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Professional Ethics

I Sea Dead Ethics

There are these things inside the marine biology community called dead zones. These dead zones are bodies of dead water. Quite literally, the water is dead. This is because all the pollution and plastics that pollute our waters have lessened the oxygen content (NOAA). This oxygen deficient water will kill everything living inside of it. If this sounds terrible, that’s because it is. The only survivors are fish that can travel quickly and manage to survive while slowly choking to death. This is a problem that only humans are contributing to and causing worse. Water pollution combined with the 10 to 15 percent of fish dying because of passing through dams, we have a situation that’s killing fish that we might not be able to get back (Harrison). The pollution affecting our bodies of water is an ethical problem. According to a study by the World Wildlife Fund, based on scientific evidence from all over the world says that in the past three decades we have destroyed a third of our natural Earth (Townsend & Burke). I say “we” instead of humans because we all contribute and can all make a difference. However, a third of our natural Earth being practically desecrated is not a grand gesture. We could all live on this planet even if it’s no longer natural at all. I will say though, we would all lose access to fruits and vegetables, we would have no sea creatures to look at, cherish or eat, half of us would die from malnutrition while drowning in our own waste and we definitely would need more folks to start riding their bike to work. Point being, this planet has a guaranteed chance to become uninhabitable for humans at some point. This ethical problem can certainly be blamed on the professional industries at large but it’s not just them. We have to teach people about the problems happening right now and if we choose not to do something, at least we are aware of our impending doom.

The Pew Commission is an independent commission made by the Pew Foundation that was created to devote themselves to helping make a stand for the ocean pollution issue. Their initial goal was to help the entire world but seeing as that was easier said than done, they decided to just work on the 200-mile territorial limit around the United States (Panetta). First off, they went around hosting and attending hearings and talking to all sorts of fisherman and constructing reports that are based off of the current state of the waters. Based on the assessment, our ocean ecosystems have been categorized as in a state of crisis (Panetta). This does not only affect fish, this can affect coral reef, whales and even the birds that feed off of the ocean animals. One thing the Pew Commission reminds us is that 50 percent of our population lives along the coast. What this means is that 20,000 acres of marshes and floodwaters per year are disappearing simply due to urbanization (Panetta). So ocean’s ecosystems are collapsing. However, aren’t the parts of the ocean that are toward deeper water remaining intact? There is no possible way the problem could spread throughout the entire ocean, because 70 percent of our Earth is covered in water.

Where there is a will, there is a way. Ocean gyres are natural spots in the ocean that help move the constant circular motion of the ocean conveyor belt. Instead of natural flowing, clean and fresh water running through these gyres, they are known to be the places with the largest pileup of plastics. (Unesco). To reiterate, the gyres that power the ocean’s entire circulation are now filled with plastic gathered from all around the world.

A report from Carl Zimmer explains that the fertilizer run off, like that from the Mississippi into the Gulf of Mexico, can create bacteria algae that spreads so quickly it desolates the oxygen levels in the water. There are now over 400 dead zones in the coastal waters around the world (Zimmer). Zimmer says that even global warming affects the oxygen level in the waters. If the water is warmer, it can retain less dissolved oxygen. Regardless of any debate revolving around global warming, it is a fact that the carbon dioxide levels in our atmosphere are rising. This is important to our oceans because they get oxygen from photosynthesizing algae floating on the surface of the water. With more carbon dioxide in the air, the algae can’t do their job as well. More importantly, fresh water is less dense than salt water and water that is warmer is also less dense (Zimmer). This means that the water at the surface of the ocean is less likely to sink. To sum this up, this is extremely important because when the water that contains most of the oxygen is less likely to sink, the entire ocean recirculates less oxygen altogether.

Leon Panetta from the Pew Commission continues to educate us about polluted waters in reference to cruise ships. A 3,000 passenger cruise ship generates 210,000 gallons of sewage, 37,000 gallons of oil ditch water and one million gallons of greywater (Panetta). I can hardly fathom that amount of waste being dumped into our seas and oceans. One million sounds like a lot, so what is greywater? Greywater is all wastewater that is generated that does not contain fecal contamination. By categorization, there is water from the toilet and there is everything else. Sources of greywater can include sinks, showers, baths and washing machines. This water would only be suitable to be reused in the practical world for toilet flushing or crop irrigation (Greywater). It’s completely acceptable to eat fruit that has been nurtured with your dirty and soapy shower water. Scientifically, that may be true, but it doesn’t sound very appetizing to me. This is the same water that we create one *million* gallons of for every cruise ship. At this point, I should be starting to see the clear decline in the health of our oceans, but all I see is murky water. If there was one source of the problem, it would be a lot easier to find a viable solution. However, there are numerous sources of pollution and there is no current replacement for things like ferries, which many people rely on to get to work. But in reality, is this situation a crisis? I think that we will not know for a fact, or be able to truly accept our actions, until all of the natural marine life in our oceans becomes extinct.

If pollution is such a problem, then there must be someone to blame. There must be a big company that’s simply trashing the place. Even farmers can affect the waters. Every spring, because the farmers prepare their crop with fertilizer, there is a dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico. That’s right, each spring, each and every thing near the river run off in the Gulf of Mexico dies. The United Nations Environment Programme estimated nine years ago that each square mile of ocean contains 46,000 pieces of floating plastic (Unesco). And that was nine years ago. I can only imagine floating in the ocean with my goggles and looking up to see all the careless actions of people. Real people, like you and I, not just a building, helped create that image. One day we will run out of oil to power fossil fuel and we will fill our entire ocean with junk. It’s inevitable, with our insistence on carelessness, that our planet will become surprisingly uninhabitable. I can picture a world where there are no oceans; where we just leveled out all the mountains and filled the ocean with sand so that the whole world is desert and flat. There are no trees because we cut them all down, there are no fish to eat, animals can hardly find homes and the ground is so dry and brown that nothing will grow. One day, if we continue this unethical behavior, that will happen and there is nothing we can do to reverse it. At this point, I can only be grateful that I will die before the Earth implodes from how much debt the government manages to rack up. And I’m serious about creating more land, there are people with lots of money that take sand from the bottom of the ocean and attach it to our land to create more land for hotels and anything else that sells the ocean-front locale.

To further prove the point; in 1913 there were two billion people on the planet. And, by this year, 2015, there is supposed to be eight billion people on this planet (Worldometers). That means that our population increased by three magnitudes. And, if the trend continues, by 2115 we will have 24 billion people scrounging for food, hoping for shelter and many will just barely be savaging because of how low resources will have become. Clearly, at some point if each couple has two kids on average, then for each person we will have another person each 50 years. In my opinion, in about 200 years from now, which is only a couple of generations away, we will start facing severe repercussions of our choices. Even now, about 21,000 people die each other from hunger or hunger-related issues (Poverty). That is about one death every four seconds. That’s not that bad, if we are continuing at the rate we have been, car deaths, disease deaths, cancer deaths, all, for example, mean nothing because we still are producing at a rate that outshines that. The world birth rate is said to be about 4.3 births each second right now (Barrientos). It’s clear that with more people making the same choices we are, which is bound to happen when parents teach their kids how to litter and pollute, the Earth will eventually be out of natural and clean bodies of water.

Soon people will either become unhealthy because of the lack of fruit and vegetables, the lack of truly organic food, or the lack of lean meat. Or, they will become abominations by consuming pesticides, fertilizer, and steroids that are likely to be sprinkled with nuclear waste. However, we need to take a step back from the long term big picture and focus on the facts and the figures. Today, we should continue to have hope and know that our actions have yet to be turned to stone. Also, we need to figure out exactly what the problem is so that we can fix it.

Now that we are fully aware that our self-destruction is inevitable, what is it exactly that we are doing wrong? We need to pinpoint that problem so that we can jointly make a decision. Almost everyone on the planet has to be in agreement to make a one-eighty degree turn around. If we are all to be in agreement about what needs to happen to change our oceans, the government needs to make concise and connected policies. In other words, everyone needs to be on the same page. There are government officials responsible for these issues but they are all spread out. Consolidation and precision is necessary when creating the policies that affect the health of the water.

The problem that causes all of this is convenience. Farmers use fertilizers to make their crops bigger so that they can get more profit and spend less time farming. The companies pour plastic and other waste in the ocean and the rivers because taking care of it correctly and professionally takes interaction with real people, hard work and money. Also, an impediment to marine life like a dam is creating electricity so that we can use more. At what point is more electricity not worth losing more fish? I am becoming surprised myself how easily we could spell this out for the government and others alike.

In conclusion, the human race has become instilled with this idea that if we live on the coast and we dump our Coke into the ocean, it’s just a drop in the ocean when it comes to pollution. Well, it is just a drop in the ocean, but eight billion people taking their share of drops into the ocean each day takes a severe toll on the destruction of our waters. By now, you have learned that each person can make a difference, and while we can blame the farmers, the cruise ships and the plastic producing companies, ocean pollution is literally going to ruin life for humankind. One of the biggest ethical problems about this is that future generations will be born into a horrible world and they will have no choice on the matter. Their actions will no longer be relevant because once the natural ocean wildlife is all gone there is no way to bring it back.

There are many factors to the decimation of the preservation of this planet, but none of them can be the lone wolf. All contributions to the pollution of our air and water are connected and all will one day keep us eating nutrient paste and keep us watching over our infertile land and plastic filled water. Can you imagine a beach view a few hundred years from now? I would probably still enjoy the coastal view if there were floating pieces of plastic but the smell and sight of all the floating dead sea creatures would definitely lower the resale cost of my condo.

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