

# H1-Environmental Ethics

by  
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## H2-Introduction

This year, there are a large number of kritiks that generally fit under the rubric of “environmental ethics” or ecophilosophy — an inquiry into the ethical value of the physical world and what values ought to drive environmental protection. Theorists writing within the field of environmental ethics argue that particular ethical frameworks are superior to others. Contests over which ethical framework to endorse will drive your environmental ethics kritik debates.

**...“our relationship with nature should be valued based on how our interactions with nature affect human beings...”**

## H2-Cornerstone Philosophies

There are a number of foundational environmental philosophies that drive most of the environmental ethics kritiks. Each are briefly introduced in this section and discussed in further detail in the sections that immediately follow.

*Anthropocentrism.* Anthropocentrism is the view that our relationship with nature should be valued based on how our interactions with nature affect human beings. Arguments that “we need to save the oceans to save humankind” fit into this category.

*Intergenerational Anthropocentrism.* Intergenerational anthropocentrists argue that human behavior should be judged based on how likely a particular practice is to threaten future generations. Arguments such as “global warming will destroy life on earth for future generations” fit into this category.

*Nonanthropocentrism.* Nonanthropocentrists argue that our behavior toward nature should be evaluated based on how it affects other living beings and ecosystems. Arguments such as “global warming will destroy all non-human life on the earth” fit under this rationale.

Nonanthropocentrists often advocate policies that

protect species and the ecosystem at the expense of human populations. Rolston (1994) argues that “conserving the Earth is more important than having more people” (p. 233). Naess (1989) argues that the “flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease” (p. 29).

*Biocentrism.* Biocentrists argue that our behavior toward the environment should only be evaluated on how it affects *living* things. This *includes* human beings. Often in debates, “Biocentrism” is associated with the argument that *only non-human life* matters, but what Biocentrists really argue is that only living things matter. Ecosystems, since they are not actually alive themselves, are not valued in a Biocentric paradigm – way of viewing the world.

*Ecocentrism.* Ecocentrists argue that our behavior toward nature should be evaluated on how it impacts the entire ecosystem and not just living things. Rolston (1994a), an Ecocentrist, writes that “an important ethical constraint in environmental decisions is concern for the integrity, stability, and beauty of biotic communities” (p. 82). Debaters often assume that Biocentrism and Ecocentrism are the same. But, there is an important distinction: Biocentrism is primarily concerned with the survival of non-human species whereas Ecocentrism is concerned with the survival of the entire ecosystem, including humans.

*Ontological Criticisms.* Ontological criticisms question the fundamental relationship we assume with nature. Vogel (2002), for example, argues that if we see ourselves as separate from nature – as an outside force that comes in and destroys it – we will never be able to solve the environmental crisis.

*Deconstruction.* Deconstruction, a philosophical concept advanced by Jacques Derrida that argues that all experiences are *contextual* that there are no fundamental ecological essences. Vogel (2002) explains that “when the naturalist think persists....when we talk about nature we do so in categories we do so in categories drenched in contingent history and sociality...we hear (as so often in these discussions) what Derrida calls the moment of deferral, as each failed attempt to get to the ultimate foundation produces yet another claim that it’s just around the next bend. No experience is immediate; *all* experience only becomes possible on the basis of prior history, culture, thought – *and* on the basis, too, of prior human transformations of those landscapes we call

natural.” Vogel (Ibid) explains that this philosophy challenges most traditional environmental philosophy because “environmental philosophy is thus characterized by a deep naturalism that claims to find in pre-social nature the basis for ethical and political imperatives. But it is the very idea of such a naturalistic basis that practices of deconstruction call into question, teaching us to look for the unexpressed and unexamined assumptions that lie behind such claims.” (p. 30) Soule (1995) and Rolston (1994) argue that deconstructionist philosophy threatens the environment because it assumes that the environment is not “real.”

## H2-The Implications

The significance of the impact of disagreements related to environmental ethics is itself a hotly contested issue within the literature. Norton (1991) argues that the entire debate is not that significant since all advocates favor environmental protection and thus reach the same policy conclusions (p. 86).

Despite this criticism, a number of scholars argue that it is important to critically examine the ethics that drive how we relate to nature. Taylor (1986) writes that “It makes a practical difference in the way we treat the natural environment whether we accept an anthropocentric or a biocentric system of ethics” (p. 136). Vogel (2002) argues that unless we adopt an appropriate environmental ethics, the core causes of environmental problems will never be addressed:

This recognition in turn would include the realization that nowadays it is mostly for worse and not for better: the world of toxic waste dumps and ugly superhighways and dangerous global warming and ozone holes we confront is precisely the world produced by our own actions when they are *not* tempered by any recognition of responsibility, but rather occur in the context of a global economic system organized not make it impossible to acknowledge the social causes and consequences of our acts. The question for environmental theory is “what does nature require?” but rather “what sort of environment ought there to be?” or more to the point “what practices ought we to engage in?” The critical force of such a theory lies in point out that today the question is never asked, and certainly it is never democratically answered, and that as a result the environment we inhabit is the unplanned outcome of a whole series of private decisions that are made for private gain in a way that leaves it structurally impossible to take into account their public consequences” (pp. 36-7).

## H2-Moving On To Specific Arguments

The sections that follow describe each of the main environmental frameworks in more detail and discuss more practically how they each will function as debate arguments.

Each of the arguments can be contextualized in terms of the “cornerstone” environmental philosophies just discussed. Social Ecology is an anthropocentric philosophy that argues that we must address fundamental *human inequality* before environmental problems can be solved. Deep Ecology, a non-anthropocentric philosophy that finds itself in direct clash with Social Ecology, argues that as long as we prioritize human concerns we will never solve environmental problems. Ecofeminism is an anthropocentric environmental philosophy that argues that we must address gender inequality before solving environmental problems.

Ecophenomenology address our ontological relationship with the environment. Ecopsychology is difficult to classify, but also deals with the fundamental relationship we have with the environment.

Understanding each of these philosophies and how they function is important for all debaters because each criticize traditional approaches to environmental policy-making. Affirmatives that are unable to defend their approach or criticize alternative approaches are not likely to win many debates.

## H2-Social Ecology

Social Ecology is an environmental philosophy that was begun and developed by Murray Bookchin, now the Director Emeritus of the Institute for Social Ecology at the University of Vermont. As the bibliography demonstrates, Bookchin is a prolific author whose work is easily accessible. The cornerstone philosophy that is most directly associated with Social Ecology is anthropocentrism since it is concerned with *human* inequality and how that inequality impacts the environment.

The primary claim of Social Ecology is that environmental problems are “social” in nature – that all of our ecological problems arise from deep-seated social problems. Bookchin claims that our present ecological problems cannot be solved until social problems in society, particularly forms of inequality, are solved. Bookchin explains:

Indeed, to separate ecological problems from social problems—or even to play down or give token recognition to this crucial relationship— would be to grossly misconstrue the sources of the growing environmental crisis. The way human beings deal with each other as social beings is crucial to addressing the ecological crisis. Unless we clearly recognize this, we will surely fail to see that the hierarchical mentality and class relationships that so thoroughly permeate society give rise to the very idea of dominating the natural world. Unless we realize that the present market society, structured around the brutally competitive imperative of “grow or die,” is a thoroughly impersonal, self-operating mechanism, we will falsely tend to blame technology as such or population growth as such for environmental problems. We will ignore their root causes, such as trade for profit, industrial expansion, and the identification of “progress” with corporate self-interest. In short, we will tend to focus on the symptoms of a grim social pathology rather than on the pathology itself, and our efforts will be directed toward limited goals whose attainment is more cosmetic than curative.

## H3-Winning the Kritik

*Winning the link.* The link will be the least difficult part for the negative to win. Most affirmatives will operate within the current economic-socio-political paradigm (capitalism/liberal democracy) that will continue to avoid confronting fundamental inequality.

*Winning the impact.* The negative will not have much difficulty winning the impact either. There is very good evidence from Bookchin that says unless we embrace a less hierarchical world environmental problems will continue.

*Winning the competitiveness.* If the affirmative has the right evidence, this will probably be the most difficult part of the argument for the negative to win. Although there is very good evi-

dence that traditional approaches undermine less hierarchical approaches that the negative should read, there is also very good evidence from the negative's authors that says we should support practical measures in the interim even if those measures are anthropocentric. The negative will need to do a very good job refuting the permutation, spinning the plan as something very undesirable.

*Respond to criticisms.* There are many strong criticisms of social ecologists, particularly from Deep Ecologists. Deep Ecologists argue that it is not social inequality that is the root of environmental problems, but rather our entire philosophical outlook. One problem using the Deep Ecology criticism of Social Ecology to respond on the affirmative is that most affirmatives are not likely to adopt a deep ecological perspective.

### **H3-Defeating the Kritik**

The best approach for affirmatives that do not adopt radical environmental policies is to argue for the environmental pragmatist position that was discussed in the introduction to this section. Although it is possible from a theoretical perspective to criticize Social Ecology from the perspective of Deep Ecologists, most affirmatives will not embrace a Deep Ecological framework, so it would be quite unwise to criticize Social Ecology from this point of view.

### **H2-Deep Ecology Kritik**

Deep Ecology is an environmental movement philosophy that was started by Arnie Naess, a Norwegian philosopher, in 1972. Naess argued that we needed a "deeper" understanding about humanity's relationship with nature. Instead of a more anthropocentric approach that assumes that humans are unique we need to conceive of ourselves simply as one integral part of the biosphere. To support this "deep ecology" Naes argued that people need a self-realization where we learn to identify with plants and animals rather than our own families. Other scholars have supported Naess' work by drawing on the work of Martin Heidegger.

The Deep Ecology kritik argues that rather endorsing the affirmative plan, which is likely to simply carry-on with the existing anthropocentric approach, we need to embrace a realization that we are just one part of the biosphere. Since most affirmatives, such as the Law of the Sea, assume that we as humans can manipulate nature for our own ends and control it, they will fail to endorse the realization that Naess calls for and may actually undermine it.

### **H3-Winning the Kritik**

*Winning the link.* The link will be the least difficult part for the negative to win. Most affirmatives will use modern scientific methods to protect the environment and will claim that if it is protected that humans will be in a unique position to benefit from those improvements. This is the heart of anthropocentrism.

*Winning the impact.* The negative will not have much difficulty winning the impact either. There is very good evidence from authors such as Zimmerman that says unless we embrace a deep ecological, biocentric worldview that we will not be able to survive an ecological apocalypse.

*Winning the competitiveness.* If the affirmative has the right evidence, this will probably be the most difficult part of the argument for the negative to win. Although there is very good evidence that anthropocentric approaches undermine Biocentric approaches that the negative should read, there is also very good evidence from the negative's authors that we should support prac-

tical measures in the interim even if the measures are anthropocentric. The negative will need to do a very good job refuting the permutation, spinning the plan as something very undesirable.

*Respond to criticisms.* There are many strong criticisms of deep ecologists, particularly from Social Ecologists. These criticisms were discussed in the previous section. Deep Ecologists do respond to these criticisms and the negative should be prepared with answers.

### **H3-Defeating the Kritik**

*Attacking the competitiveness.* As just discussed, the weakest point of the kritik is the competitiveness. The affirmative should read, and extend, the evidence that advocates combining both approaches. You can find this in the "negative" sources.

*Argue Deep Ecology is bad.* There are many criticisms of Deep Ecology. First, many radical environmentalists such as *Earth First!* have adopted the philosophy and argue that it means that since humans play no special role they must be eliminated when necessary to save the environment. Some *Earth Firsters* have even embraced things like AIDS as the solution to environmental problems. Many argue that such logics are genocidal. Second, many Social Ecologists argue that Deep Ecologists ignore and mask the *social* roots of environmental destruction such as authoritarianism, patriarchy, and racism.

## **H2-Ecofeminism**

Ecofeminists argue that environmental problems cannot be solved until the problem of patriarchy – the domination of men over women — is addressed because that inequality/oppression is reflected in how we treat nature/the environment. Ecofeminism was originally a French project. Simon de Beauvoir argue in 1952 that in the logic of patriarchy both women and nature appear as other. In 1974, Francoise d'Eaubonne coined the term "l'ecodomination" and argued it was necessary for women to begin the ecological revolution. The movement began in the U.S. in the same year when Sandra Marburg and Lisa Watson hosted a conference at Berkeley entitled "Women and the Environment."

Since then, Karen Warren has led the charge for an Ecofeminist approach toward environmental ethics, arguing that environmental problems cannot be solved until patriarchy is overcome and also defending Ecofeminism against its critics. If you only have time to do limited reading on the argument, and you want to defend the approach, you should read her 2000 book. Ecofeminism is most closely associated with the anthropocentric and Social Ecology perspectives, as it argues that inequality must be addressed before environmental problems can be effectively confronted.

### **H2-Winning the Kritik**

Negatives who want to run the Ecofeminism kritik should argue that since the affirmative not only fails to solve patriarchy, but also may perpetuate it through traditional governmental action, that they will be unable to solve the environmental crisis. They should suggest an alternative along the lines of "rejecting patriarchy" to solve.

### **H2-Defeating the Kritik**

Criticisms of Eco-feminism are similar to criticisms of most "feminist" positions. The best criticisms include.

Essentialism. Essentialism is the notion that feminist cri-

tiques assume that all women are “essentially” the same and that when you argue that all women are essentially the same that that just increases gender oppression.

Classism and racism. Many scholars critique feminist philosophy by arguing that its more esoteric claims are only relevant to wealthy, usually white women.

Counter-kritiks. Affirmatives can argue that patriarchy is not the root of oppression but rather that other things are the root of oppression, such as classicism/capitalism or racism and that they solve those kritiks.

## H2-Ecophenomenology

The Ecophenomenology kritik is based on the philosophical principle of phenomenology – that reality only consists of objects and events as we perceive them and that they have no independent meaning beyond that interaction. Phenomenology insists that we should just let “things be themselves” and not commit them to theoretical constructs that make them static. Instead, we should allow them to assume new identities/understandings/meanings in the ever-changing context of human social relations. Phenomenology was developed by Edmund Husserl in 1905.

Martin Heidegger, studying Husserl, argued that phenomenology was a method of ontological investigation, which addresses the nature of being. Some philosophers argue that until we properly understand the nature of being we will never be able to solve contemporary crises, such as environmental crises. This kritik is associated with Deep Ecology and concerns our fundamental ontological relationship with the environment.

### H2-Winning the Kritik

To win the kritik, the negative needs to argue that the affirmative does not have the proper phenomenological approach to the environment – to simply let things be. Most affirmatives will link to this argument as they will attempt to manipulate the environment in particular ways in order to fulfill certain goals.

### H3-Answering the Kritik

The most common criticism of the kritik is that radical approaches to environmental ethics fail and that environmental pragmatism is needed. Many of the criticisms of Deep Ecology are also relevant.

## Ecopsychology

### Introduction

According to the International Community for Ecopsychology ([www.ecopsychology.org](http://www.ecopsychology.org)), Ecopsychology is “situated at the intersection of a number of fields of inquiry, including environmental philosophy, psychology, and ecolocology...ecopsychology suggests that there is a synergistic relation between planetary and personal well being...” In other words, in order to solve environmental problems, we need to be in harmony with nature, and to be in harmony with nature, we need to be in harmony with ourselves, which requires being psychologically in tune with nature.

Ecopsychologists argue that in order to live properly we need to recognize that there is more to our individual selves and that we need to connect with what is universal, such as the environment, and particularly, the oceans.

According to Ecopsychology Online, there are eight principles of ecopsychology:

1. The core of the mind is the ecological unconscious....Open access to the ecological unconscious is the path to sanity.....
2. The contents of the ecological unconscious represent, in some degree, at some level of mentality, the living record of cosmic evolution, tracing back to distant initial conditions in the history of time.
3. Just as it has been the goal of previous therapies to recover the repressed contents of the unconscious, so the goal of ecopsychology is to awaken the inherent sense of environmental reciprocity that lies within the ecological unconscious. ....
4. For ecopsychology as for other therapies, the crucial stage of development is the life of the child.
5. The ecological ego matures toward a sense of ethical responsibility to the planet that is as vividly experienced as our ethical responsibility to other people. ...
6. Among the therapeutic projects most important to ecopsychology is the re-evaluation of certain compulsively “masculine” character traits that permeate our structures of political power and which drive us to dominate nature as if it were an alien and rightless realm...
7. Whatever contributes to small scale social forms and personal empowerment nourishes the ecological ego. Whatever strives for large-scale domination and the suppression of personhood undermines the ecological ego. Ecopsychology therefore deeply questions the essential sanity of our gargantuan urban-industrial culture, whether capitalistic or collectivistic in its organization.....
8. Ecopsychology holds that there is a synergistic interplay between planetary and personal well-being.

### H3-Winning the Kritik

This kritik is won by arguing that the affirmative does not address the cornerstone of the environmental crisis – our psychological relationship with the environment — and that continuing to operate within the mainstream undermines that needed psychological relationship.

### H3-Answering the Kritik

Like the others, the best way to attack this kritik is to defend environmental pragmatism or argue that a “holistic” approach to environmental philosophy is unlikely to succeed (Calicott, 1999).

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