anthropocentrism and strong anthropocentrism.

While weak anthropocentrism believes that human beings are the centre because it is only through their perspective that environmental situations can be interpreted.

Strong anthropocentrism, however, believes that human beings are at the centre because they rightfully deserve to be there.

2. Non-Anthropocentrism

As opposed to anthropocentrism, non-anthropocentrism, this principle gives value to every object, every animal in nature. It is a principle that believes in everything that sustains itself in nature.

3. Psychocentrism.

Psychocentrism is the principle that believes that human beings hold more value in the environment since their mental capacities are better developed and far more complex than any other element in the environment.

4. Biocentrism

It is a term that holds not only an ecological but also a political value. It is a philosophy that imparts importance to all living beings. In terms of environmental ethics, biocentrism is the principle that ensures the proper balance of ecology on the planet.

5. Holism

The term holism had been coined by Jan Smuts in his book called *Holism and Evolution* (1926). Holism considers environment systems as a whole rather than being individual parts of something. It considers these environment systems to be valuable.

6. Resourcism

The principle of resourcism says that nature is considered to be valuable only because it has resources to provide with. Thus, nature ought to be exploited.

7. Speciesism

The principle of speciesism justifies the superiority of the human race. Thus, it also justifies the exploitation and maltreatment of animals by humankind.

8. Moral Considerability

This, too, is an important principle of environmental ethics. Intrinsic value is added to every being, which makes us consider being moral. Moral considerability towards a being means that we agree that all our interactions whatsoever with the being is bound by moral laws.

9. Instrumental Value

The instrumental value is the value imparted to a being as long as it can serve us with resources.

10. Intrinsic Value

Intrinsic value is the value attached to a being just for itself and not only for its resourcefulness.

11. Aesthetic Value

Aesthetic value is imparted to a being by virtue of its looks or its beauty.

12. Animal Liberation or Animal Rights

As is evident from its name, animal liberation or rights try to secure animal life and ensure their welfare by enforcing certain laws.

13. Animal Welfare

It ensures that the animals are treated well and humanely.

Types of Environmental Ethics

With the emergence of several theories, several environmental ethics have emerged. While some protect human beings, others protect plants, animals and other elements of nature. The types include:

- Social ecology, which is the study of human beings and their relation to their environment.
- Deep ecology promotes that all beings have an intrinsic value.
- Ecofeminism is a branch of feminism that helps us look at earth as a woman so that we can respect it in a better way.

Evolution of environmental problems

The way we look at environmental problems has been influenced by developments in science and by the changing way society treats environmental issues.

Ecology and environmental science Environmental

Ecology originated as a part of plant biology during the 19th century, a series of papers were published which dealt with concepts, ideas and techniques of analysis, which we would now consider as being part of ecology. Another landmark in the progress of knowledge was set by Charles Darwin. He identified the environment as a force shaping plant and animal physiology and behavior, and postulated -the theory of competition among animals as a mechanism for enhancing species survivability. The most frequently cited definition of ecology also stems from this period and it is ascribed to Haeckel, who in 1866 during his inaugural speech as professor of Botany at the University of Jena in Germany, defined ecology as "the study of the reciprocal relations between living organisms and their biotic and abiotic environment".

Societal roots

Although it is easy to show that societal factors have substantially contributed to environmental problems and to the perception of them, it is much more difficult to list them in a systematic way. The following is an attempt to show that the social impact is as important as the "autonomous" scientific development. Nature conservation movement: the exact origin of the nature conservation movement is unclear. There is no doubt that for example, by the middle of the 19th century, romantic painters in Paris organized actions to save parts of the forest of Fontainebleau. Such actions were however patchy, unstructured and rather occasional. More structured and permanent active groups, such as the Nature Trust in Great Britain and the Sierra Club in the United States, were established by the end of the

last century. They are important to this debate for a variety of reasons: - they promote the idea of nature as a value not only because it is important to man, but because of its own intrinsic qualities, - both their organizational structure and the instruments they use to reach their targets.

Ethical Aspects of Environmental Management

There are three major significance that the environment can have for humanity:

- (1) quality of life,
- (2) intrinsic value and
- (3) the means of production.

An environmental problem occurs when an individual or organization believes that the relationship between him and the environment has suffered some unwanted changes. This happens when one of the three meanings is affected so much that a group of people considers it to be problematic. Consequently, environmental problems are not individual but are social problems. The problems regarding environmental protection currently hold special significance, not only in terms of the technical aspect, but also morally. The idea that man is the owner of his nature turned into the perspective that man must ensure a balance between consumption and use of resources. Currently, environmental issues evolve as fast as mankind develops and we get to face increasingly more destructive consequences of this development. Unfortunately, environmental issues are complex, specific and complicated because of their economic, social, cultural, technical size that we need to consider when trying to solve them. This complexity can be reduced only by changing human behavior towards the environment. Thus, it is necessary for humanity to adopt and harmonize ethical dimensions with scientific, economic, social and legislative aspects in order to control the environmental pollution and aiming at achieving an effective protection of the environment.

The environment is affected by a number of factors that generate destructive effects in the long-term or even permanently. Everything starts from the lack of minimum ethical principles and it continues with items that have a negative impact on the environment as directly as possible.

Among the factors that most often bring damage to the environment we can mention:

- ♣ The lack of research responsibility – the desire to achieve profit regardless of the environment;
- ♣ The technology - a growing consumption of energy, having as main consequence the weakening of the environment;
- ♣ The religious orientation – it is considered that the only reason of nature's existence is to serve man;

- ♣ The lack of environmental education - too few educational institutions give due consideration to showing environmental protection principles among children and adolescents;
- ♣ The overdevelopment – its main effect in the long term is an economic downturn;
- ♣ The over consumption - the main factor generating destructive effects on the environment;
- ♣ The lack of social responsibility of most organizations - which had as main objective the achievement of profit by any means.

Unfortunately, the sense of voluntary responsibility and the desire to become sustainable were not the main motivations for most organizations when they undertook a series of environmental initiatives. The main reason that these actions took place was to comply with legal requirements and regulations. Thus corporate culture, aggregation of expectations, beliefs and values, must perceive greening in the long term as a key business value, which should become an inherent activity, rather than a conscious problem. We're pretty close to the end of current consumption habits and current lifestyle. Some problems occur suddenly and unexpectedly, so that the moment science will be caught up is inevitable. For example, we don't know when an ecological crisis might occur, in addition to the economic crisis of the last years or which will be the environmental impact of certain current technological breakthroughs such as the use of nanotechnology, the use of biofuel and the use of alternative energy. Therefore, it is imperative that every individual and every organization builds their own ethical framework to relate with nature through the assessment of the consequences of their own behavior on nature. Environmental ethics is a discipline in applied ethics which deals with the moral analysis of how companies, shareholders, employees, buyers act on the environment. Environmental ethics has emerged as a new discipline that joins ethical values of the natural world. Environmental ethics tries to engross some principles and moral values on the environment, in the same way in which ethics, in general, has an impact on business, medicine, engineering or technology. Many organizations face problems incorporating some ecological principles such as sustainable development and environmental protection in their management practices. One of the main reasons for the difficulties in implementing environmental strategies, is the difficulty to find a balance between economic and social factors. Aiming at effective participation in global environmental protection, environmental ethics specialists began to be actively involved, since the beginning of 1990, in implementing environmental ethics principles in establishing the organizations' policies.

There are three main reasons for the introduction of good environmental practices:

- ♣ accepting responsibility for the conservation of natural resources;
- ♣ awareness of development opportunities through the establishment of measures to protect the environment and reduce costs, thereby increasing income;
- ♣ avoiding or reducing the risks, such as ignoring environmental problems or facing economic sanctions.

Therefore, we wanted to continue with identifying several instances where environmental ethics was both a central and important point in addressing some economic initiatives of organizations.

The philosophy of Aldo Leopold

Aldo Leopold (January 11, 1887 – April 21, 1948) was an American author, philosopher, naturalist, scientist, ecologist, forester, conservationist, and environmentalist. He was a professor at the University of Wisconsin and is best known for his book *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), which has sold more than two million copies.

Leopold was influential in the development of modern environmental ethics and in the movement for wilderness conservation. His ethics of nature and wildlife preservation had a profound impact on the environmental movement, with his ecocentric or holistic ethics regarding land. He emphasized biodiversity and ecology and was a founder of the science of wildlife management.

Early on, Leopold was assigned to hunt and kill bears, wolves, and mountain lions in New Mexico. Local ranchers hated these predators because of livestock losses, but Leopold came to respect the animals. One day after fatally shooting a wolf, Leopold reached the animal and was transfixed by a "fierce green fire dying in her eyes." That experience changed him and put him on the path toward an ecocentric outlook. He developed an ecological ethic that replaced the earlier wilderness ethic that stressed the need for human dominance. His rethinking the importance of predators in the balance of nature has resulted in the return of bears and mountain lions to New Mexico wilderness areas.

By the early 1920s, Leopold had concluded that a particular kind of preservation should be embraced in the national forests of the American West. He was prompted to this by the rampant building of roads to accommodate the "proliferation of the automobile" and the related increasingly heavy recreational demands placed on public lands. He was the first to employ the term "wilderness" to describe such preservation. Over the next two decades, he added ethical and scientific rationales to his defense of the wilderness concept. In one essay, he rhetorically asked, "Of what avail are forty freedoms without a blank spot on the map?" Leopold saw a progress of ethical sensitivity from interpersonal relationships, to relationships to society as a whole, to relationships with the land, leading to a steady diminution of actions based on expediency, conquest, and self-interest. Leopold thus rejected the utilitarianism of conservationists such as Theodore Roosevelt.

By the 1930s, Leopold was the nation's foremost expert on wildlife management. He advocated the scientific management of wildlife habitats by both public and private landholders rather than a reliance on game refuges, hunting laws, and other methods intended to protect specific species of desired game. In his 1933 book *Game Management*, Leopold defined the science of wildlife management as "the art of making land produce sustained

annual crops of wild game for recreational use." He once pointed out, he also considered it to be a technique for restoring and maintaining diversity in the environment.

The concept of "wilderness" also took on a new meaning; Leopold no longer saw it as a hunting or recreational ground, but as an arena for a healthy biotic community, including wolves and mountain lions. In 1935, he helped found the Wilderness Society, dedicated to expanding and protecting the nation's wilderness areas. He regarded the society as "one of the focal points of a new attitude—an intelligent humility toward Man's place in nature." Science writer Connie Barlow says Leopold wrote eloquently from a perspective that today would be called Religious Naturalism.

Nature writing

Leopold's nature writing is notable for its simple directness. His portrayals of various natural environments through which he had moved, or had known for many years, displayed impressive intimacy with what exists and happens in nature. This includes detailed diaries and journals of his Forest Service activity, hunting and field experience, as well as observations and activities at his Sand County farm. He offered frank criticism of the harm he believed was frequently done to natural systems (such as land) out of a sense of a culture or society's sovereign ownership over the land base – eclipsing any sense of a community of life to which humans belong. He felt the security and prosperity resulting from "mechanization" now gives people the time to reflect on the preciousness of nature and to learn more about what happens there; however, he also wrote, "Theoretically, the mechanization of farming ought to cut the farmer's chains, but whether it really does is debatable."

A Sand County Almanac

The book was published in 1949, shortly after Leopold's death. One of the well-known quotes from the book which clarifies his land ethic is,

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

The concept of a trophic cascade is put forth in the chapter, "Thinking Like a Mountain", wherein Leopold realizes that killing a predator wolf carries serious implications for the rest of the ecosystem a conclusion that found sympathetic appreciation generations later.

Land ethic

In "The Land Ethic", a chapter in *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold delves into conservation in "The Ecological Conscience" section. He wrote: "Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land." He noted that conservation guidelines at the time boiled down to: "obey the law, vote right, join some organizations, and practice what conservation is profitable on your own land; the government will do the rest." (p. 243–244)

Leopold explained:

The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land. This sounds simple: do we not already sing our love for and obligation to the land of the free and the home of the brave? Yes, but just what and whom do we love? Certainly not the soil, which we are sending helter-skelter down river. Certainly not the waters, which we assume have no function except to turn turbines, float barges, and carry off sewage. Certainly not the plants, of which we exterminate whole communities without batting an eye. Certainly not the animals, of which we have already extirpated many of the largest and most beautiful species. A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these 'resources,' but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state. In short, a land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.

REFERENCES

1. National environmental management authority (NEMA) - <https://www.nema.go.ke/>
2. Introduction to Environmental Management 1st by Mary K. Theodore, Louis Theodore
3. Uehara, Thiago Hector Kanashiro; Otero, Gabriela Gomes Prol; Martins, Euder Glendes Andrade; Philippi Jr, Arlindo; Mantovani, Waldir (June 2010).
4. World Commission on Environment and Development (2 August 1987). "Our Common Future, Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development". Development and International Co-operation: Environment. United Nations.
5. Levy, David L (1997). "Environmental management as political sustainability". *Organ. Environ.* 10 (2): 126–147.
6. Prasad, Pushkala; Elmes, Michael (2005). "In the name of the practical: unearthing the hegemony of pragmatics in the discourse of environmental management".
7. Colby, M.E. (September 1991). "Environmental management in development: the evolution of paradigms". *Ecological Economics*.
8. Berman, Morris (1981). *The Reenchantment of the World*. Cornell University Press. ISBN 978-0-8014-9225-9.
9. Pepper, David; Perkins, John W.; Youngs, Martyn J. (1984). *The Roots of Modern Environmentalism*. Croom Helm. p. 145. ISBN 978-0-7099-2064-9.
10. Purser, Ronald E.; Montuori, Alfonso (1996). "Ecocentrism is in the Eye of the Beholder".
11. Thampapillai, Dodo J. (2002). *Environmental economics: concepts, methods, and policies*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-553577-8.
12. Kneese, Allen V.; Ayres, Robert U.; D'Arge, Ralph C. (1970). *Economics and the environment: a materials balance approach*. Resources for the Future; distributed by the Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore. ISBN 978-0-8018-1215-6.
13. Daly, Herman E.; Cobb, John B. Jr (1994). *For The Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future*. Beacon Press. ISBN 978-0-8070-4705-7.
14. Walters, Carl J. (1986). *Adaptive management of renewable resources*. Macmillan. ISBN 978-0-02-947970-4.
15. United Nations Environment Programme (1978). Holling, C.S. (ed.). *Adaptive environmental assessment and management*.