

Environmental values

Environmental ethics must be **informed** by contemporary science but **cannot** be based on science alone.

Francis Bacon said that the goal of science is the conquest of nature, for "knowledge is power." "Let the human race recover the right over nature which belongs to it by divine bequest."

In the last two centuries Mechanistic science, dualistic philosophy, industrial technology, and capitalist economics all encourage human domination over nature.

The theory of evolution seemed to undermine humanity's unique status. Darwin's studies brought out the interconnectedness of the web of life and the complex balance of interactions in the biological world.

Four concepts have been especially important in the 20th century ecology:

1. *The ecosystem concept.* The interconnected web of life must be considered as a system; a change at one point can have far-reaching repercussions at other points.
2. *Finite limits.* One of the most significant implications of ecology is its challenge to prevailing assumptions about unlimited growth.
3. *Ecological stability.* Diversity in an ecosystem contributes to its stability and adaptability.
4. *Longtime spans.* Ecologists urge us to think about the consequences of our actions on future generations.

Attempts to use technology to extend the carrying capacity of the environment are running into the law of diminishing returns and the prospect of delayed side effects.

Human benefits from the environment.

We should "humanize and perfect nature" all respecting its vulnerability.

Duties to future generations.

Can there be obligations to people who do not exist?

A factor in discounting the future is the prevalent confidence that technological advances will provide solutions to environment resource problems.

It is impossible to consider an indefinitely long series of future generations in policy decisions. But in the case of renewable resources, such as fish, timber, and crops, the same result can be obtained by aiming for the *maximum sustainable yield*. Once the maximum sustainable yield is exceeded, people are then consuming productive biological "capital" rather than living on the "interest" that could continue indefinitely. They're stealing the wealth of their children and grandchildren.

With respect to the non-renewable resources, such as minerals or fossil fuels, justice between generations would require that *the resource base* should not be depleted more rapidly than it can be extended by technology.

Respect for all forms of life.

Aristotle, Aquinas, and Kant, asserted that we have no direct duties toward animals because they cannot reason. *Rationality* was the criterion for whom we have a moral responsibility towards. Utilitarians said that *sentience*, not rationality, determines whether a being can be the object of our moral obligations.

In process philosophy, all living things are valuable, but they are not equally valuable.

To process thinkers, all entities derive significance from their participation in the divine life. The process view leads to respect for all forms of life, commitment to the distinctive values of human life, and a general framework for judging their relative importance in a conflict.

Religion and environmental values

Taosim in China portrays the world as an organic, interconnected system. Nothing exists in isolation; the parts of the whole are interpenetrating and interfused.

Chinese communism shares of Marxist assumption that nature is an object conquest.

The first chapter of Genesis includes the commission to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing" (1:28). A number of authors have claimed that the biblical idea of dominion was the main historical root of environmentally destructive attitudes in the West.

Aristotle stated that other creatures are devoid of the contemplative activity in which humans are most akin to God; plant and animal life exists solely for the sake of human life. Cicero insisted that we have no obligation to respect animals because they are not rational beings.

In the 13th century, St. Francis expressed eloquently a deep love of the natural world and a sense of union with it. He saw nature as a living whole and all creatures as objects of God's love, and hence as significant in their own right. Most theologians assumed that humanity would be saved *from* nature *not* in and with nature.

Traditional Christianity overemphasized divine *transcendence* and the gap between God and nature.

According to process theology, God transcends nature but is also imminent in the temporal process. This implies that nature is not to be exploited, on the one hand, or worshiped, on the other, but it is to be respected and appreciated, for it is the scene of God's continuing activity.