

Environmental Ethics

Environmental Ethics

- Environmental ethics is the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its nonhuman contents.
 - Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Different Foci of Environmental Ethics

- 1. Anthropocentric
 - Human centered
 - The environment has value only for what it can provide for us

Value of Environment

- Instrumental Value
 - The environment has value because it helps people to reach some end
 - Food
 - Shelter
 - Clothing
 - Medicine
 - Entertainment

Ecosystem Services

- Ecosystem Services are the processes by which the environment produces resources that we often take for granted such as clean water, timber, and habitat for fisheries, and pollination of native and agricultural plants.

Ecosystem Services

- moderate weather extremes and their impacts
- disperse seeds
- mitigate drought and floods
- protect people from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays
- cycle and move nutrients
- protect stream and river channels and coastal shores from erosion
- detoxify and decompose wastes
- control agricultural pests
- maintain biodiversity
- generate and preserve soils and renew their fertility
- contribute to climate stability
- purify the air and water
- regulate disease carrying organisms
- pollinate crops and natural vegetation

Value of Ecosystem Services

- In the 1990s a group of ecologists attempted to estimate the monetary value of ecosystem services
 - Estimates ranged from 18 – 52 trillion dollars!
 - Mean- 33 trillion
- Equal to 1.8 times the GDP of the USA

Frontier Ethic

- A frontier ethic assumes that the earth has an unlimited supply of resources.
- If resources run out in one area, more can be found elsewhere or alternatively human ingenuity will find substitutes.
- This attitude sees humans as masters who manage the planet.

Judeo-Christian Ethic

Genesis 1 28

And God blessed them, and God said to them, "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 that moves upon the earth."

Different Foci of Environmental Ethics

- 2. Biocentric ethic
 - views all life as possessing intrinsic value.
- Intrinsic value
 - Aspects of the environment have inherent value just because they exist

Biocentric Ethic

- an individualistic biocentric ethic recognizes intrinsic value in every living thing
- a holistic biocentric ethic recognizes species or aggregates of living things
 - species are not living, so some argue that it is not possible to have holistic approach because “species” are not living

Biocentric Ethic

- an egalitarian biocentric ethic accords equal value to all living things
- A nonegalitarian biocentric ethic would give greater value to certain living things over others.



Foci of Environmental Ethics

- Ecocentric ethic
 - All aspects of the environment, both living and non-living, have inherent value



Land Ethic

- Developed by American Aldo Leopold
 - Sand County Almanac- 1939
- Leopold thought that ethics direct individuals to cooperate with each other for the mutual benefit of all.
- He argued that this ‘community’ should be enlarged to include non-human elements such as soils, waters, plants, and animals, “or collectively: the land”.

Ecofeminism