

A STUDY ON ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN SELECTED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN SELANGOR

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Introduction:

Environmental ethics is the part of environmental philosophy which considers the ethical relationship between human beings and the natural environment. It is the field of inquiry that addresses the ethical responsibilities of human beings for the natural environment. It exerts influence on a large range of disciplines including law, sociology, theology, economics, ecology and geography. Environmental ethics is the discipline that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its nonhuman contents. It also can be defined as the field of inquiry that addresses the ethical responsibilities of human beings for the natural environment. This field took its name from the 1979 creation of the journal *Environmental Ethics*. (Botzler & Armstrong, 1998)

Nature can be seen as beautiful and harmonious but it also inspires fear in man who has had to fight it in order to survive. Nowadays, nature is threatened by man who has become detached from it. Rapid economic growth and industrialization has caused serious environmental problems to our Earth. Technology has endowed humans with the power of a major geological agency, which may act on a continental or even planetary scale (e.g. acid rain, photochemical smog, radioactive contamination, stratospheric ozone depletion, climate change). These man-made environmental problems cannot all be solved by technology alone. Changes in human behaviour are necessary, hence the need for codes of conduct based on the ethics of the environment. The relationship between man and nature must be reconsidered. (Bourdeau, 2003)

As human population growth, technology, pollution and demands on finite resources begin to tax the earth's capacity, the theory that man and environment are a whole must be put into practice if man is to avoid self-destruction. A fundamental change in man's attitude toward the environment and most important of all, an ethical basis for the necessary legal and incentives is required for the man to avoid self-destruction in the environment. According to Blackstone, 1974, the main cause of environmental crisis is mistaken values and attitudes, which are "the attitudes that we can exploit the environment without restrictions, that the production of goods is more important than the people who use them, that nature will provide unlimited resources, that we have no obligation to future generations to conserve resources, that continued increases in human population is desirable and that the right to have as many children as one wants is an inviolate right, that the answer to the problems of technology is more

technology, and that gross differences and inequities in the distribution of goods and services are quite acceptable”.

The “environmental awareness movement” which began in the late 1960s is evidence that people’s attitudes are changing rapidly, and so it would seem that the development of an environmental ethics is but a logical extension of general ethics. (Blackstone, 1974)

During the three thousand years which have since elapsed, ethical criteria have been extended to many fields of conduct, with corresponding shrinkages in those judged by expediency only. This extension of ethics is actually a process of ecological evolution. An ethic, biologically, is a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle of existence and philosophically, is a differentiation of social from anti-social conduct.

There are four typical environmental philosophical perspectives dealing with the view of environment which is technocentrism, anthropocentrism, biocentrism and ecocentrism.

Technocentrism is the philosophical perspective that meaning values centred on technology. Technocentrists, including imperialists, have absolute faith in technology and industry and firmly believe that humans have control over nature. Although technocentrists may accept that environmental problems do exist, they do not see them as problems to be solved by a reduction in industry. Rather, environmental problems are seen as problems to be solved using science. Indeed, technocentrists see that the way forward for developed and developing countries and the solutions to our environmental problems today lie in scientific and technological advancement.

The term ‘anthropocentric’ was first coined in the 1860s, amidst the controversy over Darwin's theory of evolution, to represent the idea that humans are the center of the universe (Campbell, 1983). Anthropocentrism is the philosophical perspective asserting that ethical principles apply to humans only, and that human needs and interests are of highest, and even exclusive, value and importance. Thus, concern for nonhuman entities is limited to those entities having values to humans.

There are typically two major types of anthropocentrism, which is strong anthropocentrism and weak anthropocentrism. Strong anthropocentrism is characterized by the notion that nonhuman species and natural objects have value only to the extent that they satisfy a “felt preference”, which is any fulfilable human desire, whether or not it is based on thought and reflection.

For weak anthropocentrism, it was distinguished by the affirmation that nonhumans and nature objects can satisfy “considered preferable” than as well as “felt preferences”. A “considered preference” is a human desire or need that is based on careful deliberation and is compatible with a rationality adopted world view, incorporating sound metaphysics, scientific theories, aesthetic values and moral ideals.

Thus, weak anthropocentrism value nonhuman entities for more than their use in meeting unreflective human needs. They value them for enriching the human experience.

Biocentrism defined as the belief that all forms of life are equally valuable and humanity is not the centre of existence. In *Respect for Nature* (1986), Paul Taylor described the fundamental points of biocentrism. First, Taylor equates the status of human beings with that of animals. He argues that humans and animals share the earth, and should live equally and harmoniously. Second, Taylor says that human and other animal species are interdependent. This rejects the view that humans need animals, or that animals depend upon humans. (Taylor, 1986)

Third, every living creature is unique, and lives in its own way for its own good, says Taylor. This implies that one species cannot know more about what is good for another species than that species itself. Fourth, Taylor rejects the argument that human beings are inherently superior to animals.

But, there is a key problem in biocentrism. This philosophical perspective still pre-ecological, which mean that not really focused on ecosystems, but on individual life forms.

Ecocentrism is based on the philosophical premise that the natural world has inherent or intrinsic value. There are typically two types of ecocentrism which is the land ethic and deep ecology.

Land ethic was first clearly articulated by Aldo Leopold in the late 1940s. The proponents of the land ethic advocate the human responsibility towards the natural world. Proponents of the land ethic advocate a true environmental ethic, valuing nature in and of itself rather than only in relation to its significance for the survival and well-being of humans or other select species. The land ethic implies human responsibility for natural communities.

Deep ecology is a more recent ecocentric philosophy. This term was coined in 1974 by Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher, as a contrast with the notion of shallow ecology; the latter includes all superficial, short-term reform approaches to solving such environmental problems as pollution and resource depletion. Deep ecology involves an intensive questioning of the values and lifestyles that have led to serious environmental problems. (Botzler & Armstrong, 1998)

Objective:

1. To determine the environmental philosophical perspective among undergraduates.
2. To compare the environmental philosophical perspective among undergraduates between public and private institution.

Research Methodology:

Study Area

The area of study will be in selected public and private universities in Selangor. There are currently 4 public universities and 14 private universities in Selangor (MOHE). The universities which offered environmental based courses will be selected as study area. The subject of 'environment' covers a whole range of areas; from environmental science and health, to more specific topics such as planning, law, landscape and construction. ("University Environmental Courses - Environment Training and Education")

Questionnaire Design

University students' environmental philosophical perspective will be measured by using a well-designed questionnaire. All questions asked in the questionnaire were relevant to the goal of the study. Likert scale has been used for scoring which have 5 points for each question. Five points were assigned to 'strongly agree', four to 'agree', three to 'neutral', two to 'disagree' and one to 'strongly disagree'. Questionnaire will be divided into two parts which is respondent particulars and their views on towards the earth. The final questionnaire was bilingual, containing question items written in English accompanied by the Malay version.

Data Collection

Well designed questionnaires will be distributed among the undergraduates to observe their environmental philosophical perspective.

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis such as T-test and ANOVA will be conducted using statistical software, SPSS Version 17 to analyze the data.

Result & Discussion

Pre Test

A pre test has been carried out to check the validity and reliability of the survey instrument. Sixty-four second year Bachelor of Science (Environment) undergraduates with the target population responded to the pilot questionnaire in a half hour sit in session. Besides responding to the questionnaire, they were asked to comment on difficulty in comprehension of content and language used in the questionnaire. The time taken for respondents to complete the questionnaire ranged from 5 to 30 minutes.

Reliability analysis on the scale items was carried out to obtain Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which measures the internal consistency of a scale. Internal consistency refers to the degree to which the items that make up the scale 'hang together', that is, whether all the items are measuring the same underlying construct (Pallant, 2005).

According to Pallant (2005), an acceptable scale should have a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.7 and above. The reliability of a scale varies depending on the sample that it is used with. Moreover, Cronbach alpha values were sensitive to the number of items in a scale. Short scales of less than 10 items often return low Cronbach's alpha values.

Here is the analysis result for reliability test for pilot test:

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for scale items in pilot test

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Technocentrism / Ecocentrism (14 items)	0.608
Anthropocentrism (14 items)	0.816
Biocentrism (14 items)	0.845
Attitude (21 items)	0.817

To improve the reliability of the scale measures, some modifications were made on the questionnaire. The number of items in the 'Technocentrism / Ecocentrism' subscale was decreased from 14 to 13.

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for scale items after modification

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Technocentrism / Ecocentrism (13 items)	0.895
Anthropocentrism (14 items)	0.816
Biocentrism (14 items)	0.845
Attitude (21 items)	0.817

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