



Mains Practice Question

Q. What is environmental ethics? What are the various issues involved in environmental ethics? (150 Words)

12 Dec, 2019 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Explain environmental ethics and its importance
- Discuss the issues involved in environmental ethics
- Suggest measures to mitigate these issues

Introduction

Environmental ethics is a sub-discipline of philosophy that deals with the ethical problems surrounding environmental protection. It aims to provide ethical justification and moral motivation for the cause of global environmental protection.

Body

- Environmental ethics focuses on questions concerning how we ought to inhabit the world; what constitutes a good life or a good society; and who, where, or what merits moral standing. The field emerged most significantly in the 1960s from an increasing awareness of the global environmental condition.
- It is concerned with the issue of responsible personal conduct with respect to natural landscapes, resources, species, and non-human organisms. It is a cluster of beliefs, values and norms regarding how humans should interact with the environment.

Issues involved in environmental ethics

- **Consumption of natural resources:** Since humans are part of nature, sustainable use of resources can be achieved through cooperation with nature.
- **Destruction of forests:** Big industries and multinational companies form the major section which exploits forests unsustainably. However, the brunt of the destruction is faced by the poor and tribals who are the inhabitants of the forests. It leads to the loss of biodiversity, habitats and extinction of plants and animals.
- **Environmental pollution:** Consequences of environmental pollution do not respect national boundaries. Moreover, the poor and weaker sections of society are disproportionately affected by negative effects of climate change.
- **Anthropocentrism:** It refers to an ethical framework that grants “moral standing” solely to human beings. Thus, an anthropocentric ethic claims that only human beings are morally considerable in their own right, meaning that all the direct moral obligations we possess, including those we have with regard to the environment, are owed to our fellow human beings.
- **Equity:** People living in the economically-advanced sections/ parts use greater amount of resources and energy per individual and also waste more resources. This is at the cost of poor people who are resource-deprived.
- **Animal rights:** The plants and animals that share the Earth with us too have a right to live and

share the Earth's resources and living space. Animal welfare is relevant to environmental ethics because animals exist within the natural environment and thus form part of environmentalists' concerns.

Measures to maintain environmental ethics

- The **“land ethic”** of Aldo Leopold: It demands that we stop treating the land as a mere object or resource. Land is not merely soil, instead, it is a fountain of energy, flowing through a circuit of soils, plants and animals.
- In order to preserve the relations within the land, Leopold claims that we must move towards a “land ethic”, thereby granting moral standing to the land community itself, not just its individual members.

Deep ecology: There are eight principles or statements that are basic to deep ecology:

- The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
- Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
- Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
- The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
- Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
- Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
- The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living.
- Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.

The conservation ethics and traditional value systems: Since olden days, people have always valued mountains, rivers, forests, trees and several animals. Thus, much of nature was venerated and protected. Traditions held plants and animals as an important aspect of nature and were considered the basis of life-support systems and integral to bring about a harmonious life.

Virtue ethics: Virtue ethics is a way of thinking about how to behave well, which focuses on the character of moral agents and the nature of the good life. Virtue ethics is based on a positive view of human nature, one that takes into account that humans are strongly predisposed to recognize excellence in others (including non-human) whom they can take as role models and gain fulfillment from a life lived virtuously.

Conclusion

To cope with the issues of environmental ethics, human beings must reach some value consensus and cooperate with each other at the personal, national, regional, multinational and global levels. Global environmental protection depends on global governance. An environmental ethic is, therefore, typically a global ethic with a global perspective.