

Environmental Ethics: Duties to the Ordinary World

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Abstract

Environmental justice is a crucial framework that ensures fair and equitable access to clean air, water, and natural resources for all, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable populations. It addresses the environmental inequalities and injustices that disproportionately impact ordinary people and communities. This research highlights the pressing need to bridge the gap between environmental protection and social equity, ensuring that no community bears an undue burden of environmental degradation while others reap the benefits. The paper advocates for practices of stewardship and conservation at individual, community, and societal levels. These practices include responsible management of natural resources, sustainable land use, habitat restoration, and conservation efforts aimed at preserving the ordinary elements of the natural world. It emphasizes the importance of protecting local environments, common resources, and everyday landscapes that form the backbone of human and ecological well-being. By safeguarding these elements, the study promotes a sustainable future and a healthier planet for generations to come. Central to the research is the concept of environmental ethics, which defines the moral responsibilities humans have toward the ordinary, often overlooked aspects of the natural world. "Environmental Ethics: Duties to the Ordinary World" argues that beyond grand gestures of conservation, everyday landscapes and resources demand equal attention and care. The paper underscores the value of local ecosystems and highlights how these are critical to maintaining the ecological balance and quality of life for all species. Additionally, the study calls for collective action to restore and protect ordinary natural elements. It emphasizes the interdependence between human well-being and environmental stewardship, advocating for policies and initiatives that prioritize conservation. By fostering environmental justice and ethical responsibility, the research urges societies to adopt sustainable practices that not only reduce disparities but also promote a balanced relationship with nature. Ultimately, this research offers a vision for a future where communities, individuals, and policymakers work collaboratively to protect and preserve the ordinary natural world, ensuring its continuity for present and future generations.

Keywords: vulnerable, marginalized, inequalities, conservation, resources, stewardship

INTRODUCTION

Environmental ethics is a critical branch of philosophy that examines the moral obligations and responsibilities humans have toward the environment. It explores how individuals, societies, and governments should interact with nature, considering ethical principles such as stewardship, sustainability, and justice. With growing concerns over climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and pollution, the importance of ethical decision-making in environmental conservation has become more evident.

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One of the fundamental aspects of environmental ethics is environmental justice, which ensures equal

access to clean air, water, and natural resources, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable communities. Environmental ethics also promotes sustainable practices, advocating for responsible use of natural resources to maintain ecological balance for future generations. Furthermore, it emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature, recognizing that ecosystems and non-human beings deserve ethical consideration beyond their utility to humans.

By fostering a deeper understanding of the relationship between humans and the environment, environmental ethics encourages policies and actions that prioritize conservation, restoration, and equitable resource distribution. This paper examines key ethical frameworks, including anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, and biocentrism, and their relevance in addressing modern environmental challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Environmental ethics has evolved over the decades, integrating diverse philosophical perspectives to address complex environmental issues. This section explores the key theories and concepts that have shaped the field.

Theoretical Foundations of Environmental Ethics

One of the earliest discussions on environmental ethics emerged from the anthropocentric perspective, which prioritizes human well-being and development. Scholars argued that environmental conservation should primarily serve human interests. However, ecocentric and biocentric perspectives later challenged this notion introduced the land ethic, suggesting that humans are a part of a larger ecological community and should act as stewards rather than exploiters of nature [1].

The deep ecology movement, introduced by advocates for a fundamental shift in human consciousness, promoting the intrinsic worth of all living beings. Similarly, Singer (1975) emphasized animal ethics, arguing that non-human species deserve moral consideration. These theories collectively shape modern environmental decision-making by integrating ethical responsibility into conservation and sustainability efforts [2].

Environmental Justice and Ethical Considerations

The concept of environmental justice gained prominence in the 1980s, highlighting the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities. The examined how low-income and minority populations often suffer from industrial pollution, deforestation, and resource depletion. He argued that ethical environmental policies must ensure equal access to clean resources and protection against environmental hazards [3-5].

Recent studies emphasize the role of indigenous knowledge and ethics in environmental conservation. Berkes (1999) explored how indigenous communities practice sustainable resource management based on deep ecological and spiritual values. Such traditional wisdom aligns with stewardship ethics, which advocate responsible management of natural resources [6].

Sustainability and Ethical Resource Management

Sustainability is a core principle of environmental ethics, aiming to balance ecological preservation with human development. The Brundtland Report (1987) [7] defined sustainability as meeting present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet theirs. Scholars like emphasize the importance of ecological economics, which integrates ethical considerations into economic policies to ensure resource longevity.

Additionally, ecosystem services have become a focal point in environmental ethics research. categorized these services into provisioning (food, water), regulation (climate, pollination), supporting (soil formation, nutrient cycling), and cultural (recreational, spiritual) benefits. Recognizing these services' ethical and economic significance helps in formulating conservation strategies.

Holistic Approaches to Environmental Ethics

Modern environmental ethics incorporates holistic and interdisciplinary approaches to address global ecological challenges. proposed adaptive environmental management, which integrates science, ethics, and policy to create sustainable environmental solutions. Similarly, emphasized the importance of recognizing human-nature interconnectedness, advocating for collaborative efforts in addressing environmental crises [8].

Furthermore, ethical discussions on climate change responsibility have gained traction. explored the climate ethics dilemma, arguing that developed nations have a moral duty to assist vulnerable communities facing climate change consequences. This perspective supports the broader ethical obligation to preserve biodiversity, restore ecosystems, and ensure a just environmental transition.

Environmental ethics-

1. The study of the moral interaction between people and the natural world is known as environmental ethics. It looks at issues including the moral duties people have to the environment, the inherent worth of nature, and the values that ought to govern how people interact with the environment. The following are some essential ideas and precepts in environmental ethics:
2. *Anthropocentrism vs. Ecocentrism*: Anthropocentrism is the view that places human interests and well-being at the center of moral consideration, often prioritizing human needs over those of the environment. In contrast, ecocentrism considers the entire ecological system, including non-human beings and ecosystems, as deserving moral consideration.
3. *Intrinsic Value*: Regardless matter how beneficial nature is to humans, environmental ethics examines if it has intrinsic value, which is the idea that something has intrinsic worth and merits moral attention.
4. This perspective challenges the notion that nature is valuable only for its instrumental or economic value to humans.
5. *Stewardship*: Humans have an ethical obligation to preserve and care for the environment. It highlights the notion that people ought to take responsible care of the planet, protecting biodiversity and natural resources for both the current and coming generations.
6. *Biocentrism*: Biocentrism extends moral consideration to all living beings, not just humans, based on the idea that all organisms have inherent value and interests that deserve respect and consideration.
7. *Deep Ecology*: This philosophical viewpoint highlights the inherent worth and interdependence of all living things and ecosystems.
8. It advocates for a radical shift in human consciousness and behaviour towards a more eccentric worldview, emphasizing humility, respect for nature, and the recognition of humans as part of a larger ecological community.
9. *Environmental Justice*: Environmental ethics also tackles environmental injustices and inequities that disproportionately impact underprivileged people, as well as the equitable allocation of environmental benefits and costs.
10. *Sustainability*: The idea of sustainability, which stresses addressing current demands without sacrificing the capacity of future generations to address their own, is supported by environmental ethics. It demands that natural resources be used responsibly and that long-term environmental effects be considered when making decisions [9].
11. *Environmental Responsibility*: Environmental ethics underscores the moral responsibility individuals, corporations, governments, and societies have towards the environment. It calls for accountability and ethical decision-making in environmental policy, resource management, and everyday actions.
12. *Holistic*: Environmental ethics frequently takes a holistic stance, acknowledging the interdependence of all environmental components and the significance of taking the larger ecological context into account when making moral decisions.

13. *Environmental Virtue Ethics*: The development of virtues that govern moral behavior toward the environment, such as humility, compassion, and ecological wisdom, is the main goal of environmental virtue ethics. It places a strong emphasis on developing values that support peaceful and long-lasting interactions with nature.
14. Overall, environmental ethics provides a philosophical framework for addressing complex ethical dilemmas and guiding ethical decision-making in environmental conservation, resource management, and sustainability efforts. It promotes introspection about our ethical duties to the environment and the values that ought to direct our relationships with the natural world.

Top of FormEnvironmental ethics explores the values inherent in and the duties owed to the natural world.

Environmental ethics often considers whether nature has intrinsic value, meaning it possesses worth in and of itself, independent of human interests or utility. This viewpoint contradicts the anthropocentric belief that the worth of nature is purely utilitarian and determined by how beneficial it is to humans [10].

Biodiversity is recognized as a fundamental value in the natural world. It encompasses the variety of life forms, ecosystems, and ecological processes, which contribute to the resilience, stability, and beauty of the Earth's biosphere.

The term "ecosystem services" refers to the advantages that people obtain from nature, such as providing services (like food and water), regulating services (like pollination and climate regulation), and cultural services (like recreational and aesthetic value) and supporting services (e.g., nutrient cycling, soil formation).

Aesthetic Value: Nature is valued for its aesthetic qualities, including its beauty, diversity, and intricacy. Aesthetic appreciation of nature fosters a deeper connection to the natural world and enhances human well-being.

Spiritual and Cultural Significance: Many cultures and indigenous traditions regard nature as sacred or imbued with spiritual significance. Nature plays a central role in cultural identities, rituals, and belief systems, reflecting deep connections between humans and the natural world.

Duties to the Natural World

Stewardship: Stewardship refers to the moral obligation that people have to preserve and care for the environment. It entails conserving biodiversity, managing natural resources responsibly and sustainably, and taking long-term environmental effects into account when making decisions.

Environmental Justice: The significance of environmental justice, which entails guaranteeing just treatment and an equitable distribution of environmental benefits and responsibilities, is emphasized by environmental ethics. It tackles injustices and environmental disparities that disproportionately impact underprivileged areas.

Sustainability: A key idea in environmental ethics, sustainability emphasizes the necessity of addressing current demands without sacrificing the capacity of future generations to address their own.. It calls for responsible use of natural resources, reduction of environmental degradation, and promotion of social and economic equity.

Respect for Non-human Beings: Environmental ethics extends moral consideration to non-human beings, recognizing their intrinsic value and interests. It involves treating animals, plants, and ecosystems with respect and consideration, avoiding harm and exploitation, and promoting their well-being.

Holism and Interconnectedness: Environmental ethics places a strong emphasis on how all aspects of the ecosystem are interconnected and how crucial it is to take the larger ecological context into account when making moral decisions.

It recognizes that actions in one part of the ecosystem can have far-reaching consequences for other beings and ecosystems.

In summary, environmental ethics acknowledges the intrinsic value of nature and advocates for ethical duties and responsibilities towards the natural world, including stewardship, environmental justice, sustainability, respect for non-human beings, and recognition of interconnectedness and holism. These values and duties provide a framework for ethical decision-making and action to promote the well-being of both humans and the environment.

Different viewpoints and methods for figuring out the moral relationship between people and the natural world are all included in environmental ethics.

Anthropocentrism: This human-centered perspective on environmental ethics places the interests and welfare of people first. This perspective often justifies environmental protection based on the benefits it provides to humans, such as ecosystem services, economic value, or recreational opportunities.

Biocentrism: This philosophy extends morality to all living things, not just humans. It acknowledges that non-human beings have intrinsic worth and concerns that should be respected and taken into account. Biocentrism highlights the value of protecting biodiversity and the inherent value of all living things.

Ecocentrism: Ecocentrism takes a holistic approach to environmental ethics, viewing the entire ecological system as deserving moral consideration. It promotes the preservation of ecological integrity and the health of the biosphere overall by highlighting the connection and connectivity of all living things and ecosystems.

Deep Ecology: This philosophical viewpoint highlights the inherent worth of all living things and ecosystems. It calls for a radical shift in human consciousness and behaviour towards a more eccentric worldview, promoting humility, respect for nature, and recognition of humans as part of a larger ecological community.

Environmental Pragmatism: Environmental pragmatism focuses on practical solutions to environmental problems, emphasizing the importance of experimentation, adaptation, and flexibility in addressing sustainability challenges. It seeks to find common ground between different ethical perspectives and prioritize actions that are effective and achievable in specific contexts.

Environmental Virtue Ethics: This field of study focuses on cultivating virtues that lead to ethical behavior toward the environment, such as humility, compassion, and ecological wisdom. It places a strong emphasis on developing values that support peaceful and long-lasting interactions with nature.

Feminist Environmental Ethics: Feminist environmental ethics examines the intersections between gender, nature, and justice. It critiques traditional approaches to environmental ethics for their focus on domination, control, and hierarchy and advocates for more relational and care-based ethics that prioritize interconnectedness, empathy, and nurturing.

Animal Rights and Animal Liberation: Animal rights and animal liberation ethics focus on the moral consideration of non-human animals and advocate for their rights to life, freedom, and protection from harm. These perspectives challenge anthropocentric assumptions about the superiority of humans and the moral justification for exploiting animals for human purposes.

Social Ecology: Social ecology explores the connections between social and environmental issues, emphasizing the importance of addressing root causes of environmental degradation, such as social inequality, injustice, and exploitation. It advocates for ecological solutions that promote social justice, democracy, and grassroots empowerment.

Conservation Ethics: Conservation ethics focuses on the ethical principles and values underlying conservation efforts, such as preserving biodiversity, protecting endangered species, and maintaining ecological integrity. It considers questions of stewardship, sustainability, and responsibility towards future generations in conservation decision-making.

These different types of environmental ethics offer diverse perspectives on the moral dimensions of human interactions with the natural world, providing frameworks for ethical reflection, decision-making, and action in environmental conservation, resource management, and sustainability efforts.

Effects of Environmental Education on Environmental Ethics

Environmental education plays a significant role in shaping environmental ethics by fostering awareness, understanding, and values related to the natural world. Here are some effects of environmental education on environmental ethics:

Enhanced Awareness: Environmental education increases knowledge of environmental problems such as pollution, resource depletion, biodiversity loss, and climate change. People have a better understanding of the significance of environmental conservation and protection by learning about these issues.

Knowledge of Interconnectedness: People who receive environmental education are better able to comprehend how ecological systems are interrelated and how human activity affects the environment.

Through studying ecological concepts like ecosystems, biodiversity, and ecological interdependencies, individuals develop a deeper appreciation for the complexity and fragility of the natural world.

Development of Environmental Values: Environmental education fosters the development of environmental values, such as stewardship, responsibility, and respect for nature. By exploring ethical principles and discussing environmental dilemmas, learners reflect on their moral obligations to the environment and the importance of protecting natural resources for present and future generations.

Promotion of Pro-environmental Attitudes and Behaviours: Environmental education promotes pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours by encouraging individuals to adopt sustainable lifestyles and practices. Through hands-on activities, field trips, and community engagement initiatives, learners are inspired to take action to reduce their environmental impact and advocate for environmental conservation.

Empowerment and Agency: People who get environmental education are better equipped to serve as proactive change agents both within and outside of their communities.

By providing knowledge, skills, and resources, education equips people with the tools they need to address environmental challenges and contribute to sustainable solutions.

Cultivation of Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills: Environmental education cultivates critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills that are essential for addressing complex environmental issues. By analysing environmental problems from multiple perspectives and exploring diverse solutions, learners develop the ability to evaluate evidence, weigh trade-offs, and make informed choices.

Creation of Environmental Leaders and Advocates: Environmental education cultivates future environmental leaders and advocates who are passionate about protecting the environment and promoting sustainability. By fostering leadership skills, communication abilities, and a sense of social responsibility, education prepares individuals to effectively advocate for environmental policies and initiatives at local, national, and global levels.

1. *Integration into Ethical Frameworks and Worldviews:* Environmental education integrates environmental ethics into individuals' ethical frameworks and worldviews, influencing their values, beliefs, and decision-making processes. By exploring ethical principles and values related to the environment, learners develop a deeper understanding of their moral responsibilities towards nature and their role in creating a more sustainable future.

Overall, environmental education has a profound impact on shaping environmental ethics by raising awareness, fostering values, promoting pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours, empowering individuals, cultivating critical thinking skills, and integrating environmental ethics into ethical frameworks and worldviews. A stronger bond with nature and a stronger desire to protect it for present and future generations are fostered by education.

CONCLUSION

Environmental ethics offers a vital philosophical framework for addressing the complex relationship between humanity and the natural world. By exploring diverse ethical perspectives, including anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, and biocentrism, this paper has highlighted the moral obligations humans have toward preserving the environment and its ecosystems. The core principles of environmental ethics, such as stewardship, sustainability, environmental justice, and respect for non-human life, provide a comprehensive approach to addressing current environmental challenges and ensuring a balanced relationship between human development and ecological integrity.

The growing impact of environmental degradation, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, necessitates the adoption of ethical frameworks that promote responsible resource management and equitable distribution of environmental benefits. It is essential that individuals, communities, and governments alike recognize the intrinsic value of nature and prioritize environmental justice, especially for marginalized and vulnerable populations who bear the brunt of ecological inequalities.

In addition, the importance of incorporating holistic and interdisciplinary approaches to environmental ethics cannot be overstated. Integrating traditional ecological knowledge, scientific advancements, and ethical decision-making in policies will help create a more just and sustainable future for all. As we move forward, it is imperative that we not only address the immediate environmental concerns but also take a long-term view of the health of the planet, recognizing the interconnectedness of all life.

In conclusion, environmental ethics provides a robust moral foundation for creating sustainable, just, and ethical interactions with the natural world, encouraging a collective responsibility to protect and preserve the ordinary, everyday elements of our environment for present and future generations.

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