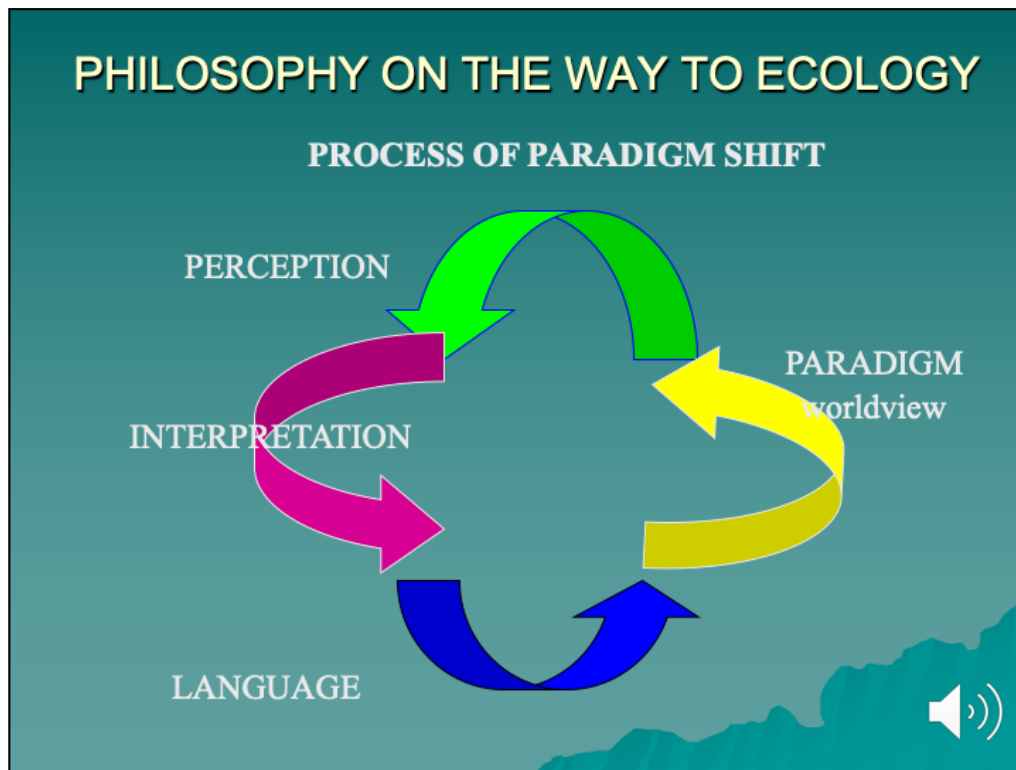


ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

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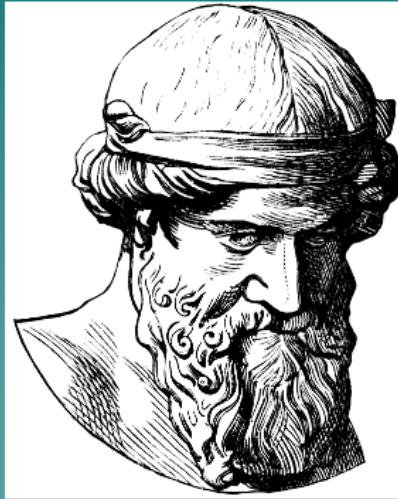
This presentation is about the different environmental philosophical approaches.



To include environment or nature or animals or land as philosophical object study demands a shift in the way of doing philosophy. We have seen and studied these shifts in philosophy. What happened was, when philosophy became more and more specialized many philosophers have begun to carve out new frontiers and landscapes that were not previously studied in detail by the classical approaches to philosophy. The shift to ecological or environmental philosophy started in the U.S. when the University of North Texas opened a subject in environmental ethics in the mid-70's. Since then, environmental philosophy became the ground to engage in multidisciplinary approaches to philosophy.

But the shift in the object of study was not just because philosophers needed to survive in a very competitive academic field but it was also a result of the emerging and rapidly spreading consciousness that humans are part of nature.

PLATO AND DESCARTES



Feminist theories trace the development of dualism to Plato that culminated in the modern period with René Descartes. Plato's philosophical project is to determine the relationship between what is "immutable" or unchanging and what "flows" or is changing. This dichotomy between the two seemingly suggests differing realities but for Plato, the only reality is the "World of Ideas" where eternal things reside. The "World of Matter," which can be deduced by the senses, is but a mere shadow cast by the former.

The true, the good and the beautiful reside in the world of ideas and can only be "seen" through the light of reason. The eye is not of the body but of the mind. Plato's goal of knowledge is not the "world in its wonderful, messy, unutterable particularity or details," but the essence of things, universals, and "the thing in itself." True knowledge is therefore rational and not empirical and disembodied.

Plato's influence on western philosophy cannot be argued. The primacy of reason over the senses as conduit of true, objective knowledge achieves a high point with René Descartes. Descartes' philosophical project is to ascertain that knowledge is to be found not through the soul's returning to the gods but through turning inward into the individual's inner thoughts. The famous "I think, therefore I am" statement is the representation of this claim and this implies that the individual subject is everything; the world and especially the natural world is merely dead matter. It is object; I am subject.

THE SUBJECT-OBJECT MODEL

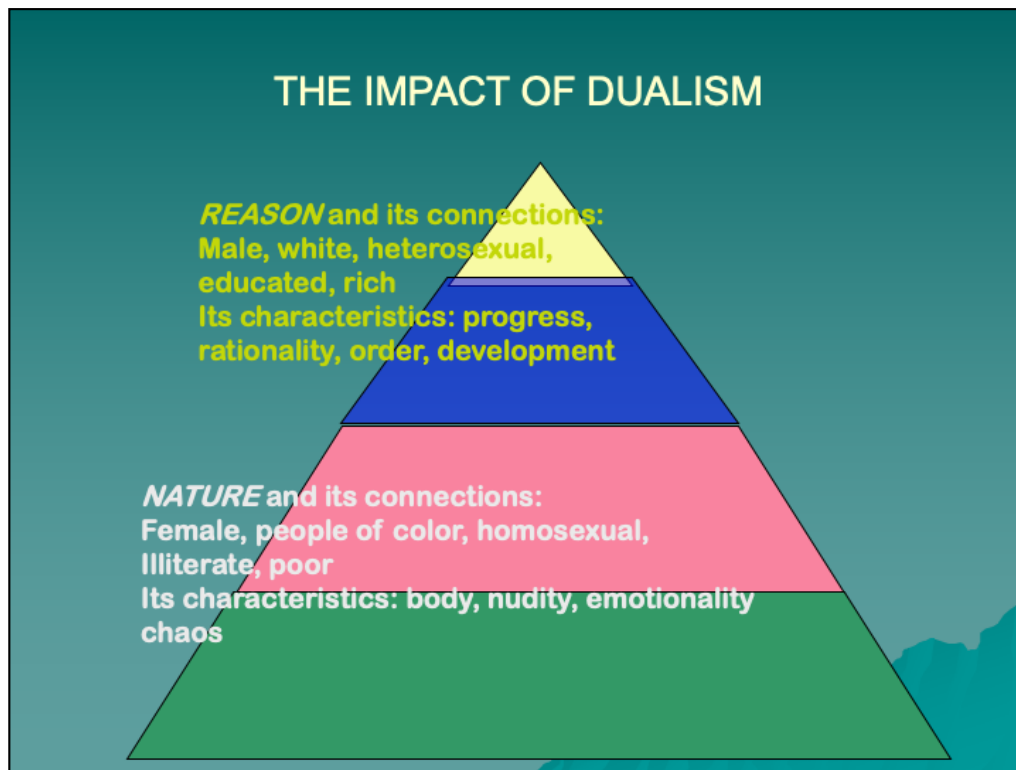
CHARACTERISTICS :

Hierarchy
Dualism
Arrogance
Control

**ITS ASSUMPTION IS
THAT EVERYTHING NOT
HUMAN CAN BE
DOMINATED,
CONQUERED
AND EXPLOITED.**



Marilyn Frye (1983, 67), describes the arrogant eye as acquisitive, seeing everything in relation to the self-either “for me” or against me.” The arrogant gaze is so focused on the self that it cannot imagine the possibility of the other as independent and indifferent. The arrogant gaze wields control over women in the manner that makes them subservient to men. The images of pimp-prostitute relationship are just several of the ways with which this control is manifested subtly so that it appears the victims act willingly. The arrogant eye or gaze is also a patriarchal eye and it is not limited to the way men look at women but also the way humans regard nature. It simplifies the world to control it, denying the complexity and the mystery of what it cannot understand. A good example is the Western culture, which sees itself as the sole subject, at the center, with the world spread out and available for its benefit, views women and nature in the same way—the male gaze, the anthropocentric gaze and the colonial gaze are similar.



Is the ultimate link between woman and nature due to the fact that both are objectified as “others” of a patriarchal, dominant supposedly rational object? Ynestra King, one of the pioneers of ecofeminism, says yes. The hatred of woman and the hatred of nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing. Nature is “other” and therefore essentially different from culture that defines human evolution (1998, 431).

Plumwood insists that women’s inclusion in the sphere of nature has been a major tool in their oppression emerges clearly from a glance at traditional resources. From the above, feminine ‘closeness’ with nature has hardly been a compliment. For Mellor (2000, 1), dominant men claim to be above nature (transcendent), women are seen as steeped in the natural body (immanent). Nature has suffered the same inferior status as women, even as it has also been used as a norm to oppress women. “Naturism,” the domination of nature, is a lifelong partner to sexism: the feminization of nature and the naturalization of women have been crucial to the historically successful subordination of both.



A Survey of Various Approaches to Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics, as defined by the *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, is a standard of conduct based on moral principles that supports a holistic, biocentric view of the relationship of humans with the environment. It further states that the significance of this field of ethics is that it deals with problems and challenges related to the relationship of humans with the environment and attempts to resolve them. The environmental destruction we are facing today questions the way humans have long regarded the environment and nature as a whole

HUMAN-CENTERED TRADITIONAL APPROACH



God created humans to be stewards of the rest of God's creation but in time have systematically destroy them, endangering the well-being of future human generations.

Traditional Humanism or Stewardship

Traditional humanism or the human-centered approach to environmental ethics arose from a need to assess the convulsive changes brought about by centuries of industrialization. This model started in the West, particularly in the highly industrialized consumer societies. This worldview, popularly known as stewardship, has gained acceptance in these societies for the last 50 years. The environmental destruction that was happening demanded that a new way of looking and regarding nature has to be appropriated.

Stewardship as an ethical responsibility to manage the planet with love, care and knowledge aptly stirred the emotions and sentiments of the largely industrialized and prosperous nations to take stock and contemplate on the massive environmental destruction that lay before their eyes. The same nations who had for centuries, plundered the earth for the fulfillment of the aspirations for social and political development. The strength of this ethic is that it brought to the attention of world leaders the interconnection of human misery borne out of massive poverty with the environmental crisis, yet the weakness lies in the emphasis on human tribulations and in effect, human being's superiority over the rest of nature. This particular problematic

assumption is brought into the limelight glaringly by the ecocentric, environmental ethics.

ANIMAL RIGHTS APPROACH

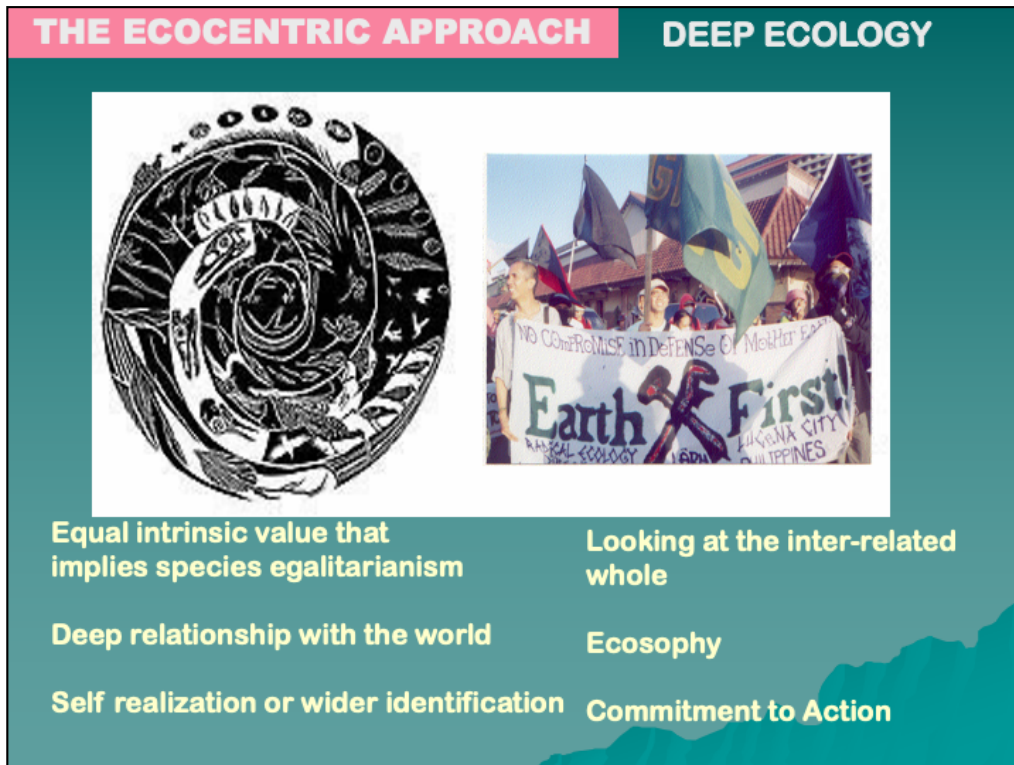


www.animalsvoice.com

Advocates of the animal rights approach claim that it is fundamentally wrong to regard animals solely as source of food, as subjects for laboratory experiments, and as pets and spectacles in zoos and parks.



Extending moral consideration to animals emphasizes the importance of nonhumans in our midst. It brings into the forefront, the plight of animals that suffer from the attitude of humans, who exploit the belief that a human, as specie, is the apex of creation.



The Ecocentric Approaches

Most literature on environmental ethics describe the ecocentric approaches as radical approaches because they advocate that moral consideration and moral duty for the environment ought to include all of it and not just the interest of humans and some animals. Expressions of moral responsibility for the environment are varied for the ecocentric approaches. It is suggested that the environment has direct rights that qualifies it for moral personhood, that it is deserving of a direct duty and that it has inherent worth. Common to all of these claims is the position that the environment by itself is on a moral par with humans.

The term “Deep Ecology” was coined by Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher, together with George Sessions in 1972 as a response to the call for an alternative view on environment that takes into account the relationship of humans with the rest of the ecosystem. This call, according to Naess, can be traced to Rachel Carson, a biologist whose book, *Silent spring* (1962), is considered to be a seminal work on environmentalism. What Carson has started is to question humanity’s competence in environmental management, as well as, the prevailing anthropocentrism of western culture.

For deep ecologists, the question, “In what situations do I experience the maximum satisfaction of my whole being?” acquires urgency in the midst of the environmental catastrophe. The environmental crisis is a crisis of consciousness. The way we think about nature and our relations with it is pure and simple, wrong. A change in the way we understand and relate to nature is the top priority for addressing the environmental crisis (Dryzek and Schlosberg 1998, 349). For Naess, the crises are not borne of lack of resources but rather the overconsumption of them—at the heart of the crises is lifestyle.

The Contribution of Ecofeminism



Ecofeminism is a philosophical system that claims that domination of women and nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing. In this study, the definition of ecofeminism comes from Karen Warren (1993). She claims that ecofeminism is a position based on the following claims: (i) there are important connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; (ii) understanding the nature of these connections is necessary to any adequate understanding of the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; (iii) feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective; and (iv) solutions to ecological problems must include a feminist perspective. The encyclopedia of religion and nature traces the historic evolution of ecofeminism.

It emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as myriad forms of feminist and environmental theories and activism intersected. Francoise d'Eaubonne introduced the term in her book *Le féminisme ou la mort* (feminism or death) published in 1974. Some theorists, such as Ynestra King (1999), name it as a third wave of feminism, while others place it in the general category of deep ecology. Ecofeminism acts in both and neither of these broad movements, simultaneously serving as an environmental critique of feminism and a feminist critique of environmentalism. Ecofeminist trajectories are varied; there is no one accepted or orthodox "ecofeminism."

NATURE = WOMAN?



Ecofeminism posits that there is a parallelism between the destruction of nature and the oppression of women. It is not difficult to see this unique relationship as their lives, situation and experience are intertwined in the most intimate manner. They are identified with each other and as such share twin oppression in a patriarchal culture. For some ecofeminists, the root of ecological destruction is in the disordered relationship between men and women (Marti Kheel 1990, 128) and it asserts that the split between humanity and nature in turn reflects split between men and women (Michael Zimmerman 1994). For Val Plumwood (1994, 210), a dualistic power hierarchy that creates a logic of interwoven oppressions supports this split between man and woman and between humans, and all other comparative spheres of existence.

SOCIAL ECOLOGY



Nearly all ecological problems are social problems (economic and political) and that to remedy the former there is a need to identify their social causes.

Social ecologists led by Murray Bookchin, ask: “How did a divisive and combative relationship between nature and humanity emerge? What were the institutional forms and ideologies that rendered this conflict possible? Given the growth of human needs and technology, was such a conflict really unavoidable?”

Moreover, can it be overcome in a future, ecologically oriented society? The task involves searching out the relationship of society to nature, the reasons why it can destroy the natural world, and, alternatively, the reasons why it has and still can enhance, foster, and richly contribute to natural evolution” (Bookchin 1998, 425). In other words, there is still a need to investigate the contribution of market-driven economics to environmental or ecological destruction. A human society has the ability to effect changes—better or worse.

A human society is more complex and it cannot be reduced to a mere community. Alienating humanity from nature, where it is rooted and from which it evolves with complexity as a thinking life form, magnifies the alienation of humanity within itself. Deep ecologists argue that humanity, as “species,” is the cause of ecological destruction. For social ecologists, this claim is dangerous as it holds that people, not society and its wealthy beneficiaries, are responsible. This declaration also accuses the non-whites, the poor, women and the oppressed, of environmental breakdown.

ECOPHENOMENOLOGY: DEVELOPING DEPTH OF PERCEPTION



Maurice Merleau-Ponty dismisses the notion that the body is purely biological, the stuff of medical research. In her appropriation of Merleau-Ponty, Bigwood (1993, 49) explains that this body that is sensitive and in deep communion with its environment is not the biological object body that science describes it. It is a “living” body, a “phenomenological” body that is able to take in all “fields of relation.” She continues, [the body] “is not a separate physical entity in a world external to it but is of the same stuff as its environs. The phenomenological body is not fixed but “continually emerges anew out of an ever-changing weave of relations to earth and sky, things, tasks, and other bodies” (Bigwood 1993, 50).

The existence of phenomenological body presupposes that the world, which it interacts with, is not a collection of dead, inanimate objects. In Phenomenology of perception, he uses some metaphors to illustrate how existence realizes itself in the body because of this incarnate communion with its surroundings (1962, 216, in Bigwood 1993, 49).

To touch the coarse skin of a tree is thus, at the same time, to experience one's own tactility, to feel oneself touched by the tree. And to see the world is also, at the same time, to experience oneself as visible, to feel oneself *seen*. Clearly, a wholly immaterial mind could neither see things nor touch things—indeed, could not experience anything at all. *We* can experience things—can touch, hear, and taste things—only because, as bodies, we are ourselves included in the sensible field, and have our own textures, sounds, and tastes. We can perceive things at all only because we ourselves are entirely a part of the sensible world that we perceive! We might as well say that we are organs of this world, flesh of its flesh, and that the world is perceiving itself *through* us.

David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*

