

Environmental ethics  
pollution and  
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The world has evolved so much since its existence until now. Science and technology have taken charge over the way we live our lives. Industries, mining, agriculture are among the daily activities of people nowadays. The anthropogenic activities have brought problems to the earth. One of the problems that have raised the concern of all mankind is pollution.

Pollution is happening in terms of air pollution, water pollution, soil contamination and noise pollution. Basically it involves components of the earth, living and non-living things. What is our ethical views regarding the issue of pollution to the earth?

The awareness against the environment had risen since long ago especially since the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962. *Silent Spring* tells us about the bad effect pesticides bring to the environment.

Besides that, the disastrous event that took place around the globe such as in Chernobyl, Bhopal India and the oil spill by Exxon Valdez had open the eyes of society that the environment needs our attention and that these events should not be happening again. In the Exxon Valdez oil spill episode, many wild life and aquatic organisms had been killed. It was one of the biggest pollution disasters ever.

Then, emerge the sustainable development concept that has been a new way of living. The activities that we do should be sustainable for the future generation to have access to the same sources like we do. We should take care of the environment and not to pollute the environment for it to be safe for people to live in.

Pollution results in degradation of the environment and quality of life. It involves the whole component of the environment or described by Aldo Leopold the biotic community. In Aldo Leopold Land Ethics, “the act is considered right if it serves to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community” (Leopold 1949). Therefore, it is ethically wrong for people to pollute the natural environment.

In the next section, we will look into the reason on why we cannot pollute the environment in the ethical point of view and further arguments on the pollution matters.

## **INTERDEPENDENCY OF THE ECOSYSTEM**

The first argument that we should not and cannot pollute the environment because of the relationship we have with the ecosystem, namely the animals, plants and other non-living things such as water, soil and air. I believe that every component serves a purpose in the ecosystem. The interference of anthropogenic activities such as pollution will only affect the chain of the natural process and eventually will affect the equilibrium state of the natural environment. Every organisms in the environment is view as an ecocentric creature where each of us are interrelated with each other.

Humans, animals and plants are the living system in the environment. We are all teleological creatures. We have our own purpose even for the organisms that are not aware of its purpose and we will find means to achieve those purposes. Living things need the appropriate conditions and habitat to live and breed. The earth has a place for all of these creatures. The earth is designed to complement the needs and necessity of the living

components. Humans basically are the steward of the earth because of our ability to administer and control other components. However, we should not treat the earth in a utilitarian kind of way. We do have goals and pleasures that we want to achieve, but at the same time we do have duties and responsibilities for others.

Degradation of the environment and pollution are the results of our own actions. Industrialization, food production, overpopulation and lack of education are among the reasons for these problems to happen. Clean water supply is being polluted with industrial waste, the atmosphere is being emitted with the Green House Gas and the soil is being contaminated with chemical pollutants. These will eventually interfere with the natural ecosystem.

If the equilibrium state of the natural environment is being interfered, then will come the disastrous events that will cause harm to human population. Nowadays, we tend to look so much into the economic incentives of the physical world where we tend to exploit the natural resources and overused the resources. These what leads to environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources. Fossil fuels are being overexploited, deforestation are happening every second and development are being carried out massively. The result, extinction of wildlife species, natural disaster happens all time and loss of habitat for species.

What we can do is to opt for sustainable development. We should be considerate to other living components in the ecosystem as well. We should conserve and preserve the natural resources not only for our purpose but

also for the benefit of the ecosystem. The relationship between humans and the ecosystem is a tight one. We are interdependent on each other. We cannot live in the world by ourselves, we need the air to breath, water to drink, plants and animals to be able to live. Therefore, we need to take care of the environment to achieve a level that would sustain an equilibrium state of ecosystem.

## **INTRINSIC VALUES AND RESPECT FOR NATURE**

The second argument in stating that pollution is ethically wrong is that every component in the environment has their intrinsic values, meaning that every living environment has their good of its own. Therefore, we should respect the existence of each creature and not to take away their rights for a live. The event of the oil spill of the Exxon Valdez in 1989 at the Prince William Sound, Alaska had taken away lives of aquatic and wildlife species. These happen because of humans actions. Pollution not only degrades the environment, it kills lives. The organisms that are not adaptable to the changing environment will die. The dying organisms will affect the food chain and ecosystem cycle and soon the threatened species will die if no further action is taken to curb the problems.

Humans should respect the existence of other living components in the environment. The lack of respect towards the environment what motivates us to continue to pollute and degrade the environment. We naturally have the aesthetic feelings towards our surroundings and appreciative gestures for other creatures. The way we treat animals and plants will eventually reflect our character as a human being as well. The act of pollution shows

that we have no respect to the environment. Where is our moral conscience  
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and awareness in dealing with the environment? The polluter-pay principle that has been adopted mainly allows companies to pollute and pay the compensation accordingly. It is very utilitarian in approach and does not justify the actions. It shows that economic outcomes are rather important than the natural environment.

The cost and benefit analysis also focus more on the economic outcomes rather than preserving the natural environment. Pollution is a continuous process and infectious. Once it happens, the remedial will take forever and cost a lot, not only in terms of monetary but also the lives of the components in the ecosystem which are affected.

It is undeniable that human population is expanding and lots of things need to be done to maintain the needs of the growing population such as food supply, infrastructure and basic needs. Therefore, we should find a way to develop in an unconventional method such as adopting the Green technology and not to view the natural resources as means to achieve our needs and wants.

## **FUTURE GENERATIONS**

The third argument is that we should not pollute the earth for future generation to have the same access to the environment that we have today. If pollution and the environmental degradation continue to happen, the earth might not be as the status quo. Even natural processes cannot undo the damage we done to the environment.

Future generations are the people in the future. We do not know who they are and even their existence are not certain. Their existence mainly lies in <https://assignbuster.com/environmental-ethics-pollution-and-degradation-of-the-environment-philosophy-essay/>

our decisions, because they are our inheritance. But why do we care? We care because as humans we have the feeling of care and love. We want our child and love ones to have the best. Therefore, we tend to care for the future generation because we want them to have the same environment as we do. We do not want them to live in a polluted environment where there is no access of clean water, no more fresh air and no more forest and wildlife. We want them to enjoy the same natural resources as we do now.

From the deontological point of approach, we as humans have our duties and obligations towards the environment. Therefore, we have the responsibilities for the future generation. We have duties to preserve and conserve the environment for them to live with. If we continue to let pollution happens at an alarming rate like today, the earth won't be able to sustain. We need to carry out our duties and start to mitigate the pollution and find ways for better solution in providing the best interest for all living components in the environment.

Science and technology is growing in a fast rate. The emerging technology and scientific findings should not jeopardize the environmental conditions. With the more discoveries in genetic engineering and cloning, the path of these scientific findings should still respect the natural evolution of species and not change the natural process of the ecosystem.

## **STEWARD OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

Humans are no superior creature of the earth. It is just that we have the ability to create a platform of common understanding between us and the ability to turn our thinking into words and action. We are the steward of the

environment. It is our duty to take care of the environment at the best condition possible.

Problems will occur if we tend not to care of the environment. The problems basically came from humans. Overpopulation, poverty, war, lack of education, health care, and hygiene, waste dumps, global warming, climate change and in this context pollution are among the problems the world face today.

These problems involve the whole of the biotic community. As stated by Aldo Leopold (1949) in his famous view of Land Ethics, “ a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

## **CONCLUSION**

Humans are part of the ecosystem. We are interrelated with each other and every component has their own purpose in the environment. Too much anthropogenic activities have lead to a global problem of pollution. It is an issue that needs further attention.

We are part of the environment and we should respect the other components in the chain of the ecosystem. We are interrelated with each other and our existence complement each other on earth.

Every living thing has their own intrinsic values. We have no right to overrule their rights for a live and should respect their needs for a conducive environment and habitat to live and breed.



Besides that, we have the responsibilities to the future generations. We want them to have the same access of the environment as we do. We want them to breathe in the same quality of air and the same access to clean water supply and to have the same natural resources like we do. Therefore we should not pollute the environment for it to maintain as the status quo.

Humans are the steward of the environment because we can think, speak and act accordingly. We can develop a platform of common understanding among us and develop organizations. Therefore, we have the responsibility to take care of the earth and prevent any more pollution from happening than what is happening now.

Humans, animals and plants need a conducive environment for us to live and breathe. The earth is designed for us to have all the access to the needs that are required for us to live. Therefore, we should not jeopardize all these just in the name of economic incentives.