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**“Environmental Ethics – Human Beings’ Ethical Relationship
with the Natural Environment !!!”
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Introduction:

Ethics or moral philosophy is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct.

As a branch of philosophy, ethics investigates the questions "What is the best way for people to live?" and "What actions are right or wrong in particular circumstances?" In practice, ethics seeks to resolve questions of human morality, by defining concepts such as good and evil right and wrong, virtue and vice, justice and crime. As a field of intellectual enquiry, moral philosophy also is related to the fields of moral psychology, descriptive ethics, and value theory.

Environmental ethics is an elaborate concept that has been subject of debate among scholars and environmentalists. This field of ethics theory and practices mainly deals with duties and values with regards to the environment. Environmental ethics essentially involves the concern of the people for the welfare and conservation of the environment. On the other hand, another argument considers the interrelationship between humans, plants and animals as constituting environmental ethics in the entire ecosystem. Environmental ethics entails the human moral responsibility towards the environment.

Environmental ethics is a branch of ethics that studies the relation of human beings and the environment and how ethics play a role in this. Environmental ethics believe that humans are a part of society as well as other living creatures, which includes plants and animals. These items are a very important part of the world and are considered to be a functional part of human life. Thus, it is essential that every human being respect and honor this and use morals and ethics when dealing with these creatures.

Definition of Environmental Ethics :

As per Nature.com, “Environmental Ethics is a branch of applied philosophy that studies the conceptual foundations of environmental values as well as more concrete issues surrounding societal attitudes, actions, and policies to protect and sustain biodiversity and ecological systems.”

According to Wikipedia, “Environmental Ethics is the part of environmental philosophy which considers extending the traditional boundaries of ethics from solely including humans to including the non-human world. It exerts influence on a large range of disciplines including environmental law, environmental sociology, ecotheology, ecological economics, ecology and environmental geography.”

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Importance of Environmental Ethics:

Global Warming, Global Climate Change, Deforestation, Pollution, Resource Degradation, Threat of Extinction are few of the issues from which our planet is suffering. Environmental ethics are a key feature of environmental studies, that establishes relationship between humans and the earth. With environmental ethics, you can ensure that you are doing your part to keep the environment safe and protected. Every time that a tree is cut down to make a home or other resources are used we are using natural resources that are becoming more and more sparse to find. It is essential that you do your part to keep the environment protected and free from danger. It is not as difficult to do as you may think so long as you're willing to make a few simple and easy changes.

Environmental Ethics builds on scientific understanding by bringing human values, moral principles, and improved decision making into conversation with science. It was Earth Day in 1970 that helped to develop environmental ethics in the US, and soon thereafter the same ethics were developed in other countries including Canada and North America. This is important because the ethics of the environment are of major concern these days.

Environmental Ethics and Environmental Philosophy:

Environmental ethics builds on scientific understanding by bringing human values, moral principles, and improved decision making into conversation with science. It was Earth Day in 1970 that helped to develop environmental ethics in the US, and soon thereafter the same ethics were developed in other countries including Canada and North America. This is important because the ethics of the environment are of major concern these days.

Industrialization has given way to pollution and ecological imbalance. If an industry is causing such problem, it is not only the duty of that industry but all the human being to make up for the losses. But how long an artificial and restored environment will able to sustain? Will it be able to take the place of the natural resources? Environmentalists are trying to find answers to these difficult questions and all these together are termed as environment ethics.

It is the responsibility of all to ensure that environmental ethics are being met. It is somewhat difficult to make adjustments that are necessary to ensure that you are following all environmental ethics.

Ethics plays an important role in our society today, and environmental ethics and business ethics must be considered. This has become more prevalent in today's society.

Both oil and coal are bad, but not only for the environment, but for all living creatures, including plants and animals. Both are highly toxic in their natural raw state. They pollute the air and ground and water, and whether or not they are helping to create these natural disasters should be irrelevant. They are both finite, and will not last forever, and the sooner we rid ourselves of the need for these two demons, the better. While oil and coal companies continue to promote their products, and the best yet is clean coal, which is an unethical definition of something that just isn't

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possible, their ethics come into question, especially environmental ethics. Most of the world's ills are derived from both of these, with oil spills, mining accidents, fires, and now climate change and global warming.

Ensure that you are doing your part and following all environmental ethics that are out there.

Environmental Ethics:

- ❖ The branch of ethics that examines the questions of moral right and wrong relating to management, protection or endangerment of the natural environment.
- ❖ A cluster of beliefs, values and norms regarding how humans should interact with the environment.

Environmental Ethics Principles:

- ❖ We should have a profound respect for nature.
- ❖ We must maintain a harmonious relationship with other species.
- ❖ Everyone should take responsibility for his impact on nature.
- ❖ Local and indigenous environmental knowledge should be respected.
- ❖ We must plan for the long term.

Marshall's Categories of Environmental Ethics:

Some scholars have tried to categorise the various ways the natural environment is valued. Alan Marshall and Michael Smith are two examples of this, as cited by Peter Vardy in "The Puzzle of Ethics". According to Marshall, three general ethical approaches have emerged over the last 40 years: Libertarian Extension, the Ecologic Extension and Conservation Ethics.

❖ Libertarian Extension:

Marshall's Libertarian extension echoes a civil liberty approach (i.e. a commitment to extend equal rights to all members of a community). In environmentalism, though, the community is generally thought to consist of non-humans as well as humans.

Andrew Brennan was an advocate of ecologic humanism (eco-humanism), the argument that all ontological entities, animate and in-animate, can be given ethical worth purely on the basis that they exist. The work of Arne Naess and his collaborator Sessions also falls under the libertarian extension, although they preferred the term "deep ecology". Deep ecology is the argument for the intrinsic value or inherent worth of the environment – the view that it is valuable in itself. Their argument, incidentally, falls under both the libertarian extension and the ecologic extension.

Peter Singer's work can be categorized under Marshall's 'libertarian extension'. He reasoned that the "expanding circle of moral worth" should be redrawn to include the rights of non-human animals, and to not do so would be guilty of speciesism. Singer found it difficult to accept the argument from intrinsic worth of a-biotic or "non-sentient" (non-conscious) entities, and concluded in his first edition of "Practical Ethics" that they should not be included in the expanding circle of moral worth. This approach is essentially then,

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bio-centric. However, in a later edition of "Practical Ethics" after the work of Naess and Sessions, Singer admits that, although unconvinced by deep ecology, the argument from intrinsic value of non-sentient entities is plausible, but at best problematic. Singer advocated a humanist ethics.

❖ **Ecologic Extension:**

Alan Marshall's category of ecologic extension places emphasis not on human rights but on the recognition of the fundamental interdependence of all biological (and some abiological) entities and their essential diversity. Whereas Libertarian Extension can be thought of as flowing from a political reflection of the natural world, Ecologic Extension is best thought of as a scientific reflection of the natural world. Ecological Extension is roughly the same classification of Smith's eco-holism, and it argues for the intrinsic value inherent in collective ecological entities like ecosystems or the global environment as a whole entity. Holmes Rolston, among others, has taken this approach.

This category might include James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis; the theory that the planet earth alters its geo-physiological structure over time in order to ensure the continuation of an equilibrium of evolving organic and inorganic matter. The planet is characterized as a unified, holistic entity with ethical worth of which the human race is of no particular significance in the long run.

❖ **Conservation Ethics:**

Marshall's category of 'conservation ethics' is an extension of use-value into the non-human biological world. It focuses only on the worth of the environment in terms of its utility or usefulness to humans. It contrasts the intrinsic value ideas of 'deep ecology', hence is often referred to as 'shallow ecology', and generally argues for the preservation of the environment on the basis that it has extrinsic value – instrumental to the welfare of human beings. Conservation is therefore a means to an end and purely concerned with mankind and inter-generational considerations. It could be argued that it is this ethic that formed the underlying arguments proposed by Governments at the Kyoto summit in 1997 and three agreements reached in Rio in 1992.

Approaches to Environmental Ethics:

❖ Ecocentrism:

Ecocentrism is an approach to environmental ethics that holds that the alleged anthropocentrism of traditional ethics can be avoided if we make nature the source of moral values. Some environmental ethicists think this can only happen if nature has intrinsic value. One example of an ecocentric ethic is the Deep Ecology movement.

❖ Biocentrism:

There is some concern that an Ecocentric approach casts the net too wide and gives moral status to entities (such as non-sentient eco-systems) that do not appear to be appropriate objects of moral concern. Biocentrism tries to avoid this problem by focusing on a narrower range of entities.

❖ Biodiversity:

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In focusing on endangered Biodiversity, some ecologists hope to convince humans to limit their growth within and effects upon the biotic community. But there is quite a bit of disagreement in the ecological community as to how and why one should engage in Wilderness Preservation.

❖ Ecofeminism:

Some feminist philosophers see a strong connection between the historical treatment of women and the treatment of nature and that has led them to develop the environmental philosophy they call "Ecofeminism."

❖ Moral Pluralism:

It provides yet another alternative when considering environmental ethics; one that attempts to synthesize various moral approaches.

Issues in Environmental Ethics:

❖ **Consumption of Natural Resources:**

Our natural environment is not a storehouse to rob resources from. It is a reserve of resources that are crucial to the existence of life. Their unscrupulous depletion is detrimental to our well-being. We are cutting down forests for making our homes. Our excessive consumption of natural resources continues. The undue use of resources is resulting in their depletion, risking the life of our future generations. Is this Ethical ?

❖ **Destruction of Forests:**

When industrial processes lead to destruction of resources, is it not the industry's responsibility to restore the depleted resources? Moreover, can a restored environment make up for the original one? Mining processes disrupt the ecological balance in certain areas. They harm the plant and animal life in those regions. Slash-and-burn techniques are used for clearing land, that leads to the destruction of forests and woodland. The land is used for agriculture, but is the loss of so many trees compensated for ?

❖ **Environmental Pollution:**

Many human activities lead to environmental pollution. The rising human population is increasing the demand for nature's resources. As the population is exceeding the carrying capacity of our planet, animal and plant habitats are being destroyed to make space for human habitation. Huge constructions (roads and buildings for residential and industrial use) are being made at the cost of the environment. To allow space for these constructions, so many trees have to lose their lives. The animals that thrive in them lose their natural habitats and eventually their lives. However, the cutting down of trees is seldom even considered as loss of lives. Isn't this unethical ?

❖ **Harm to Animals:**

Due to habitat loss, animals may enter human settlements, thus posing a threat to the people living there. In some cases, these animals are killed. Secondly, animals serve as food sources of humans, for which they are killed. Also, animal

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studies cause harm to animals and even their deaths. This destruction has led to the extinction of many animal species. The reduction in the populations of several other animal species continues. How can we deny the animals their right to live? How are we right in depriving them of their habitat and food? Who gave us the right to harm them for our convenience ?

These are some of the ethical environmental issues that need to be addressed.

Environmental Ethics and Global Environmental Problems:

As a branch of philosophy, environmental ethics is a fairly recent development, having become a body of organized knowledge only in the last decades of the twentieth century. It came about as a necessary response to a growing number of very obvious threats to the physical condition of the world in which we live. The list of some of these global environmental problems is a long and familiar one, and many of them came about because of the massive increase in the growth of the human population worldwide. As populations continue to soar, the various problems caused by too many people naturally increase in both their number and seriousness. It is predicted that the 2000 world population of six billion people will rise by another one billion people within ten years. To the many problems this causes, such as increased pollution of the air, water, and soil, is also added the depletion of these and other important natural resources.

International Society for Environmental Ethics:

Since 1990, The International Society of Environmental Ethics (ISEE) has striven to advance research and education in the field of environmental ethics and philosophy, and to promote appropriate human use, respect, conservation, preservation, and understanding of the natural world. In conjunction with the International Association for Environmental Philosophy (IAEP) and sponsorship from the Center for Environmental Philosophy, the society hosts an annual joint ISEE-IAEP conference each summer. It also has regular sessions at the three divisional conferences of the American Philosophical Association and publishes the ISEE Newsletter.

ISEE was an official observer NGO at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, June 1992. Holmes Rolston and J. Baird Callicott were the delegates. ISEE participated in the United Nations Conference on Ethical Issues in Agenda 21, January 1994, at the United Nations in New York.

ISEE maintains an extensive website and it sponsors the largest bibliography in the world on environmental ethics, the Online Bibliography of Environmental Thought (OBET), with over 16,000 entries. It publishes a newsletter three times a year, with newsletters from the past twenty years available at the organization's website.

Conclusion:

At last it can be concluded that Environmental Ethics is of our moral responsibility to preserve nature for our future generations. By causing environmental degradation and depletion of resources, we are risking the lives of future generations. Is it not our duty to

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leave a good environment for them to live in? Non-renewable energy resources are fast-depleting and sadly, it isn't possible to replenish them. This means, they may not be available for the future generations. We need to strike a balance between our needs and the availability of resources, so that the forthcoming generations are also able to benefit from their use.

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