

Ch. 29 - Environmental Worldviews, Ethics, and Sustainability

A.D. 2060: Green Times in Planet Earth

Now is the time to decide what to do about our environment

Fossil fueling, fish harvesting, population, and extinction rates are all out of control. If they stay at current levels, we may not have much of an earth to live on in the future.

Environmental Worldviews in Industrial Societies

Clash of cultures and values

Environmental ethics: right versus wrong environmental behavior.

Environmental worldviews: the ways people think the world works, what they think their role in the world should be, and what they feel is right and wrong environmental ethics.

1. **Individual centered** (atomistic): usually human centered (anthropocentric) or life centered (biocentric).
2. **Earth centered** (holistic): either ecosystem centered or ecosphere centered.

Major Human-centered Worldviews

Most have planetary management worldview: human beings, as the planet's most important and dominant species, can and should manage the planet mostly for their own benefit. Other species merely have instrumental value: their value depends on whether they are useful to us.

Basic beliefs:

We are the most important species, and we are in charge of nature.

There are always more resources.

All economic growth is good, and our potential for economic growth is limitless.

Success depends on how well we can understand, control, and manage earth's life-support systems for our benefit. Schools of thought:

No problem school - all problems can be solved with technology.

Free-Market school - the best way to manage earth is to use a free-market global with minimal government interference and regulation. All public property would become private.

Responsible planetary management - hold enlightened self-interest, or the thought that better earth-care is better self-care. Want to mix economy, technology, and government intervention

Space-ship-earth view - earth is a spaceship, with a complex machine that we can understand and manage.

Stewardship - we have a responsibility to care for and be responsible for the earth and we should treat it as our guardian.

Life-Centered and Environmental-Centered Worldviews

Managing the Planet

Some feel that we will not necessarily be able to learn technology fast enough to save the Earth. Also, a free market would rely too much on resources.

We don't understand the Earth, so they question how we could possibly manage it. Major Biocentric and Ecocentric Worldviews

We should realize the inherent value of nature. Everything has a right to exist.

Some go so far as to have a species-centered view, also known as the animal rights movement

They think preventing injury to species will save the money it takes to protect endangered species.

Some hold the **Earth-Wisdom Worldview**:

Nature exists for all of earth's species. There is not always more.

Some forms of economic growth are environmentally beneficial, but some are destructive.

Success depends on our willingness to cooperate with earth.

Are Biocentrists Antihuman/Antireligious

Those with the views of ecocentrism feel they are prohuman.

They feel they are helping the earth, which helps us.

Ecofeminist Worldview

Idea that being human centered and androcentric (male-centered) is the problem with the environment.

Being male-dominant, we are destroying nature.

Want to emphasize gentleness, caring, compassion, non-violence, cooperation, and love.

Social Ecology Worldview

As long as we have an industrial society, we will be damaging the environment.

This will cause decentralization of political and economic systems.

Living Sustainably

Evaluating Sustainability

We don't know the answer to environmental questions, so we ought to follow the pre-cautionary principle - use prevention guidelines and strategies for developing sustainable societies. Ethical Guidelines for Earth

Ethical Guidelines for Working with the Earth

1. Ecosphere and Ecosystems

We should try to understand nature.

When we must alter nature, first we should do our best to avoid environmental harm.

2. Species and Cultures

We should work to preserve genetic diversity.

We may do what we must to stay alive, but we should do what it takes to avoid premature extinction of other species.

We must protect ecosystems to save species.

No human culture should become extinct because of present actions.

3. Individual Responsibility-

We should not cause any suffering to our food sources.

We should leave the earth better than we found it.

We should use only what we have.

We should heal the wounds we have already caused.

Earth Education - We should teach our children about our earth:

Respect life.

Understand earth.

Understand interactions of humans and the earth.

Seek wisdom.

Evaluate personal worldviews.

Evaluate consequences of lifestyles and professions

Use critical thinking skills.

Want to help the earth.

Learning to work with Earth

Listen to our children, who favor saving the earth.

Learn to make our own area sustainable.

Have fun saving the earth.

Learning to Live Simple: Gandhi's Philosophy of Voluntary Simplicity –
"Do and enjoy things more with less."

It is based on Gandhi's **Principle of Enoughness**- the earth provides enough to satisfy every person's need but not every person's greed. We should use the minimal amounts of everything. This is not the same as forced simplicity that plagues those that cannot afford to have possessions.

Law of Progressive Simplification - we must transfer energy from material to nonmaterial.

Moving on

We need to stop blaming and start taking responsibility.

We must avoid the four traps:

1. Avoid the common mental traps that lead to denial, indifference and inaction:

Gloom and doom pessimism - feeling it's over

Blind technological optimism - science will save us

Fatalism - we have no control of the future

Extrapolation to infinity - if there's no quick fix, why bother?

Paralysis by analysis - try to find the perfect solution before acting

Only faith in simple answers

2. We must realize no one can do it all.
3. Hope is vital.
4. There is more than one possible solution.

Components of the Earth-Wisdom Revolution

Efficiency revolution to make the most of the earth

Pollution prevention

Sufficiency revolution- being sure that everyone has his or her basic needs.

Demographic revolution- balance population growth.

Seeing the world as a flow of matter and energy.