

Module 4 - ENVIRONMENTAL WORLDVIEWS AND ETHICS
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Time Frame: 9 hours

Introduction

In the previous topic, you learned about environmental problems & issues. Why don't people just join hands & cooperate to solve these problems? Why are some people passionate about protecting the environment, while others don't care (and some are in-between)?

The answer lies in the differences in people's environmental worldviews and ethics. Even within your family, you may have different personalities, despite having the same family background. Similarly, when it comes to taking care of the world we live in, people have different cultural and social backgrounds and desires in life. Differences in worldviews and ethics affect our actions, how we treat our environment. Hence, our individual actions toward the environment are shaped by the environmental worldviews that we hold.

Objectives:

At the end of this lesson, the students should be able to:

- discuss how environmental ethics affect our actions toward the environment
- relate environmental worldviews to Filipino culture/traditions and own actions
- empathize with different environmental attitudes and create a visual expression of these

Answer the questions in the following page before proceeding to the next pages.

---cut along this line and return to your instructor when you meet face-to-face---

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Course/Year/Section	
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quiz 10pts ABC (1056)

Pre-test. Using the **bubble sheet** on page 1, shade the letter of your answer to the following:

1. It is a topic of applied ethics that examines the moral basis / moral foundation of environmental responsibility
 - a. social ethics
 - b. environmental ethics
 - c. Christian ethics

For question numbers 2 to 7, select your answer from the following choices:

- a. anthropocentrism
- b. biocentrism
- c. ecocentrism

2. The view that all environmental responsibility is based on human benefits alone
3. Sees humans as conquerors of the land
4. Sees land as a community to which we belong
5. "Mother Earth" should have the same right to life as any mother
6. The environment itself, not just the living organisms that inhabit it, has moral worth
7. All forms of life have an inherent right to exist

For question numbers 8 to 10, select your answer from the following choices:

- a. development
- b. conservation
- c. preservation

8. Tends to strike a balance between unrestrained development and preservationism
9. Assumes that humans are the master of nature; Earth exists solely for humans
10. This view wants to see large portions of nature intact.



Pause and ponder. Answer this brief survey on your own and compare answers with your classmates when you are done.

Put a ✓ mark under your rating for the following:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I bring my own eco-bag when buying from stores / market.					
2. I bring my own water bottle to avoid buying bottled water.					
3. I love taking care of plants.					
4. I love taking care of animals.					
5. I walk instead of ride short-distance errands to avoid pollution.					

Learning Activities

Did you and your classmates have the same views about the environment based on your answers above? Or did your answers vary? Read along as you discover why this was so.

A. Environmental Ethics (from Tyler Miller & Spoolman, 2018)

Ethics:

- is a branch of philosophy that seeks to define what is right and what is wrong
- comes from the Greek word “ethos” which means “character”
- Ethics can help us to understand what actions are wrong and why they are wrong.

Cultural Relativism:

- acknowledges that not all cultures share the same ethical commitments
- Despite the presence of some differences, there are also many cases in which ethical commitments can and should be globally agreed upon.
- The rights to life, liberty, and security of person, for example, are judged to be important across the globe.

Ethics and Laws

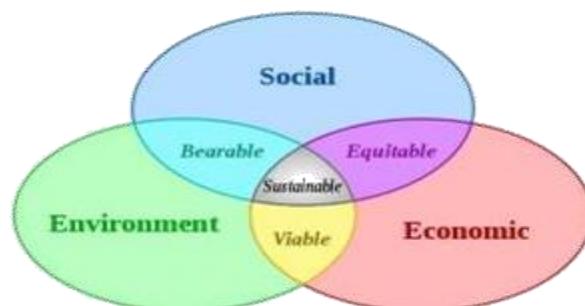
- Ideally, a nation’s laws should match its citizens’ ethical commitments
- Sometimes laws are changed to match ethical commitments only after a long period of struggle and debate.
- Care is needed in deciding when it is appropriate to legislate something and when action should be left up to the individual’s sense of right and wrong.

Conflicting Ethical Positions

- Searching for genuine “win-win” situations has become a priority in environmental decision making.

Figure 1

Sustainable development factors



Note. Source: Creative Commons



Pause and ponder: Can religious sectors make a great contribution to solving our environmental dead-end? Why or why not?

B. The Three Philosophical Approaches to Environmental Ethics (Environmental Worldviews)

Anthropocentrism (human-centered environmental worldview)

- views that all environmental responsibilities are derived from human interest alone
- assumes that only human beings are morally significant and have direct moral standing
- the value of the environment lies in its instrumental worth for humans

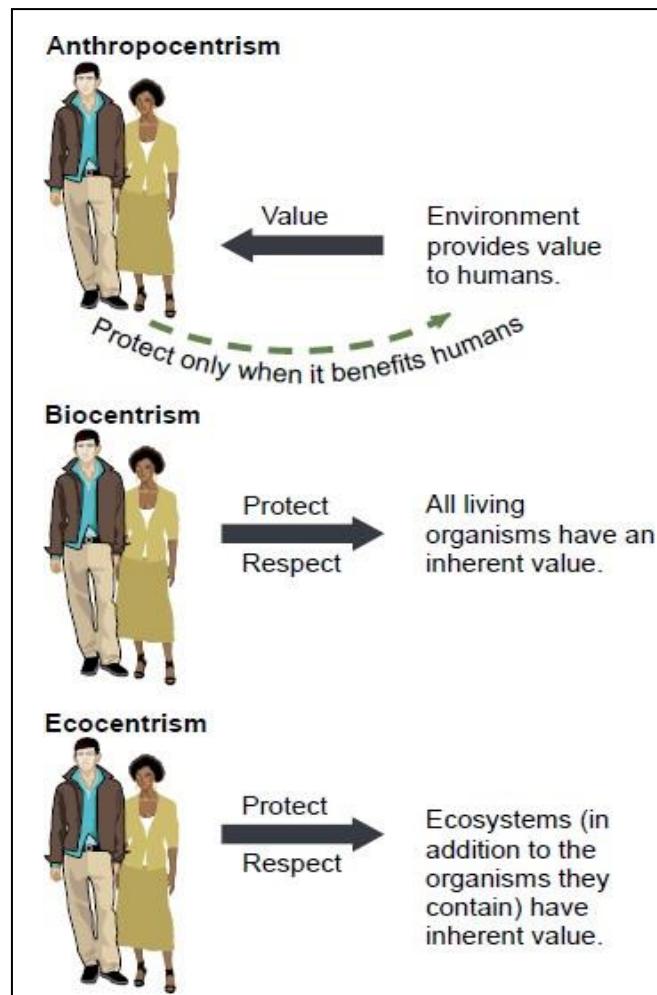
Biocentrism (life-centered environmental worldview)

- views that all forms of life have an inherent right to exist
- some biocentrists assume that there is a hierarchy of values among species: humans have a greater responsibility to protect animals than plants, or mammals than invertebrates
- other biocentrists are biocentric egalitarians who believe that all living organisms have an exactly equal right to exist

Ecocentrism (earth-centered environmental worldview)

- views that the environment deserves direct moral consideration and not consideration that is merely derived from human (anthropocentric) or animal (biocentric) interest.
- assumes that the environment itself, not just the living organisms that inhabit it, has a moral worth
- suggests that “Mother Earth” or “Gaia” should have the same right to life as any mother.

Figure 2
Philosophical approaches to environmental ethics



Note. From Environmental Science: A Study of Inter-relationships (12th ed) [E-Reader Version], by E. D. Enger & B. F. Smith, 2010.



Critical Thinking. Read the following statement from Aldo Leopold's chapter "The Land Ethic" in his 1949 book *A Sand County Almanac*.

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. . . . The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively the land . . . 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.

It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense.

1. Is the statement anthropocentric, biocentric, or ecocentric?
2. What are the key terms that persuade you to think your stand?

Other Philosophical Approaches:

Ecofeminism

- the view that there are important theoretical, historical, and empirical connections between how society treats women and how it treats the environment
- the view that social hierarchies are directly connected to behaviors that lead to environmental destruction



Deep Ecology

- the generally ecocentric view that a new spiritual sense of oneness with the Earth is the essential starting point for a more healthy relationship with the environment
- Many deep ecologists are environmental activists.



Environmental Pragmatism

- an approach that focuses on policy rather than ethics ("pragmatism" means thinking of or dealing with problems in a practical way, rather than by using theory or abstract principles –Collins dictionary)
- Environmental pragmatists think that a human-centered ethic with a long-range perspective will come to many of the same conclusions about environmental policy as an ecocentric ethic.
- Consequently, they find the emphasis on ethical theories unhelpful.

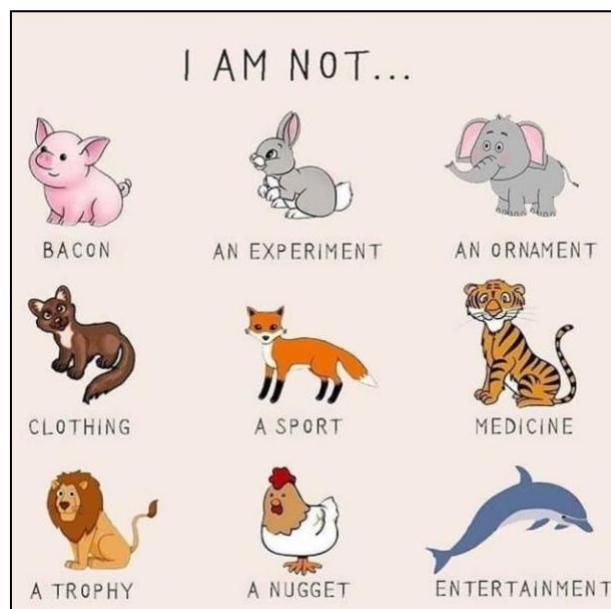
Environmental Aesthetics

- the study of how to appreciate beauty in the natural world
- Some environmental aesthetics advocates think that the most effective philosophical ground for protecting the natural environment is to think in terms of protecting natural beauty.

Animal Rights/Welfare

- asserts that humans have a strong moral obligation to nonhuman animals.
- Strictly speaking, this is not an environmental position because the commitment is to individual animals and not to ecosystems or ecological health.
- Animal rights advocates are particularly concerned about the treatment of farm animals and animals used in medical research.

Figure 3
Sample animal rights poster



Note. From www.imgur.com



Local Context. Do you know of any environmental organization here in the Philippines? In our region? In your city/municipality? What philosophical approach do they stand for? List them below.

C. Environmental Attitudes toward the environment found in modern society

Sometimes it is easier to talk in terms of general *attitudes or approaches* to the environment rather than in terms of specific ethics. The three most common attitudes are:

Development

- This approach tends to be the most anthropocentric of the three.
- assumes that the human race is and should be master of nature and that the Earth and its resources exist solely for our benefit and pleasure.
- the environment has value only insofar as human beings economically utilize it



Preservation

- tends to be the most ecocentric of the three common attitudes toward the environment
- Rather than seek to convert all of nature over to human uses, preservationists want to see large portions of nature preserved intact.
- "Nature has intrinsic value or inherent worth apart from human uses."
- While many preservationists adopt an ecocentric ethic, some also include



anthropocentric principles in their arguments. These preservationists wish to keep large parts of nature intact for aesthetic or recreational reasons. They believe that nature is beautiful and restorative and should be preserved to ensure that wild places exist for future humans to hike, camp, fish, or just enjoy some solitude.

Conservation

- tends to strike a balance between unrestrained development and preservationism.
- Conservationism is anthropocentric in the sense that it is interested in promoting human well-being. But conservationists tend to consider a wider range of long-term human goods in their decisions about environmental management
- Examples: hunting; allowing forests to regenerate after timber harvesting; water conservation, energy conservation



Filipino Heritage. List down some examples of Filipino culture and traditions that reflect specific environmental worldviews. Also list some of your actions affecting the environment and the worldview these reflect. Write your answers on the table below.

Filipino culture / traditions	Environmental worldview
1.	
2.	
3.	
My actions that affect the environment	
1.	
2.	
3.	

**Critical Thinking.**

Watch the film “Before the Flood” (National Geographic, 2016; see Google Classroom for the link to access the movie). After watching the film, answer the following questions:

1. Differentiate between the environmental ethics of developed and developing countries.
2. Describe the corporate ethics portrayed in the film.
3. Is there a need for a global environmental ethics? Why or why not?

Supplemental learning:

- “Environmental Ethics” (Enger & Smith, 2010 pp. 14-35)

Self-evaluation

Imagine a forest like the picture on the right. Three people, with different environmental worldviews, are looking at it. How do you think each of them would view the forest? Why?

- a. A developer
- b. A preservationist
- c. A conservationist



Google Classroom

Classwork. On a short bond paper, create a poster of what one of the three characters mentioned in “Self-Evaluation” imagines when he/she looks at the forest. Choose any of the following modes for your poster:

- Collage
- Hand-drawing / painting
- Poster created using an app / program

Write a one-sentence description of your work below it then upload your work (scanned image / photo / screenshot) in Google Classroom (see “Classwork” in Google Classroom):

Name	Course/Year/Sectio
Character: (choose one: developer, preservationist, or	
poster here	
One-sentence description	

Review of Concepts

- **Environmental ethics** – a topic of applied ethics that examines the moral basis / moral foundation of environmental responsibility
- Philosophical approaches to environmental ethics: **anthropocentrism, biocentrism, ecocentrism**
- Environmental attitudes: **development, preservation, conservation**

Post-test



1. Quiz and oral recitation during face-to-face meeting

References

Enger, Eldon D. and Smith, Bradley F. (2010). Environmental Science: A Study of Inter-relationships (12th ed) [E-Reader Version]. NY: McGraw Hill Higher Education.

Tyler Miller, G., & Spoolman, S. (2018). Living in the Environment. Cengage Learning.