

Ethics and Stewardship

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we will cover the topic of environmental ethics and stewardship. We will discuss the three main environmental ethical philosophies and explore what environmental stewardship means. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

1. Environmental Ethical Philosophies

Ethics is about moral principles, and environmental ethics is about moral principles of the relationship between humans and the environment. The following are the three main environmental ethical philosophies:

- **Anthropocentrism**, which means to be concerned with actions to improve the state of the environment for the well-being of humans
- **Biocentrism**, which means to be concerned with actions to improve the state of the environment for the well-being of all living things
- **Ecocentrism**, which means to be concerned with actions to improve the state of the environment for the environment itself, which includes humans



HINT

Ecocentrism is concerned with the earth as a whole system, not just with its individual parts. Both biocentrism and ecocentrism believe in intrinsic value, or the belief that everything—human or non-human—has intrinsic value regardless of whether or not humans acknowledge it.

IN CONTEXT

Let's look at a single environmental issue from each of the three angles: deforestation.

- Anthropocentrists would view deforestation as valuable if done at a rate that enables future humans use of tree resources.
- Biocentrists would view deforestation as harmful, because it is damaging to living beings.
- Ecocentrists would view deforestation depending on its global ecosystem impacts, which would most likely be in a negative light.



TERMS TO KNOW

Anthropocentrism

Concerned with actions to improve the state of the environment for the well-being of humans.

Biocentrism

Concerned with actions to improve the state of the environment for the well-being of all living beings.

Ecocentrism

Concerned with actions to improve the state of the environment for the environment itself, which includes humans.

2. Environmental Stewardship

Environmental stewardship is when humans take action to protect the environment based on their ethical beliefs. Anthropocentrists, biocentrists, and ecocentrists can all be environmental stewards, though the actions they might choose to take could look very different.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Conservation of resources, recycling, and land restoration are all stewardship actions. Environmental stewardship is essentially environmentalism in action. Again, environmentalism is not determined by scientific objectivity, like environmental science, but is a subjective interpretation of good or bad actions that humans should make in relation to the environment.

IN CONTEXT

Let's look at a more specific example of environmental stewardship: wastewater management. The photo below shows what is called a living machine. Living machines were invented to clean human wastewater by moving the dirty water through various tanks to mimic how a natural wetland cleans water. The goal is to clean water without harmful chemicals. Living machines use microbial life, plants, and fish to clean and test water before it is returned to the surrounding natural ecosystem. This is a form of environmental stewardship.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, we learned about three major **environmental ethical philosophies**: anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism. We also defined what **environmental stewardship** means and explored an example of environmentalism in action. Don't forget that each of those philosophies is also a key term: anthropocentrism, to be concerned with actions to improve the state of the environment for the well-being of humans; biocentrism, to be concerned with actions to improve the state of the environment for the well-being of all living things; and ecocentrism, to be concerned with actions to improve the state of the environment for the environment itself, which includes humans.

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ATTRIBUTIONS

- [Jungle burned for agriculture](#) | Author: Jami Dwyer | License: Public Domain
- [The "Living Machine" water treatment facility](#) | Author: Stan Shebs | License: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported



TERMS TO KNOW

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Concerned with actions to improve the state of the environment for the well-being of all living beings.

Ecocentrism

Concerned with actions to improve the state of the environment for the environment itself, which includes humans.