ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS ETH-210-TE

This TECEP® explores the concept of environmental ethics, a philosophy that extends the ethical concepts traditionally applied to human behavior to address the entire natural world. Topics include: history of environmental ethics, the idea of environmental justice, and how our views about the natural world have changed over time. (3 s.h.)

- Test format: 40 multiple choice questions (1 point each); 4 essay questions (10 points each)
- Passing score: 65% (52/80 points). Your grade will be reported as CR (credit) or NC (no credit).
- Time limit: 2 hours

Topics on the test and their approximate distribution

Below are the topics covered by this exam. The percentages indicate how much of the test is made up of questions on that topic. Following each line are links to free and openly-licensed review materials that can help augment your prior knowledge on that topic. These materials have been selected by our subject matter experts and will supplement your understanding of the topics covered in this exam. Make sure to compare what is covered in these materials to what will be covered on the exam—what is important is that you are knowledgeable on the exam topics described below.

1. OVERVIEW (20-25%)  
   - Ethical behavior  
   - Environmental ethics perspectives  
     - Anthropocentric  
     - Biocentric  
     - Ecocentric  
     - Deep ecology and the Gaia hypothesis  
     - Speciesism  
     - Ethical egoism and utilitarianism (how they apply to environmental issues)

2. APPROACHES, BELIEFS, WORLD VIEWS (20-25%)  
   - Religious views about the environment  
   - Utilitarian conservation vs. biocentric preservation  
   - Anthropocentric vs. non-anthropocentric ethical approaches  
   - Models of environmental sustainability and sustainable development  
   - Instrumental or extrinsic values vs. intrinsic values  
   - TEK (traditional ecological knowledge)

3. HISTORY, PIONEERS, KEY EVENTS (20-25%)  
   - John Muir: Sierra Club, national parks  
   - Gifford Pinchot: U. S. Forest Service  
   - Aldo Leopold: Land Ethic, wildlife/wilderness ecology  
   - Garrett Hardin: The Tragedy of the Commons  
   - Rachel Carson: “Silent Spring”  
   - Arne Naess: Deep Ecology  
   - James Lovelock: Gaia hypothesis  
   - Formation/role of the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)  
   - Air and water quality issues  
   - Energy  
   - Climate change
4. **ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE** (20–25%)
   - Environmental justice definition
   - Environmental racism
   - Environmental injustice around the world
   - Relationship between the human rights movement and environmental justice
   - Environmental rights litigation
   - Environmental management strategies
   - Goals of the environmental rights movement
   - Environmental effects on health
   - Community focus of environmental justice movement
   - Industrial and corporate interests

5. **ENVIRONMENTAL LAW** (5%)
   - Key environmental laws in the U. S. and European Union
   - Impact of these environmental laws
   - Enforcement of current international environmental laws and accords
   - Areas for environmental law improvement

**Outcomes assessed on the test**

- Describe the key concepts on which environmental ethics is based
- Describe the main environmental ethics approaches and viewpoints
- Relate ethical concepts about the environment to religious teachings/beliefs around the world
- Explain how our moral attitude toward the natural world has changed over time
- Identify key events and pioneers in the environmental ethics movement
- Evaluate the impact of environmental justice on various social groups and the world
- Identify the major environmental laws passed throughout the world, focusing on those implemented in the United States and the European Union countries
- Discuss the development of international accords, such as the Copenhagen Accord
- Identify non-governmental advocacy organizations, such as Greenpeace etc.

**Study resources**

Many texts and open online resources can help you review this subject, including the ones shown below. Whatever resources you select, compare them to the topic outline to make sure everything is covered.

The Saylor Academy’s open online course: Environmental Ethics, Justice, and World Views  

*Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application*. Paul Pojman and Louis Pojman  
Current or last edition. Boston: Wadsworth/Cengage

Current or last edition. New York: Oxford University Press
Sample questions

Multiple choice

1. The ancient Greeks valued the environment, as evidenced by their
   a. building architecture
   b. recycling efforts
   c. sleeping in the open air
   d. having gods of nature

2. Why is *A Sand County Almanac* considered an important book in the environmental field?
   a. It promotes the idea of a “land ethic.”
   b. It has been taught in many colleges around the world.
   c. It contains pragmatic conservation advice.
   d. Its author was a highly-respected science writer and lecturer.

3. Much of the emphasis on clean water initiatives in the 1970s was prompted by the
   a. water pollution of the Great Lakes
   b. Cuyahoga River in Ohio catching on fire
   c. disposal of radioactive wastes into rivers and the ocean
   d. water pollution produced by the mining of coal

4. What important project helped John Muir and Gifford Pinchot articulate their ethical positions on
   preservation or conservation for the general public?
   a. The declaration of Yosemite Valley as a national park
   b. The preservation of the sequoia forests
   c. The flooding of the Hetch Hetchy Valley
   d. The designation of regions in the Sierra Nevada Mountains as wilderness areas

5. John Evelyn wrote a famous treatise that foreshowed the detrimental effect of industrialization. What
   environmental issue did he highlight?
   a. Air pollution
   b. Water pollution
   c. Soil contamination
   d. Sewage disposal

6. Environmental justice is described as intergenerational, meaning that
   a. both genders should enjoy the environment equally
   b. international laws define general environmental laws
   c. each generation is responsible for current environmental laws
   d. the environment should be preserved for future generations
7. Product manufacturers accused of exposing the public to chemical concentrations in excess of “maximum contaminant levels,” in violation of The Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act, is an example of environmental

   a. negotiation  
   b. toxic tort  
   c. inequality  
   d. impact assessment

8. The main opposition to Rachel Carson’s thesis in *Silent Spring* came from

   a. the general public  
   b. the U.S. military  
   c. government agencies  
   d. chemical companies

9. What is the purpose of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)?

   a. To provide an ethical framework for the state agencies that monitor environmental activity  
   b. To create a regional network of environmentally supportive policies that states may modify  
   c. To promote informed decision-making by federal agencies by providing detailed information concerning environmental impacts  
   d. To enact more effective but less stringent policies affecting specific areas of environmental concern

**Essay**

10. Define environmental justice and discuss the issues related to environmental justice with regard to the effects of pollution, land use and climate change on developing nations.

11. In the landmark 1992 case, *Lucas v. South Carolina*, the Supreme Court of the United States laid out precedent principles in the application of “regulatory taking.” Explain what this important environmental case was about and discuss the meaning of “regulatory taking.”

12. Can anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric environmental ethics be reconciled? Present arguments made by ethical theorists such as Aldo Leopold and Arne Naess that address this issue.

**Answers to sample questions**

1. (d) 2. (a) 3. (b) 4. (c) 5. (a) 6. (d) 7. (b) 8. (d) 9. (c)

10. There is an inequitable distribution of environmental hazards around the world. The rise of economic globalization, marked by liberalized trade rules and the dominance of multinational corporations, has played a key role in shifting environmental pollution from industrialized to developing countries. This shift can be seen most prominently in the export of polluting industries and hazardous wastes from developed countries to poor, developing countries in Africa, South America, and Asia. Weak environmental regulations and lax enforcement of laws foster this shift, supported by trade rules that force developing countries to make trade-offs between environmental protection and economic prosperity. Despite attempts to regulate the international waste trade by treaty, illegal exportation of hazardous wastes to developing countries continues to flourish.
In addition, the negative effects of widely recognized environmental degradation (ozone depletion, climate change, declining biodiversity, deforestation) are disproportionately borne by developing countries and poor populations across the globe. The United States is responsible for 25% of the world’s greenhouse gases, even though it has only 4% of the world’s population. In contrast, developing countries have only recently started down the path to industrialization, and their per capita emissions of greenhouse gases are comparatively low. Developing nations are especially vulnerable to climate change and other adverse impacts. They also have fewer resources to respond to these problems, and stand to lose the most ground in their development efforts, threatening to entrench existing global economic and social inequalities.

Scoring Rubric:
Definition of environmental justice: 4 points
Appropriate discussion of issues: 3 points
Acknowledgment of the limited power of developing nations: 3 points

11. The Fifth Amendment states that private property shall not “be taken for public use without just compensation.” Federal courts have interpreted this clause to ban not only the literal taking of private property but also “regulatory taking.” Regulatory taking occurs when the government, by law or regulation, deprives a land owner of all or some economic uses of his or her property.

A builder named David Lucas bought two beach front lots on the South Carolina coast with the intent to build houses. Before he could build, South Carolina passed a law prohibiting building on critical areas or near beaches and denied him a building permit.

Lucas took the state agency that grants permits to court. Although the State said the denial was not a regulatory taking, a lower court ruled in the builder’s favor and awarded him a cash settlement. After the Supreme Court of South Carolina overturned the lower court’s decision, the case went to the Supreme Court of the United States, who decided that the Supreme Court of South Carolina had erred when they ruled that the case was not a regulatory taking. Lucas was allowed to build houses on his beachfront property.

This set the following precedent for environmental law: A regulation that deprives a land owner of all economically beneficial uses of land constitutes a regulatory taking.

Scoring Rubric:
Definition of regulatory taking: 5 points
Application to case: 5 points

12. Anthropocentric ethics considers humans the sole possessors of moral consideration. Non-anthropocentric (ecocentric or biocentric) ethics believes that non-humans also deserve moral consideration. The closest approach to reconciliation between these schools of thought comes from Utilitarianism, which is largely anthropocentric in its approach, but believes that animal pain is a moral consideration.

The Land Ethic, by Aldo Leopold, was the first of the ecocentric theories and claimed that an act is good if it promotes the beauty, integrity and stability of the ecosystem, and bad if it harms it. According to this ethic, the ecosystem has the highest moral value and if necessary, human interests can be secondary.

Deep Ecology, by Arne Naess, is a holistic ethical theory that believes we need to reevaluate our notion of self in order to address the ecological crisis. It involves a sense of identification with the entire planet, in which the individual’s true self is recognized as identical with the cosmos. The
“depth” of Deep Ecology lies in its rejection of the anthropocentric approach that believes the living environment exists to support human use.

The two theories cannot be reconciled when there is a conflict of interest between ecological preservation and human use. An example of this is whale hunting. A non-anthropocentric approach would recognize that whales have been driven to near-extinction and regulation of their hunting should be enforced to prevent their disappearance for future generations. An anthropocentric perspective would claim that human benefits trump saving whales.

Scoring Rubric:

- Definition of anthropocentric, biocentric and ecocentric principles: 4 points
- Discussion of Leopold’s approach: 2 points
- Discussion of Naess’s approach: 2 points
- Answer to and defense of the question: 2 points