

Introduction to Environmental Ethics

- 1. **What** is environmental ethics and how is it approached?
- 2. **How** do the approaches to environmental ethics work?
- 3. **Why** are environmental ethics and its approaches important?

1. **What** is environmental ethics and how is it approached?

Ethics is a large field that can be divided into three branches: applied ethics, meta-ethics, and normative ethics. To understand environmental ethics, it is necessary to understand where it is located in the field of ethics. Write definitions for "applied ethics" and "environmental ethics".

Applied Ethics	Environmental Ethics

There are two significant approaches to environmental ethics, and those concerned with environmental issues usually subscribe to one of them. Although both approaches promote care for the environment, there are some important differences between them. Make a note about the two approaches (i.e. conservation and stewardship).

Approaches to Environmental Ethics	
Conservation	Stewardship

2. **How** do the approaches to environmental ethics work?

The approaches to environmental ethics (i.e. conservation and stewardship) are usually motivated by underlying beliefs. Conservation is usually motivated by one of two different underlying beliefs, and stewardship is motivated by a third underlying belief. Make a note about the underlying beliefs that can motivate conservation.

Anthropocentrism	Biocentrism

Stewardship is motivated by a different underlying belief to those associated with conservation. Importantly, the underlying belief that motivates stewardship is religious, whilst the underlying beliefs that motivate conservation are not. Make a note about the underlying belief that motivates stewardship.

Theocentrism

3. **Why** are environmental ethics and its approaches important?

Although the approaches to environmental ethics are similar, because they both promote care for the environment, their differences have a profound impact on how people treat the environment. Conservationists inspired by anthropocentrism (also known as shallow ecologists) do not seek to preserve the environment beyond the level required to safeguard human survival; this means they only protect those parts of the environment that are useful to people. On the other hand, conservationists inspired by biocentrism (also known as deep ecologists) seek to preserve the environment to the greatest extent possible; they believe damage and destruction of the environment is only justified if it is done to fulfil basic human needs. Stewards sit somewhere between the two types of conservationist; they believe that God wants them to care for living things, and treat the environment responsibly. Consider the differences between conservationists and stewards, and make a note about why they are important.

Why the Approaches to Environmental Ethics Are Important		
Approach	How	Why
Stewardship Theocentrism	Consider all living things in ethical decision-making but prioritise human beings.	
Conservation Anthropocentrism Shallow Ecology	Consider human beings in ethical decision-making.	
Conservation Biocentrism Deep Ecology	Consider all living things in ethical decision-making.	