

STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS - A HUMAN MORAL CODE TOWARDS ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Treatment of the environment with the perception of it merely being a resource to further the human domain on the planet has come under scrutiny after seeing its impact in the form of environmental imbalance and climate change. Countering to it the field of Environmental philosophy deals with the unexamined values, assumptions and different ideologies existing in humanity towards nature and tries to elicit an effective response pertaining to a nature centric sustainable framework. The research presented here, with the help of a questionnaire and hence the data received tries to make sense of the societal perspective, attitude and the understanding of sustainability. It tries to decipher the differences in the idea of "Sustainable Development" which is, either Anthropocentric, where nature is barely a means for humanity to utilise as deemed judicious by the parameter self-designated by humans or an idea of ecocentrism, which goes beyond the consideration of individuals and extends moral consideration to the ecosystems as a whole. Ecocentrism emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living and non-living components of ecosystem, recognizing their inherent value and the need to preserve ecological integrity. So that just and pertinent value should be given to all non-human components of the environment.

Key words : Climate change, Sustainable Development, Anthropocentric, Ecocentrism
Environmental Philosophy

INTRODUCTION

The human thirst for development is a multifaceted and dynamic force that drives individuals and societies to continuously seek progress and improvement in various aspects of life, with the aim of creating a better present and future for themselves and the world around them. This desire for development has resulted in utilisation of earths limited natural resources in an inconsiderate manner where the prime focus is to fulfil human needs. Which has resulting in Climate change.

Climate change and the fears of depleting natural resources resulting in a subsequent slowing or even closing down of much of the economic activities and production systems has

caused humans to think of an idea of “sustainable development”. The concept has emerged as a broad framework to debate and decide on desirable direction of change in social and economic systems, policies, programmes and actions at the national, community or individual levels and move towards implementing practices that conserve ecosystems, promote biodiversity, and minimize environmental degradation.

The doctrine of sustainable development derives from a discipline in economics that has been evolving for almost two centuries. The debate about whether Earth's limited natural resources will continue to provide life support for humanity's burgeoning population began with the work of the English political economist Thomas Malthus in the early 1800's (Dixon and Fallon, 1989)

sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (UN's Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987)

"Biological resources' includes genetic resources, organisms or parts thereof, populations, or any other biotic component of ecosystems with actual or potential use or value for humanity. (UN's convention on Biological Diversity, 1992)

The above understanding of Sustainable development primarily focuses on the human needs and results in an anthropocentric view of sustainability. It gives humans an ownership of the ecosystem to utilise as deemed judicial by the parameter self-designated by them.

Anthropocentrism simply places humans at the centre of the universe; therefore, everything else in existence should be evaluated in terms of its utility for us. All environmental studies should include an assessment of the intrinsic value of non-human beings (Singer P. 1991)

Environmental ethics is the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its non-human contents. It has come to exert significant influence over a number of human science disciplines including Theology, Law, Economics, Sociology, Ecology, and Geography in relation to sustainability and human well-being. Environmental ethics studies the moral relationship of human beings to the environment and its contents. (Brennan A. Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy.)

Environmental ethics extends the traditional boundaries of ethics from only including humans, to a more inclusive view of including non-human and also the non-living world. (Molotkienė 2020).

Therefore, environmental ethics as a branch of environmental philosophy considers the actual and possible ethical relationships between humanity and non-human nature. (Marjan Laal, 2009). It is a field that considers questions such as our obligation to future generations, to other species and even non-living aspects of the natural world.

The environmental ethics helps define man's moral and ethical obligations towards the environment. Global warming, global climate change, deforestation, pollutions, resource

degradation, thread of extinction are the major issues in which our planet is now suffering. (Ambili S, 2020)

Appreciating the value and moral status of the environment and its non-human contents can help us understand the relationship between human beings and nature with a view to defending the planet against climate change and advancing towards actual sustainable development.

Giving such values to non-human components of ecosystem results in Deep ecology. Deep ecology is based on the idea that nature as a whole has moral value. (Hens L. Global Bioethics, 2014)

All environmental studies should include an assessment of the intrinsic value of non-human components of the ecosystem. Therefore, Environmental ethics as a branch of environmental philosophy considers the actual and possible ethical relationships between humanity and non-human nature.

Environmental philosophy tries to make sense of the unexamined values, assumptions and ideologies behind humanities treatment of the environment and, in doing so, aims at helping to elicit an effective human response to related issues.

Philosophy is responsible for the development of critical, reflective and analytical thinking with an ethical and moral approach, and thus provides us with resources to better understand the reality that we are now experiencing. We are talking about a green philosophy that will enable us to defend the planet against major threats such as climate change. A way of living that involves a holistic approach to preservation and conservation of natural resources. (Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine, Tehran University)

Environmental sustainability involves ecosystem integrity, carrying capacity and biodiversity. It requires that natural capital be maintained as a source of economic inputs and a sink for wastes. Resources must be harvested no faster than they can be regenerated. Wastes must be emitted no faster than they can be assimilated by the environment (Kahn, 1995)

Environmental ethics has much to contribute to the solution of global environmental problems. Various governments and policy makers can bring the insights of environmental ethics into various natural resource management settings and design developmental policies which are focused more on Ecocentrism rather than Anthropocentrism.

In the current study, with the background of environmental ethics, we try to analyse the different opinions and understandings prevalent in the population about sustainable development. We try to interpret the data so as to examine the differences in the perception of sustainable development being an anthropocentric or ecocentrism issue. We proceed to draw on classical, philosophical, and ethical theories to argue the predominance of a certain presumption present in the population and to explore which mind-shifts are required to attain true sustainable development.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To understand the perspective of the population towards sustainability of the environment.
- Do gauge the population awareness between the difference between Anthropocentric and Non-anthropocentric sustainability.
- To see the awareness in society about Environmental philosophy and environmental ethics.

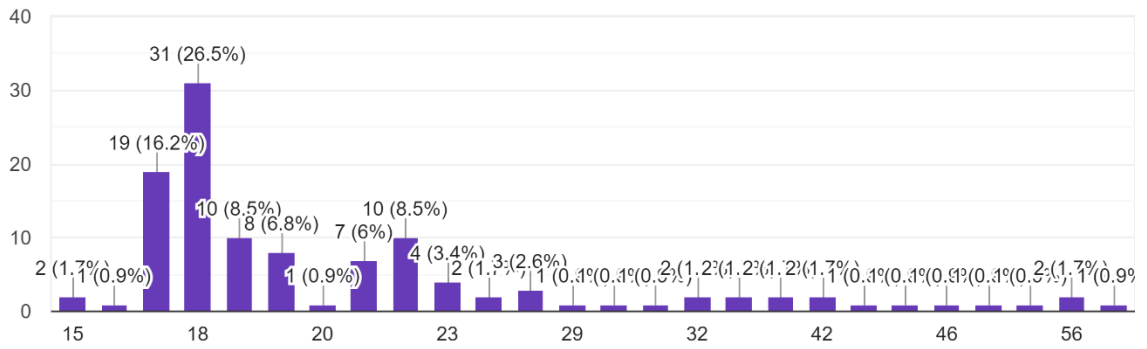
METHODOLOGY

- An open survey with a focus on the topic as conducted
- A questionnaire consisting of eleven questions on the concerned topic was prepared
- Google form of the above relevant questions was generated and circulated
- The data received in form of answers was observed and conclusion was drawn

RESPONSES OF SURVEY

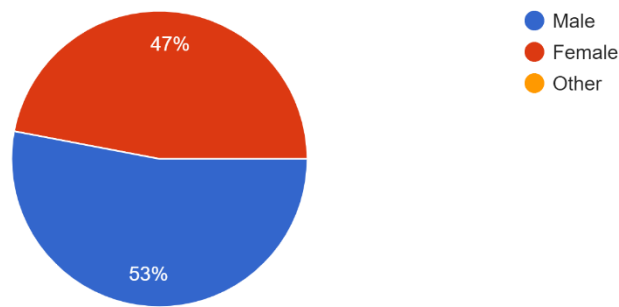
Age

117 responses



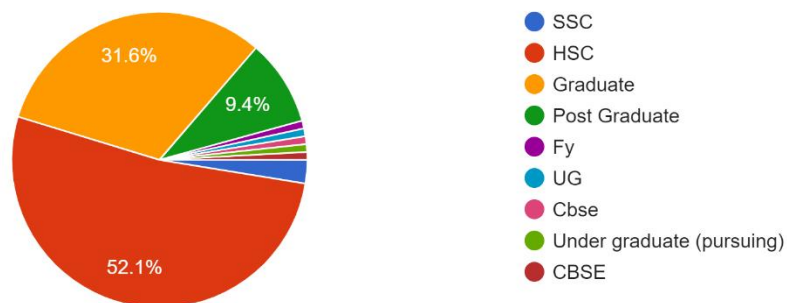
Gender

117 responses



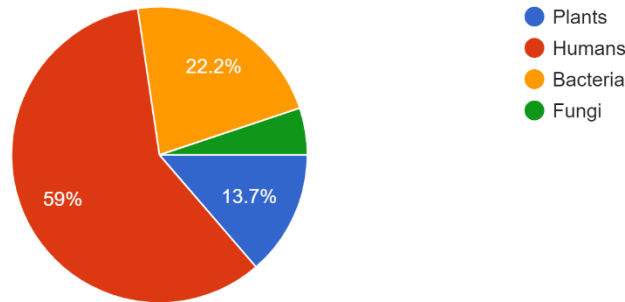
Education

117 responses



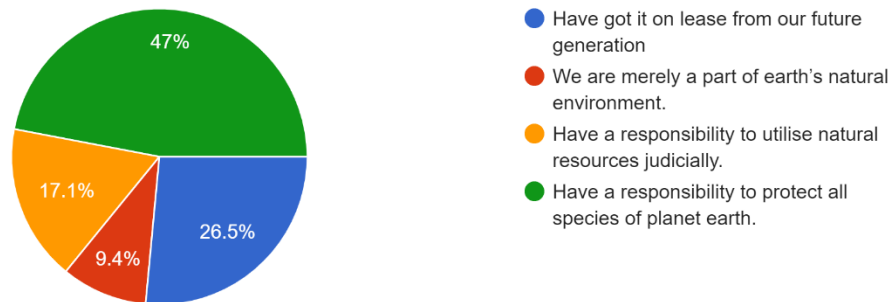
1) Of the following, which is the most successful group of living organisms on earth?

117 responses



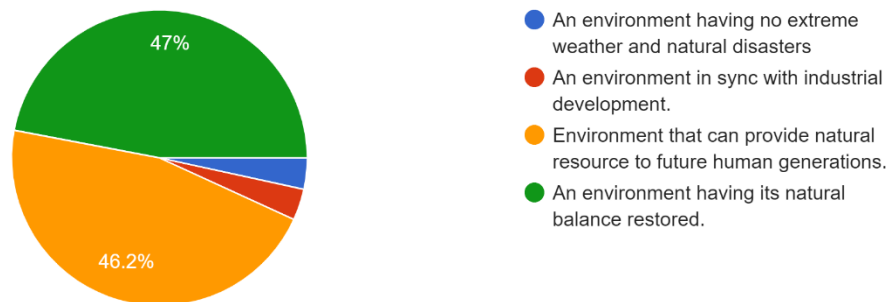
2) As present generation of humans on earth we haven't inherited earth from our ancestors but_____

117 responses



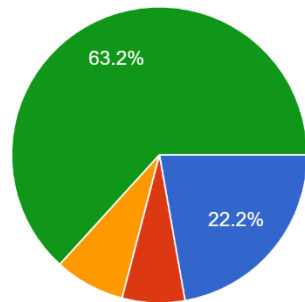
3) What do you mean by a sustainable environment?

117 responses



4) Which of the following is the major cause of environmental imbalance?

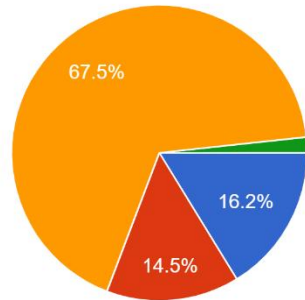
117 responses



- Use of natural resources
- Growth of economy
- Illiteracy
- Population growth

5) What is Green Economy?

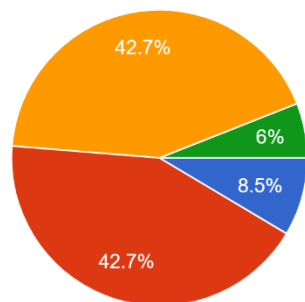
117 responses



- Economy that depends on agricultural produce.
- An economy majorly focusing on Recycling
- Economy that aims at reducing environmental risk and ecological imbalance.
- An economy utilising primary resources only.

6) What do you understand by the term Environmental ethics?

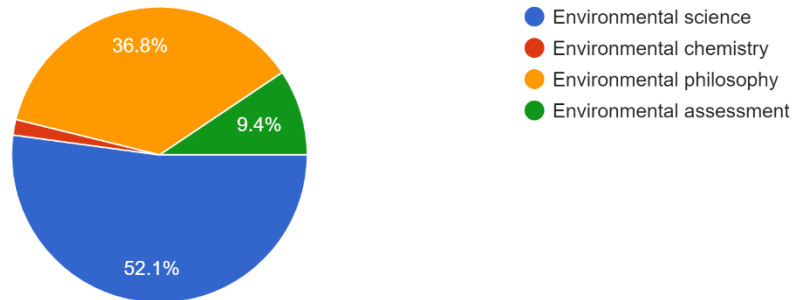
117 responses



- A view giving equal values to all living beings.
- A view giving equal values to all animals, plants, water bodies and landscapes
- The way for protecting the environment and natural resources.
- Assessing effects of human activity on the environment.

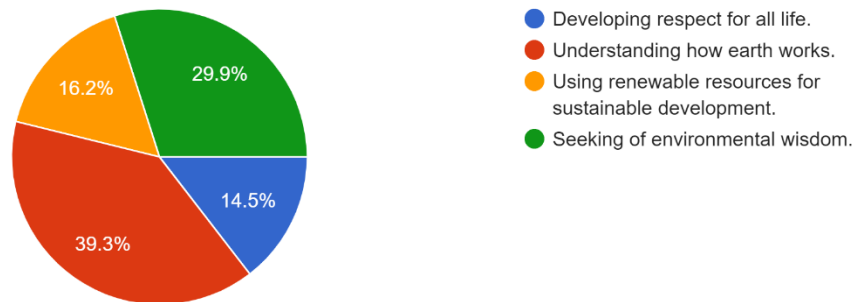
7) Environmental ethics belongs to which field of studies?

117 responses



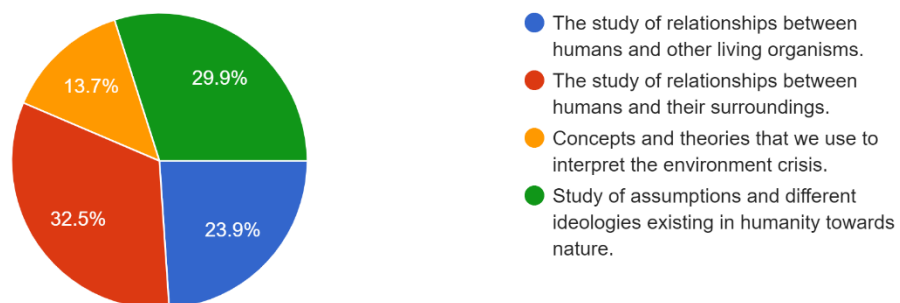
8) Which one of the following is not an Environmental ethics guideline?

117 responses



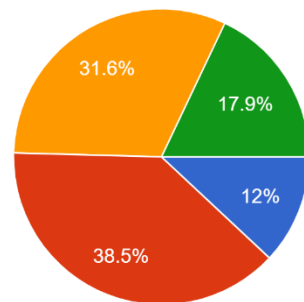
9) What is Environmental Philosophy?

117 responses



10) What is "Non-Anthropocentrism"?

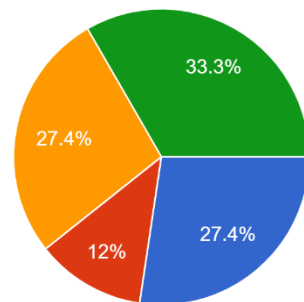
117 responses



- A political outlook that believes in of social equality.
- An attribute of society where people centre their attention and actions on other people rather than themselves.
- A view that humans a merely a part of the Environment
- The ethical belief that humans alone possess intrinsic value.

11) Which of these is not an Environmental philosophical approach towards ecology?

117 responses



- Anthropocentrism
- Veganism
- Technocentrism
- Non-anthropocentrism

The majority of the sample population falls in the age bracket of 17 to 23 years. The age group of the study is the young population which is going to be the policy maker of the upcoming future.

Out of all the responses 53% are male and 47% are female. on the criteria of education 52% people are high school students and 31.6% are Graduates.

RESULTS

- 1) Responses to the first question presents a fact that large number of people understand the need of switching to greener methods of economic development.
- 2) Responses to the second question indicates that a large section of people view sustainability as a prosperity of Humankind i.e. An Anthropocentric view.
- 3) Third and fourth questions' responses furthers the view that maximum people se humans as the most successful organism and believe in humans as the care taker of other species; Effectively the environment.

- 4) Responses to the fifth question clears that there exists a gap in understanding, that people do not see use of natural resources as an environmental degrading process.
- 5) The last two questions present the fact that the understanding and awareness of environmental philosophy and environmental ethics is missing.

CONCLUSION

- 1) The data is indicative of a societal believe of human superiority compared to other living and non-living components of the environment.
- 2) There is a clear awareness that we need to shift towards green environmental practices but it is still with a Anthropocentric point of view.
- 3) People have a perception towards the environment as a reservoir of the natural resources needed for the growth and development of the humanity.
- 4) The lack of awareness about the environmental philosophy and environmental ethics is the causative reason for the vagaries in the conceptual understanding of sustainable development.
- 5) In totality the results indicate the society does value the environment but we need to start respecting the environment.

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