

Environmental Ethics

- Human beings are destroying the planet's resources and its ecosystem (biological community of organisms and their physical environment).
 - **Global warming.**
 - **Destruction of species.**
 - **Industrial and traffic pollution.**

Christian Thought and the Environment

God's Love and his Perfect Creation

- God created the universe out of the abundance of his love – Genesis shows God creating a perfect world out of his limitless love.
- Human beings represent the peak of God's love – humans are special and set apart from other creatures.
 - Genesis 1:27 - created in the image of God.
- Genesis 2 – God gives humanity control over the earth and all its creatures – dominion over nature.

Dominion and Stewardship

- Dominion brings responsibility – duty of care for the environment because God created it.
- God made the world for humanity – the planet needs to be treated with respect and dedication.
- Stewardship – the idea that God put humans in charge of earth – we are then obliged to look after it.

- Old Testament states that the world will one day come to an end – eschaton (the end of the world is the final event in the divine plan).
- The destructive power of humanity has been acknowledged – humans are unable to do what is necessary and this points to the inevitable destruction of the world.
 - Example of The United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen (2009) – minor progress was made to take the world beyond what was agreed at the Kyoto summit of 1997.
- **Martin Luther** – believed that Judgement Day would come after the destruction of the earth.
 - Protestant belief that the world will end in great flourish.
 - The apocalypse – Christians who are dead and alive will rise up to heaven (rapture).
 - The Second Coming of Christ and God's final battle of the Armageddon
- Some Christians believe that everything is in God's hands – there is nothing human beings can do about the environment.

- Other Christians believe that the environmental issues are linked to God's justice – Christians are meant to imitate Jesus and therefore they must be just.
 - Humans have a duty to care and protect the environment as well as to help the less fortunate.

Strengths and Weaknesses

- Concentrates on two main ideas:
 - God created the world out of his love.
 - Human beings have a duty of care – stewardship.
- There is an understanding that ecological issues link to world poverty and social justice – exploitation of the planet is socially unjust.
 - Amazon rainforest – destroying the environment of indigenous people for soya production.
- Anthropocentric (regards humans as the most important species) – humans are at the centre of creation and are responsible for what happens to the environment.
 - This can also be seen as a WEAKNESS – it separates humans from other creations and implies that humans are superior.
 - Doesn't view humanity as one part of the creation.
 - Dominion given to Adam and Eve caused destruction of the planet – this gives humans the belief that they can do as they please.
- James Lovelock – suggests that because Christians believe that God is ultimately in control, all will be well in the end – this removes any human responsibility.
 - Theocentric understanding must be removed – world based around God.

Natural Law – Environment

Vladimir Lossky

- 1904-1958.
- Solution to the problem of anthropocentricity.
- Humans are part of Creation – they are like the heart of the body – the heart is very significant, but it cannot survive if the other organs are not working properly.
- Damage to the environment must be stopped – it is up to human beings to fix any destruction that has already taken place.
- This is an ecocentric approach – belief that rights of humans are not more important than the rights of any other living thing.

Mark Murphy

- Practical method of using reason to calculate what ought to be done morally in a situation.
- He adapted John Finn's list of basic goods needed to create eudaimonia.
 - Life.
 - Knowledge.
 - Aesthetic experience.
 - Excellence at work and play.
 - Freedom,
 - Inner peace.
 - Friendship and community.
 - Religion.
 - Happiness.
- Murphy believed that this list could be applied rationally to life – it would create practical rationality.
- Scott Davison applied this list to Natural Law in the environment – environmental issues could be applied to the list to create eudemonia from global warming.
 - This is important for human development – to lead a moral/good life.
- Bebhinn Donnelly and Patrick Bishop criticised the focus on the benefits to humanity of environmental care.
- The anthropocentric nature of Aquinas' theory means that it does not give the natural world intrinsic value.
- Nature serves human needs – useful because it does not demand respect for what it does.
- Natural Law is just a theory – does not have the tools to be turned into practice – cannot solve environmental problems.

Secular Environmentalism

Deep Ecology

- Arne Naess (1912-2009).
- Invented deep ecology and shallow ecology.
- He loved the sea – this made him:
 - Realise the importance and integrity of nature.
 - Led him to develop the idea of deep ecology and shallow ecology
 - The sea has a deep floor and shallow coastline.
- Deep ecology developed from his understanding of the integrity of nature.
- He rejected any supernatural claims about God and religion – unnecessary when the spiritual nature of the natural world is in front of you – already has a spiritual basis to it.
- Mountains, trees, the river, plants and animals all have a spiritual reality which should be respected – humans are integrated in this structure and are mutually dependent.
- Humans are not special.
- Escosophy – unity of all things – the idea that true knowledge lies in the harmony of creation.
- His belief that nature is harmonic is related to Aristotle and Aquinas' views of a harmonic creation.
- Nature is at the heart of the ecosystem – ecocentrism – every piece of the jigsaw has equal importance.
- Naess' views does not mean that he ignores human beings – humanity is a vital part of the jigsaw of creation.
- Interconnected beliefs:
 - All life has equal intrinsic value.
 - The diversity of life on earth contributes the planet's welfare.
 - No single form of life, including humanity, has the right to destroy the earth's diversity and richness.
 - Human beings are the cause of destruction of the diversity and richness.
 - The growth of the human population and changing lifestyles are the main cause of this destruction.
 - Change is urgently needed to prevent further damage and to restore the ecosystem's variety.
 - Change requires peaceful protest and campaigns to alter the structures and organisations that undermine biodiversity (variety of plant and animal life in the world).
- 1960s – Naess campaigned against the building of hydroelectric power plants – led to changes in Norwegian government policy.
- Contemporary ecologists are divided over how change can be produced.
 - Violent methods used against multinational corporations.
 - Peaceful protests by Naess.

Criticisms

- Arguments about reducing population to prevent the destruction of biodiversity – some ecologists argue that starvation is a natural process and shows that an unsustainable population should be allowed to die.
 - Luc Ferry – refers to this as ecofascism and questions why the land should have equal importance to human life.

Gaia

James Lovelock

- Believes that solutions to changing to the changing nature of the climate cannot be solved by human beings.
- Individual things are part of a bigger entity called Gaia – earth is viewed as a vast self-regulating organism.
- Named after the Greek goddess of the earth.
- This entity is spiritual yet physical.
- Gaia cannot be completely understood by human beings.
- Humans, animals and plants are part of Gaia – like cogs in a machine – the cog cannot understand fully how the machine works or what the machine's purpose is.
- Gaia is a way of looking at the world – imagine the world and everything in it is a single living organism.
- To humans, a rock may seem as a dead rock – there is not such thing, they are part of the living entity that is Gaia.
- Idea that of the earth as a living organism has its origins in Plato.
 - Plato believed that the world is a body made of the four elements – earth, wind, fire and water.
 - These elements cancel each other out – the earth can never get too hot or cold.
- Aristotle and Plato believed that God would not allow the world to self-destruct.
- Lovelock's view of Gaia is anthropomorphic – the attribution of human characteristics to an object, animal or God.
- Francis Bacon – viewed the planets as living things.
- Galileo imagined that planets pulsate.
- Lovelock's work as a scientist at NASA has led him to believe that the earth has a soul – the earth '... behaves as a single, self-regulating system'.
- Lovelock worked with Lynn Margulis – both constructed the Gaia hypothesis.

Criticisms

- The Gaia hypothesis was rejected by neo-Darwinians – rejected the idea that the planet is a single organism.
- Many reject Lovelock's ideas because of their anthropomorphic nature.
 - A development of a weak Gaia theory – accepts the science of the interrelationship of everything on earth, but does not see the planet as a single body.

Shallow Ecology

- Sometimes called social environmentalism.
- Anthropocentric nature – the environment matters because of the effect it has on human welfare.
- At the heart of shallow ecology is the idea of conservation – preservation, protection or restoration of the natural environment and afterlife.
- Shallow ecology does not believe that maintaining biodiversity is virtuous in itself.
 - When effluent is released by accident into the river, fish and other creatures will die, but vast amounts of bacteria flourish and biodiversity may be enlarged.
 - Shallow ecologists would not see this as a good thing – river becomes useless to human beings.
- Human beings come first – natural habitat can be destroyed for the welfare of people.
- Relies heavily on calculations of what is and what is not environmentally beneficial for the welfare of people – utilitarian approach to the environment.
- Shallow ecologists lead the development of National Parks schemes.
 - Undeniable success in making parts of the country that were off limits available.
 - However, tourism damages the environment that the ecosystem was designed to save – cause damage to the landscapes by litter, erosion, disturbance of livestock and vandalism.
 - People travelling to the area can cause traffic congestion and pollution.

Criticisms

- Some environmentalists argue that it is important to morally restore the habitat to its natural state – others say it is not cost effective, life goes on, and nature is always changing.
- Michael Labossiere – species should be allowed to die out if their natural habitat ceases to exist.
 - It is impossible and detrimental to stop changes occurring – adaptability is important – nature will take its course.

Virtue Ethics – Environment

- Virtue Ethics is agent centred – anthropocentric – highlight the moral character of the individual.
- Contemporary ecology rejects the basis of Virtue Ethics – too much of a human centred approach to morality.
 - Humans are too interested in their own short-term gain to look at the long-term implications.
 - Environmentalists prefer an ecocentric approach – looks at the planet as a whole.
- Virtue ethicists try to maintain their agent centred approach whilst also making the ecosystem important as a whole.
- Variety of approaches to Virtue Ethics – Aristotle and Aquinas had different forms of Virtue Ethics:
 - Contemporary Virtue Ethics – looks more at the character of the moral agent and less at the result of a person's actions.
 - The problem with this is that when it comes to the environment, the result of an action is more important than the moral character.
- Virtue ethicists have developed a moral approach to the environment based on the virtues of the individual – ecological change will only occur if our minds and hearts are won over to the environmental causes.
 - This means that character traits are important.
- The moral agent seeks to be virtuous.
 - The first step is to examine the virtues and implant them into the individual.
 - The next step is us changing the environment so that the individual will be virtuous.
 - Looking at the outcome that produces value – Green issues are about result.
 - Many Virtue ethicists consider the telos of environmentalism to be about sustainability (conserving an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources).

Characteristics of a Virtuous Environment

Louke van Wensveen

- There is a need for the ecosystem to be sustained by human self-control.
- There are good and bad character traits connected with environmentalism.
- These include:
 - Care.
 - Loving life.
 - Respect for creatures.
 - Thrift rather than destructive self-indulgence.
 - Inner peace and tranquillity.
 - These character traits bring respect and harmony for the environment.
- Traits need to be tested or the Green environment will be morally counterfeit.
 - If a decision to save the planet was made and a community of indigenous people in the rain forest were to be moved into shanty towns, away from their source of livelihood.
 - Similar to when Native American's were moved away from their Indian Territory.
 - This movement was made to make sure that trade opportunities could be exploited – cheap wheat could be produced to feed America and Europe.
 - Many Native Americans died during this resettlement – might seem virtuous because it was sustaining the human race with cheap food, but it was harmful virtue.
- Van Wensveen argues that there is a possibility that similar events will occur.
 - 1970s – forced sterilization of lower caste men in India to restrict population growth.
- Van Wensveen came up with 4 tests for any virtuous act to ensure sustainability:
 - Repression test – will people be repressed by any environmental reform?
 - Alienation test – will environmental change cause the alienation of the people?
 - Guilt test – is any environmental change being done out of a sense of guilt for past mistakes?
 - Fetishism test – is any environmental change being made because it is the fashion at the moment?
- **Philip Cafaro and Joshua Colt Gambrel** – tried to produce a better understanding of what character traits are needed and needed to be controlled to create a sustainable planet.
- 4 traits that need to be controlled because they damage the environment:
 - Gluttony.
 - Arrogance.
 - Greed
 - Apathy.
- Most important virtue – simplicity.

- People rely on more sophisticated machinery and are always upgrading mobile phones to the latest model.

Strengths

- Stresses the belief that human beings should regard sustainability as the main goal.
- Rejects human arrogance and greed.
- Virtue ethics looks at the relationship with the environment – considers global interests.
- Relative – does not treat all situations the same – understands that there are different environmental issues in different places.
- Focuses on character traits – if a person carries the virtuous character traits, they will do virtuous acts.

Weaknesses

- Agent centred – sustainability is not virtuous because it is in human self-interest to save the planet – anthropocentric nature, assumes that humans are in control of the planet.
 - Agent centred nature means it is difficult when it comes to dealing with global issues.
- Being virtuous and doing virtuous – there is no point in having the virtuous character traits if you are not applying them to your actions – improving the environment.
- No guidelines – hard to apply the virtues to improving the environment when there are no guidelines about how a person can improve the environment.
- Radical relativity – no core values – environmental issues are global concerns
 - the virtue of productivity might be prioritised in some countries.

Kantian Ethics – Environment

- Nature works rationally – nature is enlightened, it works rationally and can be understood through reason.
 - Thomas Wagenbaur – saw the rational foundation of nature as one of the strengths of the Kantian approach to ecology.
- Nature liberates human beings – Kant saw the natural world as logical and purposeful.
 - Nature's purpose is the revealing of autonomy and freedom.
 - Another strength is that it sees the inter-relationship between human beings and creation – they both work in harmony to produce a world where freedom rules.
- Cruelty to animals is irrational and should be avoided – a person who beats his dog is likely to beat his children.
 - He is seen as a brute and he lacks the rational understanding that makes a human being moral.
 - Animals exist to be used by humanity – food, fur – but this comes with the responsibility to treat animals kindly.
- Nature should not be exploited – humans have a duty to themselves to survive.
 - Therefore the destructive exploitation of the environment is immoral – it damages the chances of the human race surviving.
- Nature must not be treated as a means to an end – should be treated as an end in itself.
 - Harmful or cruel acts against other creatures and the environment are condemned as immoral and irrational.
- Nature is intrinsically beautiful – Kant links the aesthetic beauty of the environment to moral goodness.
 - To destroy beauty is illogical – rational people consider beauty to be a vital part of human existence.
 - Biodiversity and places with outstanding natural beauty should not be damaged for profit.

Strengths

- Ends rather than means – environment must be cared for in order for humans to survive (anthropocentric).
- Does not allow emotion to cloud reason – emotions are temporary and unreliable, reason should be used to make environmental decisions because it is more reliable.
- Universalizability – looks at whether an environmental decision can be universalised – takes into account global considerations.
- Objective and absolute – maxims and idea of duty do not allow for subjective interpretation.

Weaknesses

- Anthropocentric approach – assumes that humans are at the centre of existence and the world is made for them – nature, beauty, animals etc.
 - Selfish – encourages human arrogance.

- Human arrogance leads to exploitation of the environment.
- Kant's theory might be more theoretical than practical – 'never lie' is not always possible.
 - Human beings are morally weak – may lie to protect someone.
 - This means that humans can care for the environment, without actually doing anything about it.
 - Universalizability is hard to apply – universalising 'never use fossils' is unrealistic.
- Ignores emotions – sometimes rational decisions are applied to non-rational issues – protecting endangered species deals with emotion.
- Absolute – does not realise that each environmental situation will be different and the same beliefs cannot be applied all the time.
 - Also does not consider individual circumstances or outcomes.
- Duties might conflict – duty to preserve human life and look after the environment at the same time.
 - Kant would encourage valuing humans over the environment – but this might not protect an endangered species.

Utilitarianism – Environment

- Vary when it comes to the environment.
- **Jeremy Bentham** – proud gardener.
 - Naturalism was very important to him – pleasure is preferred to pain because that is how it was in nature.
 - Sentient-centred – concerned with all sentient animals, not just humans.
- **Mill** – in nature, gardens that are unattended turn into wildernesses controlled by weeds.
 - Humanity brings order to nature – stops chaos.
 - Humans enhance biodiversity.
 - Anthropocentric attitude – human beings would rise above the natural environment.
 - Condemns religion and ethical systems that are based on the observation and copying of the natural world.

Modern Utilitarianism

- Consequentialist moral system that looks at the maximisation of happiness and welfare.
 - Some suggest that human beings' welfare should be maximised.
 - Mill believed animals should be treated with dignity – not doing this would create harmful effects on humans.
 - Dog fighting is morally wrong because unnecessary suffering is caused to the animals and those involved.
- Bentham's approach is different – 'the question is not, Can they reason? Nor, Can they talk? But, Can they suffer?'
- Peter Singer argued that sentient animals should be considered equally when considering environmental issues.
- Would a hydroelectric dam be built if it meant that a large number of sentient animals would be drowned? – But humans are dependent on electricity?
- Qualitative Utilitarianism – Mill's concept of higher pleasures – analysis of moral actions that take into account the quality of happiness and welfare produced.
 - What sort of environment would be needed to maximise the quality of life of humans and sentient creatures?
- Quantitative Utilitarianism – Bentham's ideas concerning the greatest good for the greatest number – an analysis of actions that take into account the quantity of happiness or welfare produced.
 - Looks for an environment that will maximise the welfare benefits for the maximal number of people and sentient creatures.

Strengths

- Teleological/consequentialist – considers the outcome of an environmental decision – whether it will cause more happiness than harm.
 - Long-term gain for short-term harm.

- Everyone's pain and pleasure is considered – environmental issues are global issues that affect everyone.
- Relies on observation – environmental damage can be seen – effects can be considered for the future.
- Relative – acknowledges that every situation is different.
 - Weighs up each environmental issue – these issues vary from country to country.

Weaknesses

- Hard to predict the consequences – no one knows the exact impact of our actions, including environmental actions.
- It is impossible to quantify pleasure and pain – how do we judge environmental pain and pleasure?
 - Should future generations be included in the idea of the greatest good for the greatest number?
- Minority suffers – sometimes a the minority will be allowed to suffer for the environmental benefit of the majority – people being moved out of their homes to grow cheap food.
- Act utilitarian can justify almost any act – no action is banned – destruction of the rainforests would be allowed.
- Utilitarianism ignores duty – some environmental actions might be intrinsically right or wrong.