

# RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

**Muzzamel Hussain Imran**

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# **Religious Philosophies and Environmental Ethics**

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## **Religious Philosophies and Environmental Ethics**

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## PREFACE

The environment in which we reside faces numerous challenges, including pollution, overpopulation, and various other forms of degradation. The existing philosophies within environmental ethics have proven insufficient in addressing the current state of our environment. This book will explore various aspects of environmental degradation and evaluate environmental philosophies to determine their adequacy in addressing this degradation and fostering attitudinal and behavioral change concerning the environment. Recent times have witnessed a growing call for a new ethical framework that can alter human attitudes towards the environment, to reduce the adverse impacts of these attitudes. One potential avenue for transforming this status quo is religion. All the world's religions have historically expressed ethical concerns for the environment and its inhabitants. They have attributed moral significance to non-human creatures and proposed ethical responsibilities for humans, even though these ethical dimensions are often considered secondary or subordinate to responsibilities towards other humans. Throughout history, religions worldwide have recognized the earth's religious significance and humanity's religious obligations to care for its inhabitants. These shared ethical concerns are evident in historical teachings rather than actual religious practices. This book contends that religious philosophies and principles can complement existing environmental philosophies, thereby strengthening environmental protection. Specifically, it delves into the religious principles of Daoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, comparing them to existing environmental philosophies such as deep ecology, to construct a new environmental ethical framework. Through a nuanced examination of religious teachings and environmental philosophies, this book aspires to contribute to the ongoing discourse on environmental ethics, inviting readers to contemplate the potential of an integrated approach that transcends disciplinary boundaries and embraces the wisdom of both secular and spiritual traditions.

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## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction to Religious Philosophies and Environmental Ethics

**Abstract:** This chapter provides a general overview of the intricate relationship between religious philosophies, environmental ethics, and the ongoing global environmental crisis. The chapter begins by tracing the historical background of the environmental movement, highlighting the unprecedented challenges humanity faces, including climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. It emphasizes the role of technological advancements and human activities in significantly impacting the natural environment. The environmental crisis is portrayed as a multifaceted challenge necessitating a shift in societal values, attitudes, and behaviors. This chapter further delves into the intersection of religion and environmental issues, acknowledging the influential role of religious beliefs in shaping individual attitudes and behaviors. It underscores the need for a collaborative effort between environmentalists and religious organizations to address environmental degradation effectively.

The chapter explores the historical development of environmental philosophies, emphasizing the anthropocentric perspective that has contributed to the current environmental crisis. It suggests a reevaluation of existing ethical frameworks and proposes a novel approach rooted in religious principles. The chapter discusses how to bridge the gap between religion and sustainability, offering insights for policymakers to make informed decisions for environmental planning and management. The chapter argues that, given the prevalence of diverse religious beliefs globally, understanding and incorporating religious perspectives is crucial for tackling contemporary environmental challenges. Ultimately, the chapter advocates for a transformative vision that integrates the wisdom of faith to foster a harmonious coexistence between humanity and the environment, addressing the urgent environmental concerns facing the planet.

**Keywords:** Anthropocentric perspective, Biodiversity loss, Climate change, Collaborative efforts, Environmental ethics, Global environmental crisis, Pollution, Religious philosophies, Sustainability planning, Technological advancements.

## INTRODUCTION

For many individuals, an environmental crisis is not solely a consequence of specific economic, political, and social factors. It also constitutes a moral and

spiritual crisis, necessitating a broader philosophical and religious comprehension of ourselves as natural beings integrated into life cycles and reliant on ecosystems. This is because religion plays a role in shaping our perceptions of nature, both consciously and unconsciously. Religion furnishes fundamental interpretative narratives about our identity, the essence of nature, our origins, and our destination (Shehu, 2015). Moreover, it offers guidance on how we should interact with fellow humans and our relationship with the natural world (Hessel & Ruether, 2000). Religion fosters worldviews and ethical systems that underpin the core attitudes and values of diverse cultures and societies. Undeniably, religions play a pivotal role in shaping our perspectives on nature, as well as offering guidance on how we should treat our fellow humans and relate to the natural world. Consequently, religions are instrumental in molding worldviews and ethics that form the foundational attitudes and values of various cultures and societies. These religious values and ethical convictions influence our interactions with others, including our relationship with all forms of life, such as plants and animals (Tucker & Grim, 2001). Some argue that the environmental crisis is, in fact, a religious or moral crisis and that returning to religious traditions represents a key solution. Current evidence suggests that people are now more receptive to religious teachings than in the past. Therefore, the timing is opportune for an exploration of the potential contributions of specific religions in addressing the environmental crisis, particularly by cultivating more comprehensive environmental ethics for the global community (Tucker & Grim, 2001).

Hence, it is essential to delve into the environmental ethics within religions. These religious philosophies may, in turn, provide potential solutions to mitigate the harmful patterns and behaviors of humans (Sewpershad, 2018). With this viewpoint, it becomes evident that religious philosophies have the capacity to reshape or enhance environmental ethical philosophies and improve environmental stewardship. This was the driving force behind my exploration of this research topic—to examine whether a connection exists between religious philosophies and environmental ethical philosophies and how they might mutually influence one another.

## **A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT**

We are currently confronted with an array of unprecedented crises, including climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, zoonotic diseases, and more. The natural environment, which humanity has historically struggled against in the pursuit of economic development, is now being significantly impacted by our technological advancements. Technology has granted humans the status of a major geological force capable of influencing continental or even planetary scales

(Bourdeau, 2004). The immense progress in science and technology poses a substantial threat to environmental stability, a threat best comprehended when we consider that humans have often perceived themselves as deities. Furthermore, in the modern age, humans lack sufficient restraints on their interactions with the natural environment (Abedi-Sarv & Shahvali, 2008). Tucker (2003) characterized it as biocide and genocide, and Gottlieb (1996) described it as a crisis encompassing our entire civilization—a slow, collective suicide. Gardner (2002) framed it as the defining challenge of our age (Tucker, 2003; Gottlieb, 1996; Gardner, 2002). The patterns of human production and consumption, industrialization, urbanization, dependence on fossil fuels and nuclear power, industrialized agriculture, and fishing practices have led to climate change, deforestation, desertification, habitat destruction, species decline, hazardous waste, and toxic chemical pollution. These factors collectively threaten the composition of life on Earth as we currently understand it (Jones, 1995). Since the onset of the Industrial Revolution in 17<sup>th</sup> century England, coal, and later petroleum, have served as fuels driving scientific and technological progress. This, in turn, led to industrial factories emitting ever-increasing quantities of carbon dioxide. Furthermore, advancements in automotive technology related to transportation and logistics also result in substantial carbon dioxide emissions. Human activities have triggered a rapid upsurge in greenhouse gas emissions, thereby affecting temperature changes over the past three decades. These changes are largely attributed to human attitudes and behaviors that exhibit a lack of awareness and ethical responsibility toward the environment, potentially exacerbating the issue further if a solution remains elusive (Wuebbles, 2012).

The environmental crisis, characterized by its multifaceted dimensions, severity, and far-reaching impacts, has been labeled as one of the most pressing challenges confronting humanity today (Gerten & Bergmann, 2012). The suffering inflicted on millions of people worldwide and the existential threats posed to the Earth's future and human society due to anthropogenic environmental impacts have underscored the imperative need for concerted efforts to align human affairs with the natural world's dynamics. Research reports published by prominent international organizations in recent decades have consistently sounded the alarm about a bleak future if humanity fails to reverse the trend of environmental degradation (Gottlieb, 2006). For example, as outlined by the IPCC (2014), climate change resulting from human activities is the primary driver behind the swift alterations in precipitation and the rising sea levels. These changes are, in turn, reshaping global hydrological systems and affecting both the quality and quantity of water resources worldwide. Climate change's adverse effects are also evident in the form of declining agricultural yields in various regions, raising significant concerns about food security for the expanding human population. The IPCC (2014) further identifies species extinction and ecosystem shifts as

## **The Environmental Degradation**

**Abstract:** The concept of the environment is multifaceted and encompasses a complex interplay of physical, chemical, and biotic elements that sustain life. This chapter explores the diverse dimensions of the environment, encompassing the atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, and biosphere. It emphasizes the interdependence between humans and the environment, highlighting the crucial role the environment plays in shaping various aspects of human life. The environment is not solely the natural world but also includes the built environment and cultural creations. The chapter delves into environmental degradation, emphasizing the threefold interaction humans have with the world—living off, in, and with the world. Human activities, such as resource extraction, habitat alteration, and waste generation, contribute to environmental degradation, disrupting ecosystems and posing threats to sustainable development. Unequal distribution of environmental consequences, often disproportionately affecting the impoverished, is also discussed.

Population growth, pollution, deforestation, desertification, and ozone depletion are identified as major contributors to environmental degradation. The chapter discusses the interconnected challenges posed by resource depletion, waste disposal, and urbanization. It calls for a conscious shift towards sustainable practices in science, technology, and population management to mitigate environmental degradation's far-reaching impacts on human health, quality of life, and overall well-being. Recognizing the environment's intrinsic value and fostering harmony with the natural world are emphasized as imperative steps in achieving global environmental sustainability. The chapter underscores the urgent need for responsible environmental stewardship, emphasizing that sustainable development hinges on safeguarding the environment.

**Keywords:** Deforestation, Environment, Environmental degradation, Environmental stewardship, Interdependence, Pollution, Population growth, Sustainable development, Urbanization, Unequal distribution.

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is crucial to recognize that the natural environment not only predates but also surpasses human existence; humanity is an integral part of this all-encompassing system (Attfield, 1983). Consequently, the environment, which constitutes the shared natural habitat for humanity and all other living beings, holds a dual status: it is invaluable as the backdrop for sustaining life, yet also precarious due to its

susceptibility to maltreatment by its inhabitants. Throughout history, humanity has often viewed the environment as an infinite reservoir of invaluable resources and a boundless receptacle for all our waste and pollution (Attfield, 1983).

These repercussions of human behaviors and actions resonate on a global scale. The increasing pace of human population growth and economic expansion relies significantly on substantial amounts of natural resources. It is crucial to abandon the idea of perceiving the environment as distinct from the economy; in truth, they are interdependent, and any damage inflicted on the environment has serious consequences for all living beings. The repercussions of human presence in the environment are now resonating throughout nature (Taylor, 1986). In alignment with this perspective, Weston (1999) lends support to the idea, emphasizing that when humans perceive themselves as distinct or independent from nature, they open the door to the potential for exploitation and destruction. Humans, often irrationally, harbor the belief that the world's environment will perpetually provide for their needs and regenerate as required (Weston, 1999).

Humans are inherently predisposed or designed to utilize the natural world for their survival. Nevertheless, there exists a delicate balance between using it for survival and exploiting it for self-serving purposes. This mentality of exploitation, combined with the misguided notion that resources are boundless, along with humanity's unbridled actions, gives rise to grave issues such as global warming, the mass extinction of species, and various other significant consequences, culminating in environmental degradation (Attfield, 2003). Numerous organizations have meticulously documented various forms and the extent of environmental degradation. Environmental degradation is defined as any alteration or disruption to the environment that is regarded as objectionable or harmful. In essence, 'degradation' signifies a negative shift in both the quality and quantity of natural resources. In broader terms, it can be loosely understood as the deterioration of the environment resulting from the depletion of natural resources and the destruction of ecosystems. The scale of environmental degradation has surged to such an extent that it now stands as one of the ten threats officially recognized by the United Nations' High-Level Threat Panel (Tyagi *et al.*, 2014). As previously mentioned, the principal cause of environmental degradation is widely attributed to human interference.

This is not a recent phenomenon, and if society believes that there's ample time to address it, that is a painful misconception. This degradation has been ongoing for centuries and has now reached critical levels. For instance, in 1594, Verrazano reported smelling cedar a hundred leagues away (one league is approximately 5,556 km) from land, and there were accounts of sailing through beds of floating flowers. Abundant poultry, deer, and lynx greeted people in unimaginable

numbers. Whales congested the seas to the extent that they posed a navigational hazard. Cape Cod teemed with marine life, and salmon thrived in the Atlantic Ocean. Lobsters were so plentiful that they were used as pig food, fish bait, and even potato fertilizer. They served as the staple diet for the navy, consumed five times a week. Islands were densely populated with seals, walrus, and seabirds. However, a mere 45 years later, many of these species have been slaughtered, displaced, over-farmed, or over-fished to the point of extinction (Weston, 1999). Some subspecies of animals have vanished before we could even acknowledge their existence. Vast tracts of rainforests that housed countless and diverse species are now engulfed in flames. Species like the spotted owl, willow flycatcher, lynx, rhinoceros, elephant, bobcat, scarlet tanager, and many more find themselves on the endangered list, or perilously close to extinction. Blue whales, which are among the largest living creatures on Earth, have seen their numbers plummet from approximately half a million to around 3,000 worldwide in just 200 years. The destruction of habitats poses a severe threat to numerous species, placing them on the brink of extinction (Weston, 1999).

The disheartening outcomes persistently accumulate: various other types of environmental degradation persist, dwindling resources are being exploited, and humans are fundamentally jeopardizing the planet's life support system (Cyprian Obiora Alokwu, 2009). To gain insight into the extent of environmental degradation, it is imperative to have a comprehensive grasp of the term "environment." This chapter will, therefore, commence by examining the diverse conceptions of the environment as presented by different authors and provide a clear definition of this concept. Subsequently, it will delve into a discussion of various manifestations of environmental degradation.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

Most of the time, the definition of the environment is often taken for granted. However, up to this point, there is no consensus on precisely what the concept of the environment encompasses. The term "environment" can encompass a wide range of interpretations. For instance, words like ecology, biosphere, creation, and nature are frequently used interchangeably with "environment," but the specific meaning of each becomes evident within its contextual usage (Sewpershad, 2018). The term "environment," which has a broader scope than "ecology," is understood as the intricate interplay of physical, chemical, and biotic elements and processes that envelop and sustain life. These elements also exert an influence on an organism or an ecological community, ultimately shaping their form and determining their survival (Simmons, 1993). In other words, the environment can be defined as the "sum total of all processes and domains in which the interaction between nature and human civilization takes place. It encompasses all-natural

## Environmental Ethics and Philosophy

**Abstract:** This chapter aims to provide a brief overview of the relationship between environmental issues and philosophy. This will entail a concise history of philosophy and a comprehensive look at the field of environmental ethics. It will further delve into the diverse theories within environmental ethics, examining their respective strengths and limitations. A particular focus will be on the theories of value and an explanation of why anthropocentrism may not be a suitable foundation for establishing our responsibilities towards the environment.

**Keywords:** Anthropocentrism, Anthropocentrism critique, Environmental issues, Environmental philosophy, Ethical theories, Environmental ethics, Environmental ethics theories, Philosophy history, Responsibility towards the environment, Theories of value.

### INTRODUCTION

The field of environmental ethics, which entails the exploration of ethical inquiries arising from human interactions with the nonhuman environment, gained prominence in the 1970s and has since flourished as a significant subfield within philosophy. It delves into a range of topics, encompassing both anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric perspectives on what possesses value. Additionally, it encompasses varying perspectives on whether environmental ethics should primarily concern itself with optimizing outcomes, upholding principles and rights, or epitomizing environmental virtues.

### DEFINITION AND SCOPES

Environmental ethics constitutes the examination of ethical inquiries that arise from human interactions with the nonhuman environment. Ethical inquiries pertain to what actions we are morally obligated to undertake, with ethical propositions being prescriptive rather than descriptive or predictive in nature (Palmer *et al.*, 2014). For instance, consider the prescriptive proposition: “Individuals should minimize the ecological footprint of their lifestyles.” This proposition remains valid even in cases where current lifestyles are unsustainable and prospects for future change are uncertain. Consequently, prescriptive propos-

itions cannot be reduced to either descriptive assertions about human behaviors and beliefs or predictive claims about potential future developments. Instead, they assume a normative and aspirational character, delineating the conduct, customs, and moral qualities that we should aspire to, even when these prove challenging to realize (Rolston, 1975). This highlights that relying solely on empirical sciences is insufficient for addressing ethical inquiries and substantiating ethical assertions. Undoubtedly, having knowledge about ecological systems, the condition of the world, human psychology, and societal structures is fundamental to sound ethical deliberation. For instance, a key aspect of ascertaining whether we should diminish our ecological footprint is the availability of accurate data pertaining to ecological constraints, the consequences of various lifestyles, and the potential outcomes if lifestyle patterns remain unaltered. Nevertheless, transitioning from descriptive and predictive statements to normative or prescriptive propositions necessitates additional components – namely, values and principles. Hence, at the heart of environmental ethics lie the endeavors to ascertain what elements within the nonhuman environment (henceforth referred to as “the environment”) possess value, the methods and reasons for this valuation, and how we should integrate these values into discussions regarding principles, deeds, customs, and regulations.

The objectives and methodologies of specific environmental policies, ecosystem management approaches, and environmental advocacy activities, among other aspects, can then be appraised based on their alignment with the valued aspects of the environment and how effectively they incorporate the principles justified by those values. Various environmental concerns, such as safeguarding endangered species, sustainable resource utilization, the use of genetically modified crops, mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, managing population growth, and addressing chemical contamination, are ethical dilemmas just as much as they are economic or legal matters. Therefore, it is vital to assess the policies and procedures related to these issues not only in terms of their efficiency or expediency but also in terms of their ethical correctness and moral soundness (Rolston, 1975).

Environmental ethics developed as a distinct branch of philosophy in the 1970s, and its domain has subsequently expanded significantly. Partly due to the rising environmental awareness and social movements in the 1960s, there was a growing public interest in inquiries concerning the moral interactions between humans and the wider natural world (Kaufman, 2003). Within the realm of philosophy, several theorists during that era started to perceive that traditional ethical theories were insufficient in offering a comprehensive framework for addressing this connection. Consequently, the initial impetus behind early environmental ethics

scholarship was a quest to formulate ethical theories that could more effectively encompass our moral responsibilities toward the nonhuman natural world.

### **PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, AND ETHICS**

Historical records indicate that in Western culture, the roots of philosophy extend back at least 2700 years, while certain Eastern philosophies trace their origins even further into the past. Philosophy encompasses numerous sub-disciplines, but two historical epochs have exerted the most profound influence on philosophical perspectives, particularly concerning the environment. These pivotal periods are classical Greek philosophy and early modern European philosophy (Hargrove, 1989, as cited in Sewpershad, 2018). Greek philosophy's historical span can be further categorized into two segments: the two centuries preceding Socrates and the various philosophies that emerged in the wake of his era until the Roman conquest. It could be argued that Pre-Socratic philosophy is primarily concerned with conjecture and contemplation regarding the natural world. Philosophers like Empedocles, Anaximander, and Thales engaged in speculation about the nature and fundamental substance of the world. Despite the seeming simplicity of their philosophical ideas, their musings laid the groundwork for the studies that eventually contributed to the development of the physics we are familiar with today. Thales' theory of matter, a pivotal aspect of Greek philosophy, has profoundly influenced Western philosophical thought (Hargrove, 1989).

From a Western standpoint, the Greek philosopher Socrates is often regarded as the progenitor of philosophy. This influence explains the profound impact Greek philosophy has had on Western philosophy and civilization. Socrates, the acknowledged father of philosophy, lived approximately from 470 to 399 BCE and was considered a thorn in the side of the leaders of ancient Athens. He was perceived as a corrupter of young men due to his unwavering pursuit of an objective understanding of moral virtues, including piety, courage, and, most notably, justice. Socrates placed a strong emphasis on self-examination and the care of one's soul, and he became renowned for his maxim, "Know thyself." Even Socrates understood that all solutions originated from within oneself (Prabhupāda, 2009). The two most notable ancient Greek philosophers following Socrates were Plato and Aristotle, known for the richness and diversity of their philosophical contributions compared to the pre-Socratic thinkers. Plato introduced the concept that the "universality of concepts implied the existence of forms or ideas that govern our perceptions of the world and our thought" (Hargrove, 1989).

The second philosophical period of significance is the modern era, commencing in the early 17th century and spanning much of the 20th century. While Greek philosophy remains a primary source of philosophical perspectives, modern

## **Religions and their Philosophies**

**Abstract:** This chapter critically examines the diverse role of religion in shaping human identity and responsibility toward the natural world, countering environmental degradation exacerbated by secular perspectives. It analyzes key religious concepts like “caring for creation” and “ecological sin,” advocating for a holistic identity beyond humanity and fostering ecological and spiritual unity. Emphasizing the transformative potential of environmental concerns, the chapter prompts a reevaluation of beliefs within the intersection of religion and ecology, envisioning the emergence of an ecological consciousness within religious traditions. This may lead to a new environmentally-centered religious movement. The chapter explores environmental viewpoints in Daoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, scrutinizing their impact on environmental attitudes. It delves into the delicate balance between the consistency and adaptability of religious beliefs when confronted with moral imperatives and evolving worldviews, highlighting religion's dynamic nature in response to contemporary challenges, particularly those posed by an ever-changing and environmentally threatened world.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Caring for creation, Christianity, Daoism, Dynamic nature of religion, Environmental degradation, Ecological consciousness, Environmental ethics, Ecological sin, Islam, Religion, Secular perspectives, Spiritual unity.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Is there a place for religious belief or faith in the environmental discourse? Could the foundations, teachings, and principles of religion serve as the underpinning for the emerging environmental ethics that Gill (1999) is advocating for?

This chapter will argue that religion, whether specific to one belief system or encompassing the collective wisdom of various religions, can help us determine our proper relationship with the natural world. Religion serves as a unique institutional, cultural, and moral resource that can make significant contributions to environmentalism, in ways that are rarely found in other sources. Religion is inherently designed to be a powerful motivator of behavior, and it has the potential to provide crucial assistance in addressing the environmental crisis. It can inspire people to take action and cultivate a mindset that extends beyond individual well-being and economic concerns. Whether consciously or unconsciously,

iously, unconsciously, religious philosophies are deeply intertwined with an environmental consciousness. They all, to varying degrees, emphasize the importance of caring for the environment.

In Daoism, the Daoist ideology focuses on self-preservation and self-cultivation by observing the dao (道), often translated as the 'way.' This involves understanding the cosmic pattern and the natural course of the world. This practice is carried out through meditation and the observation of cosmic energies, transitioning from external to internal perspectives. A Daoist strives to attain alignment with the Dao by adopting an attitude of 'non-action' (wuwei 無為) and nurturing inner potency (dé 德) (Lai, 2007).

Buddhism idealizes and emphasizes the profound interconnectedness between humanity and the environment. It fosters a mindset of cooperation between humans and the natural world by prioritizing qualities like compassion and balance. Within Buddhism, a strong commitment to non-violence towards all living beings is upheld, leading to the condemnation of meat consumption (Hessel & Ruether, 2000). Christianity, drawing its primary teachings from the Bible, has shown a historical concern for the environment. This concern is reflected in one of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shall not kill" (Holy Bible). Numerous Christian institutions actively promote the integration of spirituality and environmentalism (Hessel & Ruether, 2000). In Islam, the Quran and the teachings of the prophets emphasize the sacred nature of the environment, highlighting that it was not created haphazardly or solely for humanity. Instead, it is depicted as a reflection of truth. Many chapters of the Quran make references to the beauty of nature and underscore its significance (Holy Quran). Judaism places significant emphasis on the environment within its regulations, literature, and philosophy. There is a strong focus on the relationship and interaction between humans and the natural world. Judaism predominantly holds an anthropocentric perspective. Hinduism, particularly Gaudiya Vaishnava, is a religion that holds the belief that every living entity possesses a spirit soul, and each soul is inherently valuable. All living beings have the right to exist and fulfill their unique purposes, which are not solely geared towards meeting human needs. Similar to Buddhism, Hindus maintain the principle that harm to others equates to harm to oneself.

One might question whether Lynn White's article has compelled individuals to reevaluate, confront the stark realities regarding the adverse origins of the environmental crisis within religion, and encouraged them to embark on a journey toward a more constructive association between religion and environmental ethics. This chapter contends that religion can indeed play a role in fostering this connection. The enduring and well-documented interconnection between religion

and the environment has persisted. Globally, across various faiths, inquiries are emerging regarding the rapport between humanity and the natural world, particularly concerning the repercussions of human actions on nature. We have observed the prevalent inclination to interpret the human-nature relationship through the lens of the Christian religious perspective or belief system (Melin, 2006). Consequently, this has given rise to the widespread conviction that humans hold dominion over the earth and its natural elements, along with other living beings. However, it is worth noting that the Hebrew origins of the term 'dominion' encompass the concepts of management and care (Melin, 2006). Melin (2006) further contends that even if humans were intended to exercise dominion over the earth, it by no means signified they possessed the right to exploit it. Numerous other religious traditions also share the perspective that nature was not intended for exploitation or domination (Melin, 2006).

This chapter aims to examine how religion and its diverse and dynamic concepts can serve as sources of communities, imagery, moral frameworks, and terminologies for expressing human identity in relation to and responsibility for the natural world. This is particularly relevant in response to the prevailing secular identity and the secularly defined nature, which have contributed to environmental degradation. Religious concepts have played a significant role in discussions of environmental responsibility. For instance, phrases like “caring for creation,” “co-creation,” “Earth goddess,” “Earth theology,” “ecological sin,” “integrity of creation,” “nature as Eden,” and “stewardship” emphasize the need for a broader sense of identity that extends beyond the human realm. These concepts promote an ecological and spiritual unity that transcends reductionist and materialistic concerns, challenging human-centric attitudes and fostering a deeper connection with the broader community of life. Environmental concerns and the religious thoughts and actions they inspire are potentially reshaping concepts of personal and social identity, including religious identity. This may necessitate a process of reevaluation and transformation. As a result, environmental issues can offer a fresh context in which religious philosophies, as well as individuals and groups within them, can reexamine their beliefs, contest prevailing perspectives, and reestablish their legitimacy and public significance. Through this process, they can offer alternative interpretations of the environment and propose solutions to environmental challenges.

This chapter will examine how the field of religion and ecology encourages, stimulates, compares, and combines various religious philosophies to gain a better understanding of the environment and humanity's role within it. This process challenges environmentally destructive views and actions, with the ultimate goal of promoting environmentally responsible behaviors. In doing so, it offers a tangible example of the dynamic evolution and potential role of religion in the

## CHAPTER 5

# Religious Solutions to Environmental Problems

**Abstract:** This chapter critically addresses the insufficiency of scientific knowledge and skills alone in solving the environmental crisis, emphasizing the crucial role of individuals and institutions in implementation change. Despite efforts in environmental ethics, the chapter highlights a growing call to integrate moral considerations beyond the human sphere, suggesting that religion-based approaches might offer ecological responsibility. The chapter examines protective elements in four religions, arguing that these approaches can bridge challenges faced by religious philosophies and environmental ethics. It notes the global failure in enforcing environmental norms and rights, underscoring the potential of religious principles to contribute to legal customs and ethical norms. The chapter explores the historical link between religion and environmental destruction, urging a shift in societal values and advocating for a spiritual solution to transform attitudes toward nature. It highlights instances where religious teachings successfully influenced behavioral change in environmental conservation efforts. The chapter concludes by proposing a religious framework for environmentalism, aiming for a unified, global ethical code grounded in interconnectedness, completeness, and harmony.

**Keywords:** Environmental crisis, Environmental ethics, Environmental norms, Ecological responsibility, Global failure, Global ethical code, Moral considerations, Protective elements, Religion-based approaches, Spiritual solution.

## INTRODUCTION

If solving the current environmental crisis were as straightforward as comprehending the pertinent scientific information and possessing the requisite knowledge and skills to address the issue, our current predicament would not exist. Over the past three decades, diligent efforts from researchers, organizations, and NGOs have been dedicated to acquiring, analyzing, and comprehending data, yet these endeavors have failed to yield any meaningful success in mitigating the environmental crisis. Countless books, documentaries, and films have been produced to expound upon the dire state of our environment. However, the crux of the issue does not stem from a lack of comprehension, access to relevant information, or even the absence of necessary skills. The root of the problem lies within both individuals and institutions (Watling, 2008). It is evident that mere

knowledge, information, and skills fall short of addressing the problem at hand. Environmental ethicists have endeavored to establish a rational foundation for the moral significance of the environment by crafting arguments within the realm of environmental ethics. Nevertheless, reason and rationality alone do not appear to generate moral convictions that translate into behavioral change (Mathews, 2011). An increasingly vocal call to define the criteria for moral considerations that extend beyond the human sphere to encompass non-human life forms is emerging. Regrettably, the plea, as articulated by environmental ethicists, has thus far proved ineffective in bringing about significant behavioral change.

The global failure to enforce environmental rights and norms underscores the need to explore alternative sources of ecological responsibility, one of which may be derived from religious principles followed by faith practitioners. According to Ahmad (2020), “Intergenerational equity is also a chief concern of climate change adaptation efforts and sustainable development. According to much religious teaching, present generations should keep the environment healthy and safe for inheritance by future generations.” A deeper understanding of the connection between ecology and faith reveals that religious traditions have established centuries-old legal customs and ethical norms related to the environment. These traditions can contribute significantly to our comprehension of the public trust doctrine and impact various international legal agreements and mechanisms (Ahmad, 2020).

While examining faith-based approaches more broadly, this book places particular emphasis on the protective elements found in four specific religions. This focus aligns with the framework of environmental ethics and enables resistance against the simultaneous challenges facing religious philosophies and environmental ethics. Identifying religion-based approaches to environmental ethics plays a pivotal role in safeguarding religious identity and preserving the environment (Ahmad, 2020). It is noteworthy that religious environmental ethics have not received adequate attention within the context of the current environmental crisis. This oversight may be contributing to the failure of international environmental law to effectively safeguard the environment. Religion-based approaches have the potential to facilitate the development of an international order that is more ethically driven, coherent, and less conflicting (Ahmad, 2020).

According to Mathews (2011), religion has the potential to provide crucial, normative, and ethical solutions that can be of significant assistance. White also hints at this notion when he suggests that “the spiritual truth at the heart of religion may indeed be a truth inherent to our relationship with the Earth” (Mathews, 2011: p. 275). When considering these perspectives, we are compelled to pose two fundamental questions: How can we bring about change in the world?

And whose world are we discussing? The response to the latter question holds immense significance. Examining the extensive body of literature on religion and its connection to the environment, particularly with a predominant reference to Christianity, there appears to be a prevailing belief that humans were placed on Earth with the purpose of dominating all other living beings. For most individuals, this translates to the notion that the Earth and its inhabitants exist primarily for the enjoyment of humans. The Western world, in particular, exhibited a distinct talent for generating and disseminating intolerance toward other belief systems. They founded their doctrines not only on spiritual principles but also on economic laws. Consequently, a significant portion of the global population tends to perceive the world through a narrow, biased lens of what is deemed right, making it challenging to embrace diversity in the world. This has led to intolerance towards values that deviate from their own (Palmer, 2004).

The landscape has transformed, and the world is now urgently seeking a fresh perspective on how to perceive and interact with the environment. While this shift is primarily driven by the imperative of human survival, it signifies the recognition that the environment and all living entities mutually influence one another. So, the question that arises is how we can usher in a new way of life that doesn't view the environment solely as a means to an end. In this paradigm, the emphasis is not only on human survival but also on the survival and flourishing of the non-human environment.

Numerous initiatives have sought to establish a worldwide framework for environmental ethics, with the Earth Charter being a prominent illustration. Unveiled at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in 2000, the Earth Charter garnered endorsement from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Emphasizing the essential need to preserve the Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty, the Earth Charter urged governments, organizations, businesses, and individuals to recognize the interconnectedness of all living beings. It further emphasized that every form of life possesses intrinsic value and worth, distinct from the value assigned to it by humans. This marked a pivotal moment for the global community, compelling it to recognize the intrinsic value of the environment and acknowledge its crucial role in upholding life-sustaining systems (Mathews, 2011).

Consequently, several theorists and philosophers are now asserting that a more spiritual or meaningful approach is imperative to address the environmental injustices that humanity has inflicted. This entails a deeper contemplation of our connection with nature, a question that extends beyond our individual selves. An avenue for contemplating and reimagining this relationship may lie within various religious traditions. In recent times, an increasing number of religious institutions

## CHAPTER 6

# Solution for the Future

**Abstract:** This chapter discusses the urgent need for a new ethical framework to address the environmental crisis by examining the shortcomings of existing ethical systems in guiding behavioral change, particularly in the context of current environmental policies. The call for a new ethic has gained momentum among academics, economists, and environmentalists, emphasizing a shift toward a more meaningful and spiritual connection with nature. The chapter delves into the virtues of humility, respect, selflessness, moderation, mindfulness, and responsibility within theocentric environmental ethics, suggesting that these virtues can harmonize religious principles with environmental philosophies. Drawing on various religious traditions, the framework aims to foster a sense of interconnectedness and purpose, challenging anthropocentric views and promoting responsible conduct. The chapter also advocates for collaboration between faith communities and international bodies to address the ecological crisis collectively. In conclusion, the text underscores the importance of implementing the proposed ethical framework and calls for further exploration of its feasibility and sustainability in a rapidly advancing world.

**Keywords:** Anthropocentric views, Behavioral change, Collaboration, Ethical framework, Environmental crisis, Humility, Interconnectedness, Responsibility, Sustainability, Theocentric environmental ethics.

## INTRODUCTION

The urgency for a new ethical framework is underscored by the need to address not only the environmental challenges at hand but also the limitations of prevailing ethical systems in guiding human conduct. The discussion emphasizes the growing demand for an ethical approach that transcends traditional boundaries and fosters a more profound connection with nature (Sewpershad, 2018). Cowdin (2008) introduces the concept that a religious framework can provide the necessary connection, challenging anthropocentrism and emphasizing the inherent goodness and intrinsic value of all members of the biotic community. As the call for a new ethic gains traction, the chapter explores the virtues of humility, respect, selflessness, moderation, mindfulness, and responsibility within the context of theocentric environmental ethics. These virtues are envisioned as key components to harmonize religious principles with environmental philosophies, fostering a sense of interconnectedness and purpose. Building upon the insights of Hoffman

and Sandelands (2005), the chapter explores theocentric environmental ethics, proposing six conservation virtues as foundational elements. Humility, respect, selflessness, moderation, mindfulness, and responsibility are examined within the framework of different religious traditions, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of their roles in guiding ethical behavior.

The chapter argues for collaboration between faith communities and international bodies to collectively address the ecological crisis. It stresses the importance of not only proposing a new ethical framework but also implementing and assessing its feasibility and sustainability in our rapidly advancing world. As the environmental crisis challenges established belief systems, the intersection of religion, ethics, and environmentalism becomes a focal point for reevaluating humanity's relationship with the natural world. This chapter sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the proposed ethical framework and its potential impact on individual and collective behavior, laying the groundwork for subsequent discussions on its implementation and the transformative journey toward a sustainable future.

### **CALL FOR A NEW ETHIC**

Berunger and Douglas (2012) contend that existing ethical systems or theories have failed to provide effective moral guidance capable of inducing the necessary behavioral changes, particularly concerning contemporary environmental policies. Recognizing this shortfall, prominent assemblies of scholars, economists, and environmentalists who share a collective concern for the environment and its future advocate for the formulation of a new ethical framework. While the concept of crafting a new ethic is not novel, the impetus for its creation has intensified in recent times and is now being actively sought (Palmer, 2004). Upon deeper reflection, thinkers and philosophers like Leopold, Naess, Devall, and Callicott posit that establishing a more profound and spiritually connected relationship with nature is crucial for reshaping our worldview and attitudes toward the environment. They assert that such an association is indispensable for the emergence of a new ethic (Hedlund-De Witt, 2013).

According to Cowdin (2008), Hart contends, citing Hart, that a religious framework has the potential to establish such a connection. In this framework, the concept of anthropocentrism is relinquished, and instead, an understanding is embraced wherein all members of the biotic community inherently possess goodness and intrinsic value. These entities are to be acknowledged and respected accordingly. Additionally, Hart underscores the importance of fostering positive relationships with non-human living beings, as we share a common habitat with them (Cowdin, 2008). The initial significant effort to shift away from a human-

centered environmental ethic is documented in Taylor's "Respect for Nature" (1986), which contends that we must acknowledge the inherent worth of every living entity, acknowledging the pursuit of their own well-being, while rejecting the notion of human superiority. Nevertheless, the ethical framework for the future must also guard against succumbing to the pitfalls of individualistic theories and focusing solely on non-human individuals to the exclusion of the entire creation (Taylor, 1986). Norton (1984) echoes this apprehension, asserting that a viable environmental ethic cannot be rooted in individualism, whether pertaining to humans or non-human entities. It must possess a unique character. The emerging ethic or framework should be crafted with a comprehensive and distinctive approach, grounded in moral considerations for nature as an entirety and the interdependence of all its components. This approach should steer clear of a self-centered focus (Norton, 1984; Katz, 1991). The objective of this framework is to identify virtues that acknowledge that every being, whether animate or not, possesses a purpose, is interconnected with others, and, most significantly, follows its unique path. And,

this framework is to harmonize religious principles with environmental philosophies. As per Hoffman and Sandelands (2005), existing environmental ethical frameworks like anthropocentrism, non-anthropocentrism, and ecocentrism are deemed inadequate to address contemporary requirements. It is suggested that a potential solution could lie in blending religious and environmental values and principles (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2005).

## **FRAMEWORK**

Hoffman and Sandelands (2005), in their examination of possible theocentric environmental ethics, identify six conservation virtues well-suited for this particular ethical perspective. These virtues include humility, respect, selflessness, moderation, mindfulness, and responsibility. Although their discourse primarily revolves around "an environmentalism embedded within Catholic teaching" (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2005: p. 16), it is worth noting that these virtues can also be viewed through the lens of the four religious philosophies previously discussed in earlier chapters. This section will adapt and enhance their framework by providing a more detailed examination of each of the virtues mentioned above within the context of the specific religious philosophies outlined in this study.

### **Humility**

Humility is a shared virtue in numerous religious traditions, stemming from the recognition of a supreme God who holds sway over both humanity and nature. As Leopold suggests, the capacity to grasp "the cultural value of nature" ultimately hinges on a matter of intellectual humility (Leopold, 1949: p. 200, as cited in

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