

LESSON 4: The Human Person in the Environment

Objectives In this lesson, you will be able to:

1. explore distinct frameworks of the human person in the environment;
2. demonstrate the virtues of prudence and frugality toward one's environment;
4. appraise the beauty of nature; and
5. construct arguments on the pros and cons of effective and humane ecological costs.

Introduction: Humanity's Well-being and Their Environment

Philosophical problems of how the world started and what it is made of were investigated approximately around 600 BCE in Miletus, Greece. Because Ionia was a meeting place between the East and the West, Greek philosophy has Oriental as well as Egyptian and Babylonian influences. In both East and West, philosophers asked questions about the universe and where Earth is in its vastness. Eastern sages explored nature's depths intuitively through the eyes of spirituality; Greek thinkers regarded nature through intellectual and systematic eye (Price 2000).

The suppositions of the pre-Socratic thinkers represent a paradigm shift from the mythical explanation of the beginnings of the cosmos to a more reasonable elucidation. Paradigm shift means a change in worldview, a change in how reality, truth, and facts are viewed. An example of a paradigm shift is when the Catholic Church and medieval scholars mistakenly thought that the world was flat, until Magellan and the age of exploration proved this view wrong. These philosophers looked for the fundamental laws of nature. They wanted to understand scientific progress by studying nature itself, and not by heeding to the dictates of the gods. Though not as sophisticated in the twenty-first-century standard, the pre-Socratic philosophers epitomize the initial intellectual and systematic attempt to understand the origins of the universe.

One of the most prominent philosophers of nature (the physical world and the physical world's relationship with men's behavior with his fellowmen) is Lao Tzu. As the founder of Taoist school of thought, Lao Tzu compared the Tao or The Way to water, heaven, emptiness of a vessel, color, music, flavor, and even to weakness (Quito 1991). He claimed that weakness can overcome strength as the earth's softest substance, namely, water can erode the hardest substance-stone; or as the earth's invisible substance-air-can penetrate a solid wall.

The Taoist aims to be one with all things and to coexist with Heaven and Earth. It is not a philosophy of negation. One does not reject the world, rather, expands it to include the whole universe (Kupperman 1999). Chuang Tzu, the most eloquent representative of the Taoist school, believed in nourishing nature, returning to destiny, and enjoying nature. Chuang Tzu left transformation to things themselves.

Though Confucians have been critical of Chuang Tzu and much rejected by Chinese thinkers that since the fifth century, no outstanding scholar has ever propagated his

doctrines, his impact on Buddhism has been remarkable, mainly in the development of the Zen school. These images highlight wu wei (non-doing) and oneness with nature.

(Image)

Preserving Nature in the Philippines

(Image)

We see Tao in the natural order of the universe as in this serene image taken from China.

At present, there are different views or concepts on nature or the environment from which debates or researches can be framed and reframed. There are two main frameworks: the anthropocentric model (Table 4.1) and the ecocentric model (Table 4.2). The anthropocentric model is based on the premise that humans are essential and central to the universe. Whereas, the ecocentric model emphasizes the ecological or relational integrity that provides meaning to our morals and values. Ecological positioning occurs in the past, present, and future, and its environmental settings with regard to our identifications, relations, and attachments in, about, with, or for various natures (Payne 2009).

(Table 4.1.)

Anthropocentric Model

Human || Culture || Individualism || Mind || Calculative || Human over/against environments || Global/technological

(Table 4.2.)

Ecocentric Model

Nature || Wild || Holism || Nature/cosmos || Body || Relational || Earth/wisdom || Ecology over/against humans

According to Payne (2009), we cannot ignore the valuing of aesthetics and the environment including: artistic appreciation, enjoyment, leisure, fulfillment, serenity, peace, social relations, development toward holism, and self-understanding. Every day, we experience or hear of how nature is destroyed and, thus, flash floods and landslides are common everywhere.

Our limited understanding of the environment opens for a need for philosophical investigation of nature, applying aesthetic and theological factors, as well as to realize our philosophical reflections to the concept of nature itself. In the earlier lessons, we have learned about the underlying qualities of human being as holistic and transcendental. Not only should we value the concepts of other people, but we should also consider carefully the moral, ethical, political, cultural, and ecological realities of where we are situated.

A. Noticing Disorder in the Universe The domination of humanity is linked to the domination of nature based on the anthropocentric model. An unfair or unjust utilization of the environment results in ecological crises and disasters. From this view, human arrogance toward nature is defensible in order to satisfy human interests. Sometimes, humans adopt a manipulative attitude as nature is merely considered as an instrument for profit or self-interest. For example, quarrying or cutting down age-old trees could justify our exploitative attitude toward nature.

(Image 1)

Abuse of Nature

(Image 2)

*Environmental Impact of Instrumentalism *

Current researches by Zimmerman (1994), Elgin (2009), and Pettman (2012), to name a few, exposed the environmental consequence of international politico-economic specialization for specific countries and global regions. Research also shows the implications for both abuses of natural resources and of the generation of wastes and emissions. Such include the emission of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, methane, fluoride, and nitrous oxide that are part of production and consumption in many countries. Numerous concepts and indicators have been used to understand environmental impact such as the carbon footprint (CF). Studies reveal that the higher the income, there is a substantial change in consumption patterns, which results in higher CF. Below is an example of a household chart in North America and the average consumption of CF vis-à-vis.

Goods 18% || Services 17% || Travel 36% || Food 7% || Home 22% ||

□ Travel □ Home □ Food □ Goods Services

Figure 4.1. Average Carbon Footprint (CF) of a Two-Person Household (Hertwich and Peters 2009)

Carbon footprint has eight categories:

1. Construction
2. Shelter
3. Food
4. Clothing
5. Mobility
6. Manufactured goods
7. Services
8. Trade

The ecocentric model (Table 4.2), in contrast, prioritizes the ecosystem and presupposes that the natural world has intrinsic value. Nature is not only valued for the survival of human species, but is also invaluable in itself. For instance, humans have a responsibility toward the land. However, because of the anthropocentric attitude, humanity claims ownership or authority over its environment. For the ecocentric model, instead, love, respect, admiration for nature, and a high regard for its value are essential. For instance, land should be considered not as an instrumental mode of production, but should be preserved with integrity, stability, and beauty. It is unjust when it tends otherwise.

If humanity overworks the soil and substitutes domesticated species of plants and animals for wild ones, human-made changes threaten the health of nature. A study blames human activities for the drastic decline in wildlife population. Human interventions have swift and even violent effect on nature compared to the changes brought by the evolutionary process.

Fifty-two percent (52%) of wildlife population deteriorated because of hunting and fishing (2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, 2018). Whether or not nature can adapt to these changes and self-renew, this becomes a debatable issue.

The study then establishes that the damage is not inevitable but a consequence of our choices. Accordingly, humanity needs to develop an "ecological conscience" based on individual responsibility. Ecologists challenge us to adopt a lifestyle that involves simple living that honors the right of all life forms to live, flourish, and create a rich diversity of human and nonhuman life. For ecologists, the right to live and blossom should not only be for human beings, but must also be valid to all forms of life. This belief stems from an awareness of our dependence to other forms of life, not buying a master-slave relationship.

In 2004, indigenous grandmothers, representing tribes from the Arctic Circle, Nepal, and Tibet, held a meeting to be able to preserve their communities. Deeply concerned with the destruction of Mother Earth, including the contamination of air, water, and soil, war, poverty, and destruction of the indigenous way of life, they have committed themselves to form an alliance that will embrace prayer, education, and healing for our Mother Earth, for all her inhabitants, and for the future generations.

The 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples grants the indigenous people "the right to conservation, restoration, and protection of the total environment and the productive capacity of their lands, territories, and resources; as well as assistance from States and international cooperations." The relationship of the indigenous people with the environment is, thus, spiritually and materially strengthened (Ramiscal 2013).

B. Noticing Things That Are Not in Their Proper Place and Organizing Them in an Aesthetic Way

1. Ancient Thinkers Early Greek philosophers, the Milesians, regarded nature as spatially without boundaries, that is, as infinite or indefinite in extent. One ancient thinker, Anaximander, employed the term "boundless" to convey the further thought that nature is indeterminate-boundless in the sense that no boundaries between the warm and cold or the moist and dry regions are originally present within it (Solomon and Higgin 2010).

According to Anaximander's sketch of the genesis of the world (cosmogony), the evolution of the world begins with the generation of opposites in a certain region of nature: a portion of the boundless first differentiates itself into a cold-moist mass surrounded by a roughly spherical shell of the warm-dry. Once the warm-dry has been separated out, surrounding the cold-moist, it begins to evaporate the moisture of the latter, and this process forms a vaporous atmosphere.

Eventually, the expanding vapor or steam bursts the enclosing fiery shells into rings and, rushing outward, envelops them. The opposite forces caused an imbalance that necessitated their ultimate destruction (Price 2000). What appear to us as heavenly bodies, are in reality, parts of the fiery rings that we glimpse through openings left in their steamy,

vaporous envelopes. The revolution of the stars, sun, and moon around the central earth is in reality the rotation of the vapor-enveloped rings of fire.

Another ancient philosopher, Pythagoras, claimed that order, harmony, and beauty in nature are embodiment of the universe. Further, our relationship with the universe is connected to biophilia (love of other living things) and cosmophilia (love of other living beings).

Pythagorean beliefs such as vegetarianism, abstinence, refusal to eat beans, refusal to wear animal skins, celibacy, self-examination, immortality, and reincarnation were conceived by the author as ethical and ecological.

The Chinese, on the other hand, sees the universe as a continuous whole like a chain of natural consequences. All occurrences in the universe are results of a transitional process due to the primeval pair: yang and yin. It follows that the universe does not proceed onward but revolves without beginning or end. There is nothing new under the sun; the "new" is a repetition of the old (Quito 1991). A human being's happiness lies in his or her conformity with nature or tao; the wise, therefore, conforms with tao and is happy.

(Image 1)

Mt. Qiyun garden marks as a symbol of Taoism. Aerial View of Mt. Qiyun's Yin-Yang Garden

2. Modern Thinkers

In his third critique, Critique of Judgment, Immanuel Kant expressed that beauty is ultimately a symbol of morality (Kant 1997). According to Kant, we must ignore any practical motive or inclination that we have and instead contemplate the object without being distracted by our desires (Goldblatt and Brown 2010). We should try our best to be free of our personal biases when we analyze opinions and express our ideas. For instance, one should not be tempted to plunge into the water in a seascape portrait. In a sense, therefore, the stance that we take toward the beautiful object is similar to that which we take toward other human beings when we are properly respectful of their dignity.

The beautiful encourages us to believe that nature and humanity are part of an even bigger design. This sense of order in a beautiful object is not translatable into a formula or a recipe. Rather, the concept of a larger design, the belief in an ultimate goal in which every aspect of the sensible world has its place in a larger purpose, draws our thoughts toward a supersensible reality. Ultimately, Kant believed that the orderliness of nature and the harmony of nature with our faculties guide us toward a deeper religious perspective. Nature provides the clues and the text with which we see humanity's capacity to make moral choices and avoid immoral choices. This vision of the world is not limited to knowledge and freedom or even to faith in the ordinary sense of the term. It is a sense of cosmic harmony.

Understanding our relationship with the environment can also refer to the human beings with ecology and nature. For Herbert Marcuse, humanity has dominated nature. There can only be change if we will change our attitude toward our perception of the environment. Moreover, for George Mead, as human beings, we have not only rights but also duties. In other words, rights contain in them duties. When a person claims he or she has rights over something,

then he or she automatically gets duties related to the maintenance of these rights. We are citizens of the community, and how we react to it also changes it.

In 2007, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples directed the indigenous peoples' present and future existence to survive and thrive in a contemporary world. Consider this American Indian prayer (Gallagher 1996):

O great spirit, whose voice I heard in the winds

And whose breath gives life to the world, hear me.

I come to you as one of your many children...

I am small and weak. I need your strength and wisdom.

May I walk in beauty. Make my hands respect the things you have made,

Make my ears sharp to hear your voice.

Make me wise so that I may know the things that you have

Taught your children...

The lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock...

Make me strong so that I may not be superior to other people,

But able to fight my greatest enemy; which is myself.

Make me every ready to come to you with straight eyes

So that, when life fades as the fading sunset,

I may come to you without shame.

All over the globe, indigenous tribes are deprived of attribution, remuneration, and respect accorded to their indigenous sources (i.e., land). Our own ecological heritage and systems, from coffee beans to traditional medicines, must be protected from government officials who collude with mining industries and commercial companies that take away their ancestral domains and interests (Ramiscal 2012, 225). In relation to the conservation of our past, the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 (Republic Act No. 10066) and agencies must enforce the implementation, protection, and conservation of our cultural heritage (Ramos 2001).

C. Care for the Environment Advocates Health, Well-being, and Sustainability

In 2017, Tropical Storm Harvey brought unprecedented rain causing flood that crippled Houston, Texas. In scenes evoking the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, police and

coast guard teams rescued more than 3,000 people, plucking many from rooftops by helicopter as hundreds more were believed to be stranded in flooded houses, hanging towels or sheets outside to be rescued. These images show a similar scenario that took place in the Philippines brought by Typhoons Ondoy and Yolanda, to name some, submerging properties and causing fatalities.

(Image 1) (Image 2)

*Destruction of Property: Devastation Brought by Yolanda and Ondoy *

There are several debates among climate scientists over what role, if any, global warming may have played in causing typhoons which played a huge factor in catastrophic flooding. Arguments and some other theories prove the connection between melting sea ice in the Arctic and changes in the jet stream and the weather patterns. Compared before, the top one percent of the strongest downpours are happening frequently. A once in 1,800 years of flooding is reduced to once every 300 years due to warmer air holding more water and changes in storm. Aside from the ecocentric model, climate change triggered different views regarding environmental theories that show care for the environment, namely, deep ecology, social ecology, and ecofeminism.

1. Deep Ecology Ecological crisis is a result of anthropocentrism. For this theory, our controlling attitude extends to nature when in fact, we are part of nature. Deep ecologists advocate humanity to modify their anthropocentric attitude toward ecocentrism.
2. Social Ecology This model argued that ecological crisis is a consequence of authoritarian social structures. Destroying nature is a reflection in which few people prevail over others as the environment is exploited for profit or self-interest. Social ecologists call for small-scale societies, which recognize that humanity is linked with the well-being of the natural world in which human life depends.
3. Ecofeminism This theory, on the other hand, contends that ecological crisis is a consequence of male dominance. Male traits as in the anthropocentric model are "superior" as opposed to female traits ("inferior") as in the ecocentric model. Domination works by forcing the other to conform to what is superior. Nature must be tamed, ordered, and submit to the will of the superior. For the adherents of this view, freeing nature and humanity means removing the superior vs. inferior in human relations. There must be equality and fairness instead.

These theories value the care, conservation, preservation of nature, and humanity. Our search for the meaning of life must not only explore our own survival, but also call for a new socio-ecological order. Erich Fromm, a German humanistic philosopher, believed that it is about time that humanity ought to recognize not only itself but also the world around it. For Fromm (2013), as human beings, our biological urge for survival turns into selfishness and laziness. Fromm (2013) argued that as humans, it is also inherent in us to escape the prison cell of selfishness.

The human desire to experience connection and bond with others is one of the strongest motivators of human behavior. The other is the desire to live, not die. From these two powerful instinctive desires striving in every human being, which of the two becomes

dominant? Cultures that foster the greed for possession are rooted in one human potential. Cultures that foster being and sharing are rooted in the other potential. We must decide which of these two potentials to cultivate (Fromm 2013).

D. Demonstrating the Virtues of Prudence and Frugality toward Environment

Human life is challenged by the speed of fundamental change as it faces the implications of globalization around the world (e.g., global health pandemic of COVID-19). Moreover, technology has become a global force that poses effects on the political, social, ethical, and more importantly, environmental. Globalization encompasses real-world problems and conflicts that are far more complex than either textbooks or political ideologies suggest (Ramos 2001).

Former President Fidel V. Ramos envisioned Philippines in 2020 to initiate economic reforms. At present, the ASEAN Economic Community examines the modernization of the Research and Development (R&D) in terms of productivity performance, economic integration, technology policies, and institutional structure/arrangement. In Davos, Europe, Paris, and regional agreements, sectoral gaps are identified as well, as weaknesses of institutional arrangements are underscored.

The World Economic Forum (2006) was told that the new century belongs to Asia but it seriously requires to tackle many challenges it faces. In the Philippines, e-commerce is used in business operations, e.g., Gawad Kalinga, Inc. (Lallana 2012, 96). Moreover, ASEAN leaders do commit to the importance of e-participation tools, social networking strategies that must be highly competitive, and policy making regarding how R&D must continue to enhance information and communications technology (ICT).

Growing concerns from various international agencies suggest that Asia may have to reassess its "growth-first" strategy. In the case of South Korea, India, or other countries such as the Philippines, the 3Rs concept, reduce, reuse, and recycle, if implemented, could be the missing piece in solving the Asian waste puzzle aggravated by unplanned urbanization and sustainable development (Visvanathan and Norbu 2006).

Arising from the discussions, Fromm (2013) proposed a new society that should encourage the emergence of a new human being that will foster prudence and moderation or frugality toward environment. These are some of the functions of Fromm's envisioned society:

1. The willingness to give up all forms of having in order to fully be;
2. Being fully present where one is;
3. Trying to reduce greed, hate, and illusions as much as one is capable;
4. Making the full growth of oneself and of one's fellow beings as the supreme goal of living; and
5. Not deceiving others, but also not being deceived by others; one may be called innocent, but not naïve.

For Fromm, an ideal society focused on protecting nature, conservation, action, political will, and support from industry. If all these sectors agree on the same goals, the possibility of

change would seem to be considerably greater, especially since most citizens have become less and less interested in party loyalty and slogans.

Summary

This lesson highlights the early Greek thinkers' and Taoist's views that the human being is merely a part of nature. Discussions on early Greek thinkers' and Taoist's views exhort that the human person is but a part of nature. In the age of globalization and technology, many environmentalists argue for limiting all types of consumption and economic activities when these damage the environment. Care and respect for all life forms should not be seen as a fad but as an imperative. As humanity becomes ever busier, we are reminded of our dependence on other life forms. Coexistence with community and reexamining our attitude to nature call for a new order.

This lesson adheres to coexistence with all things, thus, enlarging our awareness of the universe as with Taoist belief and of other thinkers who view humanity as merely one element, "a dot in the universe." Humanity is no more and no less important than all the other elements of the natural world.