



Mains Practice Question

Q. The concept of intrinsic value suggests that nature has value independent of its utility to humans. Discuss the ethical implications of this perspective on environmental policymaking. **(150 words)**

27 Jun, 2024 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Introduce the answer by defining the concept of intrinsic value
- Highlight ethical point of view of Intrinsic Values using ethical theories
- Delve into Key Ethical Implications on Environmental Policymaking
- Conclude in a balanced manner.

Introduction

The concept of intrinsic value challenges the **anthropocentric view** that nature's worth is solely based on its usefulness to humans. It posits that **nature has inherent value, independent of its utility**. This perspective has significant ethical implications for environmental policymaking, demanding a shift in our relationship with the natural world.

Intrinsic Value:

- **Deontological Perspective:** Nature has inherent rights and moral standing.
 - Humans have a duty to respect and protect nature, regardless of consequences.
- **Virtue Ethics:** Recognizing nature's intrinsic value cultivates environmental virtues like **humility, respect, and stewardship**.
- **Consequentialist View:** Preserving nature's intrinsic value leads to better long-term outcomes for both **ecosystems and humanity**.

Key Ethical Implications on Environmental Policymaking.:

- **Expanding Moral Considerability:** Balancing the interests of humans against those of nature poses an ethical dilemma.
 - Environmental impact assessments should be more holistic and transparent and must consider nature as a subject.
 - An example is **New Zealand's granting of legal personhood to the Whanganui River**, recognizing its intrinsic right to "live and flourish."
- **Intergenerational Justice:** It is an obligation to preserve nature for future generations, which is also an ethical principle.
 - Long-term conservation strategies should transcend short-term economic gains, such as the **creation of "Forever Wild" land designations** that provide permanent protection to natural areas.
- **Redefining Progress and Development:** The ethical question of whether economic growth should be pursued at the expense of nature's intrinsic value arises.
 - Integrating ecological preservation into development goals is crucial.
 - **Bhutan's Gross National Happiness index**, which includes **ecological diversity** as a key metric, exemplifies this approach.

- **Challenging Anthropocentrism:** Moving from a human-centered to an eco-centered worldview represents an ethical shift.
 - Policies should protect species or ecosystems based on their inherent worth, such as **conservation efforts for species like the giant panda**, which have limited ecological function but intrinsic value.
- **Valuing Different Aspects of Nature:** Prioritizing between different intrinsic values in nature, such as individual animal welfare versus ecosystem health, poses an ethical challenge.
 - Developing frameworks to navigate conflicts between different environmental values is crucial, as seen in debates over the **ethics of captive breeding programs for endangered species**.
- **Reshaping Human-Nature Relationship:** Moving from domination to partnership with nature represents an ethical ideal.
 - Encouraging circular economies should guide policy direction. Policies promoting **agroecology and permaculture as alternatives** to industrial agriculture illustrate this approach.
- **Expanding Environmental Justice:** Justice for nature as an extension of social justice is an important ethical principle. It's the need of the hour to extend legal frameworks allowing for the representation of nature's interests.
 - **Madras High Court grants mother nature 'living being' status** with rights and duties is a significant step in this direction.

Conclusion

Recognizing the intrinsic value of nature calls for a fundamental reevaluation of our relationship with the natural world, pushing us to develop policies that **respect the inherent worth of ecosystems and species along with sustainable development**.

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