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The living and non-living environment: Spaceship Earth



Box 21.1 Activity: Web-wandering

Put 'stewardship' and 'environment' into an online search engine together with the name of the religion of your family or culture.

Identify, read about and reflect on how members of this religion would justify an enlightened anthropocentrism.



Box 21.2 Activity: Discussion topic

Adopting an anthropocentric position is a necessary condition of claiming that we are damaging our planet.

Participants should discuss this in pairs or as a group.



Box 21.3 Activity: Personal reflection

If we allow that non-sentient, non-rational things have *interests* might this impact on other moral problems such as abortion and therapeutic cloning?



Box 21.4 Activity: Paired reflection

If we go along with Singer (Chapter 13, pages 227–230) in thinking that it is the *quality of life* that matters does this mean we can't be radical biocentrists?



Box 21.5 Activity: Thought experiment: the last person

Imagine that a catastrophe has left only one living thing – a person – on earth. This person is dying.

As his last act this person destroys the planet.

The question to be answered is: did he do anything *wrong*?

If your intuition suggests he did do wrong does this demonstrate that the planet itself, independently of the living things it supports, has value? If not how would you explain this intuition?

This thought experiment, known as ‘The Last Man Argument’, is adapted from that used to stimulate discussion at a conference in 1973 by Richard Routley.



Box 21.7 Activity: Research and discussion: climate-change scepticism

Recently climate-change scepticism has been on the increase. There are three reasons for this:

- (i) The leaking of emails between climate-change scientists, that seemed to suggest that ‘tricks’ were being used to suppress research suggesting a decline in global temperatures;
- (ii) A UN report, based on an article in the *New Scientist*, which falsely claimed that the Himalayan glaciers would melt by 2035. The article was later discovered to rest on a telephone conversation with an Indian scientist, who admitted he had no evidence to support his claim.
- (iii) When the Met Office in England published on its website all its land-based temperature records, bloggers immediately found many mistakes.

Participants should conduct research on climate-change scepticism, and in particular these three reasons for it, then discuss, or write essays on, the following questions:

1. What is the scientific evidence for the claim that the climate is changing and that we are responsible?
2. What, other than the activities of human beings, might have caused global warming?
3. How good is the evidence for the claim we are causing it (how many scientists have corroborated it, are the credentials of these scientists good, do the different forms of evidence support each other)?
4. Why do the three events described above undermine this evidence?
5. Are there comparisons to be made and lessons learned from comparing the debate about climate-change with the debate about GM food?
6. What might be done by scientists to combat the idea that the climate is not changing and/or the idea that we are not responsible?

**Box 21.8 Activity: Creative writing**

Write 500–1,000 words on life without fossil fuel.

**Box 21.9 Activity: Personal reflection**

How many other activities can you think of that are not harmful if done by one person, but very harmful if done by many?

How might we persuade people that *they* should not do something if *their* doing that thing will not be harmful?

Do you think any of the theories discussed in Chapter 4 might have an answer to this?

**Box 21.12 Activity: Presentations**

Participants should be divided into small teams. Their task is to pretend to be a PR company charged by the government to develop a strategy to rehabilitate nuclear fuel as a potential solution to global warming. It is vital that such strategies take seriously:

- (i) people's worries about nuclear power (as a weapon and in accidents);
- (ii) the world's need for clean energy.

Each team should be given a week to come up with a 10-minute presentation of their strategy.

**Box 21.13 Activity: Group discussion**

Participants should be asked to consider the barriers to reducing carbon emissions, and how, if at all, these barriers might be removed.

**Box 21.14 Activity: Group discussion**

Participants should be asked to conduct some basic research into the different methods of geo-engineering. They should then be asked to discuss whether geo-engineering is a better solution to climate change than the attempt to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

**Box 21.15 Activity: A thought experiment**

The philosopher Derek Parfit says that just as we wouldn't be here if our mums and dads hadn't got together when they did, the people who will exist 200 years from now will be the people they are only because of what we do now.

This suggests that as those people who exist in 200 years wouldn't exist except for *whatever* we do now, there is no reason to think they won't be grateful to us whatever the world we bequeath to them.

Question: is this a reason not to change our behaviour?