# Environmental Justice: An Outlook

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**Abstract**

Environmental justice has emerged as a central theme in contemporary global environmentalism since the 1970s. Environmental justice has become an essential counterpoint to conventional environmentalism, focusing on the connection between social equity and environmental concerns. It highlights how marginalized communities often bear the brunt of environmental degradation and advocates for their inclusion in environmental policymaking. This movement seeks to address not only ecological concerns but also the social, political, and economic realities that shape environmental harm and benefit distribution. Environmental justice emphasizes collective experiences of injustice and aims to empower affected communities to achieve self-determination. It broadens the scope of environmentalism to include everyday issues affecting human life, such as housing and employment and seeks to redistribute the loads of environmental harm more equitably. Despite the absence of a universally accepted explanation of environmental justice, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) characterizes it as ensuring fair treatment and significant involvement of all people in environmental decision-making. The movement demands a transformative perspective that integrates environmental protection with social justice, advocating for a holistic understanding of justice that encompasses both human and non-human well-being. Overall, the discussions surrounding intrinsic value, environmental ethics, and justice reveal a complex interplay of philosophical perspectives and practical considerations, underscoring the need for inclusive and equitable approaches to addressing environmental challenges.

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Environmental justice has become a central theme in contemporary global environmentalism since the 1970s. In recent years, it has become increasingly essential for academia, particularly in philosophy, to delve into environmental issues, identifying core questions in environmental ethics, movements, and theories of justice to foster an "integrated" way of life within the environment. The debate over environmental justice is a contentious and multifaceted issue in environmental philosophy. Within philosophy, as well as political and economic theory, the focus on environmental justice has sparked a reconsideration of how justice applies to nature. Social, economic, and political justice, represents a broader concept than merely ensuring equitable distribution of environmental benefits, harms, and resources across generations and between human

communities and the natural world. As a vital aspect of social justice, ecological justice acknowledges that environmental inequalities, like other social disparities, negatively affect health, hinder economic progress, and weaken social unity. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of access to natural properties and protection from environmental hazards as fundamental human rights. Every individual has the inherent right to freedom, equality, and adequate living conditions within an environment that supports dignity and well-being. Alongside this right, humanity holds a profound responsibility to safeguard and enhance the environment for both current and future generations.

Activists, philosophers, and political theorists offer a variety of perspectives on what defines environmental justice. Nonetheless, it appears that there is seldom a methodical effort to comprehend environmental justice as a whole. The breadth and complexity of philosophical issues surrounding environmental justice may be far more than conventional philosophers have previously believed, even though they are neither clearly nor consistently articulated. Environmental justice goes beyond equitable distribution and procedural treatment in issues about the environment and natural resources.

The traditional concept of justice has predominantly been anthropocentric, with philosophical perspectives on the relationship between humans and nature often contributing to environmental harm. Many mainstream philosophical traditions, particularly within Western positivism, have historically denied the interconnectedness of humans and the natural world. Nature was typically viewed as nothing more than raw material to fulfill human needs. In traditional environmental ethics, which were largely consequentialist, nature was considered valuable only in terms of its utility to human beings. Humans were seen as having intrinsic value, while nature was assigned only instrumental value. According to such anthropocentric ethics, only human beings were regarded as morally significant in their own right, implying that all our direct moral responsibilities, including those concerning the environment, were owed solely to other humans.

However, this viewpoint has faced significant criticism from various environmental ethicists. These thinkers argue that ethics should extend beyond

humanity, granting moral consideration to the non-human natural world. Some propose that this extension should apply to sentient animals, while others believe it should encompass all living organisms. Their perspective holds that we have ethical obligations toward the environment because we owe duties to the creatures and ecosystems within it, not just to humanity.

Aristotle observed that species with diminished cognitive capacities exist to serve those with superior reasoning abilities. He perceived nature as structured hierarchically and expressed his viewpoint as: "Plant exists for the sake of animals, brute and beast for the sake of man, domestic animal for his use and food, wild one for food and other accessories of life such as clothing and various tools. Since nature makes nothing purposeless or in vain, it is undeniably true that she has made all animals for the sake of man"[1].

Descartes' theory reinforces anthropocentric perspectives by portraying the world as a machine, with humans acting as its primary operators. His Cartesian distinction between mind and body places the body subordinate to the mind, implying that the human intellect utilizes the material world to uphold its anthropocentric stance. Both Descartes and Kant emphasize the significance of communication and reasoning as essential for forming concepts, asserting that humans are the most intelligent beings within the natural hierarchy. In contrast, plants and inanimate objects are seen as lacking this cognitive ability. Wittgenstein, known for his anti-Cartesian views, also reflects a Cartesian bias regarding animal cognition, primarily due to the absence of language in non-human animals. In one of his writings, he mentioned that: "If a lion could speak, we could not understand him; in another he suggests that it is conceptually impossible for an animal to smile. He also suggests that a dog cannot simulate pain or feel remorse, that an animal cannot hope or consciously imitate, and that a dog cannot mean something by wagging its tail and a crocodile cannot think."2

The progress of science has resulted in more exploitative practices by humans regarding the environment. Technological and scientific advancements are

[1] Singer, P. The Environment*: Practical Ethics* 3rd edition, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2011, P.240-41.
[2] Wittgenstein, L. 1958. *Philosophical Investigations,* Oxford: Blackwell, P. 90,153,166,174,224.

often rooted in Western ideologies, leading to an increased demand for natural resources like land, air, and water. As a result, science and technology tend to exploit and subordinate the natural world to satisfy human desires and requirements. This viewpoint positions humans as having intrinsic value, while nature is regarded as having only instrumental worth.

Kant argued that being cruel to a dog could lead a person to become desensitized to cruelty towards other humans. In this view, cruelty to animals is considered wrong not because it is inherently immoral, but because it may lead to negative consequences for human behaviour, making the wrongness of such actions instrumental rather than intrinsic. He clearly stated that ‘‘our duties towards animals are merely indirect duties towards humanity. Animal nature has analogies to human nature, and by doing so our duties to animals in respect of manifestations which correspond to manifestation of human nature, we indirectly do our duty towards humanity.’’[3] Kantian philosophy advocates for the establishment of universal principles to navigate diverse moral dilemmas, whereas Cartesian dualism tends to downplay the significance of physical reality. In addition, John Locke's philosophical insights prioritize individualism, frequently at the expense of communal welfare. Conversely, contemporary movements for environmental justice challenge these perspectives, contending that a singular universal law cannot adequately encompass the intricacies of moral situations. They emphasize the necessity of protecting the physical existence and well-being of the community, asserting that no individual or particular group should suffer detriment for the advantage of others. These traditional intellectual frameworks of the Western perspective not only marginalize entire segments of human society but also minimize the significance of the non-human world.

According to the anthropocentric perspective, if only humans possess moral standing, then killing a wolf on a whim during a camping trip wouldn't be considered wrong about the wolf itself. Such an ethic might argue that the act is objectionable, but only in terms of its impact on humans perhaps because killing wolves is deemed unvirtuous or because it diminishes a source of prettiness for

[3] Kant, I. 1930. "Duties towards Animals and Spirits", in *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield. Methuen & Co. Ltd, London, P.239.

others. However, since anthropocentrism attributes moral worth exclusively to humans, the act wouldn't be viewed as morally wrong toward the wolf itself.

However, most of us instinctively feel that this perspective is flawed. We perceive that animals can indeed be wronged, whether through the unjust killing of a wolf or the cruelty of torturing a dog. Of course, intuition alone cannot conclusively establish that animals have moral standing, particularly since others, such as hunters or individuals who harm animals, may hold opposing intuitions leading them to different conclusions. Despite this, some thinkers have presented compelling arguments advocating for the ethical consideration of animals.

Nonetheless, proponents of anthropocentric environmental ethics have predominantly adopted a defensive rather than forward-thinking approach, dedicating considerable effort to upholding traditional Western moral philosophy in response to the arguments of more progressive thinkers who call for broadening ethical considerations to close in non-human entities and the environment. John Passmore and Kristin Shrader-Frechette were amongst the earliest proponents of anthropocentric environmental ethics. Shrader- Frechette finds it "difficult to think of an action which would do irreparable harm to the environment or ecosystem, but which would not also threaten human well-being"[4]. She contends that there is no necessity to create a new non-anthropocentric environmental ethic, as numerous anthropocentric ethical frameworks in the Western tradition, particularly utilitarianism, already denounce actions that threaten human welfare. To support this claim, she points out that traditional environmentalists have increasingly emphasized safeguarding nature, often extending their focus beyond addressing humanity's immediate needs.

Although numerous environmental ethicists strive to distance themselves from the anthropocentrism found in conventional ethical perspectives, they frequently depend on theoretical frameworks and principles that originate from those very systems. Two key moral questions can help shape this discussion: Which entities hold intrinsic value, whether positive or negative? And what criteria determine if an act is right or wrong? Consequentialist ethical theories emphasize intrinsic concepts like "value," "disvalue," "goodness," and "badness" as more

[4] Frechette, Kristen Shrader. 1981, *Environmental Ethics*, California: Boxwood Press, p. 17.

fundamental to morality than the ideas of "rightness" or "wrongness." These theories claim that the morality of an act is grounded on its beneficial or harmful outcomes. In this context, answers to the first question inform answers to the second. For instance, utilitarianism a traditional form of consequentialism defines pleasure, the satisfaction of interests, desires, and preferences, as the only intrinsic value. In contrast, it considers pain or the thwarting of desires, interests, and preferences as the only intrinsic disvalue. It argues that actions are morally right if they maximize the total pleasure-to-pain ratio. The identity of those experiencing pleasure or suffering does not influence the assessment of whether an act is right or wrong, as the utilitarian approach centers on the overall equilibrium of pleasure and pain. Thus, Jeremy Bentham and Peter Singer, both have considered that "the interests of all the sentient beings i.e., beings who are capable of experiencing pleasure or pain, including non-human ones, which are affected by an action should be taken equally into consideration in assessing the action"[5].

According to Peter Singer, the campaigns for the freedom of animals are comparable to those for women and people of color. In contrast to environmental philosophers who attribute inherent worth to nature and its living beings, Singer and utilitarians typically assign intrinsic worth to the experience of the satisfaction of interests, rather than to the beings that experience them. Even though environmentalists view non-sentient environmental elements like plants, rivers, mountains, and landscapes as ethically significant, utilitarians believe these things have no inherent value. If they help satisfy sentient beings, then they at most have instrumental worth.

This implies that even if these actions result in suffering for animals, like whale hunting or the killing of elephants for ivory, they could still be considered morally acceptable if they enhance human satisfaction to a level that surpasses the distress of non-human interests, according to utilitarian assessments. It is still uncertain how successfully a utilitarian morality may mesh with environmental ethics in light of these factors. This criticism, however, would not hold for more expansive interpretations of consequentialism, which might acknowledge the

[5] Bentham, Jeremy. 1970, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, reprint of the edition of 1823, ed. Laurence Julien Lafleur, New York: Hafner Press, p. 311.

inherent value in a variety of components and activities within the natural world apart from pleasure or contentment.

In contrast, deontological moral theories contend that an action's morality is typically unaffected by the positive or negative effects of it. According to deontologists, there are various distinct moral obligations or rules, such as "not to kill or otherwise harm the innocent," "not to lie," "to respect the rights of others," and "to keep promises," which have an inherent moral value that is, they are right or wrong irrespective of the consequences and must be followed. When pressed to protect a purported moral law, obligation, or related right, deontologists could raise the inherent worth of the entities to whom it pertains. For example, philosopher Tom Regan says that "those animals with intrinsic value or what he calls "inherent value" have the moral right to respectful treatment, which then generates a general moral duty on our part not to treat them as mere means to other ends".[6]

We have a specific moral duty to refrain from harming animals. Regan argues that certain actions, including sport or profitable hunting and animal testing, violate the animal moral rights that hold intrinsic value and warrant respectful treatment. He maintains that these practices are fundamentally unethical, regardless of any potential positive results. However, the question arises: which animals qualify as having inherent value and, therefore, a moral right to be treated with respect? Regan's response is those that fulfill the criterion of being the "subject of a life". Being a subject of a life is enough (though not the only) criterion for possessing intrinsic value. This condition includes having sensory experiences, beliefs, desires, motivations, memory, a cognizance of the imminent, and a sense of psychological continuity over time. As prominent supporters of giving other animal species moral standing, Singer and Regan are well known. Their justifications for giving animals moral status are fairly similar, despite the differences in their approaches to animal ethics. Singer contends that the ability to feel both pleasure and agony is the foundation of moral standing. However, Regan feels that all "subjects-of-a-life," or entities with faith, desires, perceptions,

[6] Regan, Tom. 1983, *The Case for Animal Rights*, California: University of California Press, p. 232.

memories, emotions, feelings of the future, and the capability to act, deserve moral consideration.

Both Singer and Regan stress consciousness as the primary component, albeit using slightly different standards for moral standing. According to Singer, when determining our moral responsibilities, we should take into account any being possessing the appropriate kind of consciousness. This suggests that while not all sentient beings should be treated similarly, their interests should be given equal weight. Stated differently, it is imperative to consider the distinct variations among individuals and their respective areas of interest. For instance, Singer contends that although it wouldn't be incorrect to deny pigs the capability to vote since they have no curiosity in democratic involvement, it would be incorrect to disregard their need to avoid suffering, as pigs share a strong desire to avoid pain. Maximizing the satisfaction of benefits is the final moral objective in the utilitarian ethical structure, which Singer integrates into his equal consideration principle. Thus, the two basic tenets of Singer's theory are that, first, we possess an ethical obligation to treat all sentient beings with equal care and, second, we should try to maximize the gratification of all interests.

Tom Regan rejects Singer's utilitarian ethical theory and develops a "rights-based" philosophy based on the criterion of consciousness. Regan asserts that every "subject-of-a-life" has "inherent value," which denotes that these entities are valuable in and of themselves regardless of how useful they may be to others or how much they advance any ultimate ethical principle. Regan contends that there are ethical limitations on how one may treat these kinds of beings as a result. This viewpoint is not equivalent to Singer's, who bases ethical responsibilities on maximizing the highest amount of total happiness and integrating all interests into a utilitarian framework. According to Singer, there are circumstances in which it is fine to put some people's interests ahead of others. For example, Singer's utilitarian approach would allow torturous experiments on a small number of pigs if the results would be a novel medication that alleviates the pain of many humans or other sentient beings. These experiments might be ethically acceptable if the final goal is to fulfill the largest number of interests. Regan's perspective, however, places severe moral restrictions on the treatment of items that have intrinsic value,

regardless of the overall effects. These boundaries are recognized as "rights," which belong to every entity that is a subject of life.

How does this relate to environmental justice? On one level, the connection is evident - animal welfare is intertwined with environmental justice because animals form a vital part of the natural environment and thus fall under its ethical considerations. Moreover, recognizing animals' moral standing introduces distinct environmental responsibilities. These ethical perspectives contend that evaluating the environmental impacts of our actions should extend beyond their effects on humans both current and future generations to include their implications for the rights and welfare of animals. For example, even if deforesting an area were proven to benefit humanity in both the short and long term, this would not fully address the ethical concerns from the standpoint of animal rights. The interests and well-being of the animals living within the forest and its surrounding ecosystem must also be considered.

Many environmental philosophers express dissatisfaction with animal-centered ecological ethics, with some even arguing that animal liberation cannot be treated as a valid method of ecological ethics. They assert that such frameworks suffer from two significant flaws: an excessive focus on distinct animals and an underlying logic that appears to justify interference with natural processes. Regarding the first issue, critics point out that environmental concerns extend beyond individual animals to encompass broader 'holistic' entities like species and ecosystems. The requirements of an ecosystem or a species often clash with the interests of the individual organisms within it. For example, an overpopulation of a specific animal species can threaten the overall health and functioning of an ecosystem. A well-known case is the ecological damage caused by rabbits in Australian ecosystems. Many environmentalists argue that in such situations, it is our responsibility to cull these harmful animals to preserve ecological balance. This perspective is in direct conflict with animal ethics, which prioritizes the rights and interests of distinct animals. Moreover, the individual-focused approach of animal-centered ethics faces challenges in addressing the wider concern for preserving endangered species. These ethical perspectives propose that moral consideration is rooted in the intrinsic value of conscious beings, implying that a critically

endangered panda would carry the same moral significance as a common domestic pet, such as a cat. Many environmental philosophers reject this view, arguing that endangered species warrant special protection, as their loss represents a more significant harm to ecological and environmental integrity.

Animal-focused ethical frameworks face criticism for the implications of their principles. For instance, if we are morally obligated to alleviate animal suffering, as some proponents argue, does this mean we should intervene to prevent predators from hunting their prey or isolate prey animals to shield them from attacks? Such conclusions not only appear impractical but also contradict environmentalist objectives of preserving natural ecosystems and their processes. However, overstating the divide between animal ethics and environmental justice would be misguided. Advocates for animal welfare do not inherently dismiss other aspects of nature merely because they emphasize the moral importance of conscious beings. Scholars argue that while ecosystems or species might not possess intrinsic moral value, this does not mean they should be ignored. The welfare of individual animals is often deeply interconnected with the health and balance of the broader systems to which they belong.

The notion that animal ethics inherently advocates for extensive intervention in natural processes can be reconsidered, particularly when such actions could negatively impact predator or scavenger species. This perspective challenges the idea that animal ethics supports broad interference with ecosystems. Nonetheless, conflicts between the interests of individual animals and other aspects of nature do occur. In such situations, advocates of animal ethics often prioritize the welfare of individual sentient beings. In contrast, environmental ethicists frequently contend that moral considerations should go beyond individuals, emphasizing the intrinsic value of ecosystems, species, and other collective entities within the natural environment.

Some philosophers have expanded ethical considerations beyond individual consciousness, proposing that the pursuit of an organism's well-being holds intrinsic value, regardless of its ability to experience awareness. For instance, Paul Taylor's concept of biocentrism, a deontological framework, asserts that every

living entity - whether an animal, plant, or microorganism - functions as a "teleological center of life." Each organism possesses its good or well-being, which can either be nurtured or harmed. Taylor argues that all such entities, as teleological centers of life, have equal intrinsic value, which he refers to as "inherent worth," deserving moral respect. Taylor further contends that actions treating wild animals merely as means to an end, thereby disregarding their inherent worth, are fundamentally wrong. He highlights that recognizing the intrinsic value of these beings creates a fundamental moral duty to protect and enhance their welfare, treating them as ends in their own right rather than merely as means to serve human interests.

Paul Taylor asserts that the ethics of reverence for nature is built upon three integral components: a belief system, a foundational ethical attitude, and a framework of duties and character traits. These components are deeply interwoven. The belief system offers a particular worldview that explains and justifies why an autonomous moral agent would adopt reverence for nature as a guiding ethical principle. It also provides the reasoning behind this attitude, as individuals who grasp their moral relationship with the natural world through this perspective will see reverence for nature as the only fitting response to all forms of wildlife in the Earth's biosphere. Within this framework, living organisms are regarded as inherently valuable and worthy of respect. Their well-being is considered intrinsically significant, creating a moral responsibility to protect and support it for its own sake. This ethical approach commits individuals to follow specific moral obligations and develop particular virtues. Adopting a respect-for-nature attitude involves recognizing these duties and virtues as universally binding for all moral beings. The rules of obligation and character traits are viewed as expressions of the principle of reverence for nature, translated into practical application.

Is there a rational basis to assert that all living things possess intrinsic value? Paul Taylor advocates for a biocentric environmental ethic, which posits that all forms of life have inherent worth. He supports this stance by drawing upon insights from environmental science, biology, and moral philosophy. Taylor presents a well-reasoned critique of the prevailing anthropocentric view, which treats the natural world and its living beings as valuable only insofar as they serve human

purposes or provide enjoyment. Notably, he does not frame his argument around granting moral rights to plants and animals. Instead, Taylor's perspective offers a thorough understanding of the multifaceted interdependence between humans and the broader natural world, along with an in-depth account of the biological circumstances necessary for all forms of existence, human and otherwise. In a divergence from Taylor's deontological and egalitarian approach to biocentrism, Robin Attfield proposes a hierarchical perspective. He asserts that while all living beings have their inherent goods and intrinsic value, certain beings, such as humans, possess this intrinsic value to a greater degree. Attfield further advocates for a form of consequentialism that seeks to account for and balance the diverse, and potentially conflicting, goods of various living entities. However, critics have argued that the concept of biological good or well-being is descriptive rather than prescriptive. For instance, while a disease might have its intrinsic purpose or "good," this does not mean that its fulfillment carries any moral value or positive ethical significance.

In recent years, environmental philosophy has seen a unique evolution in how it distinguishes between these two traditional approaches. Rather than contrasting notions of value with those of moral rightness, it has been suggested that debates about ecological good and bad may encompass two distinct interpretations of intrinsic value. Consequentialist philosophers emphasize the inherent value of desirable situations that should be promoted. Conversely, deontologists argue for the inherent value of entities that should be respected. These differing perspectives on intrinsic value continue to fuel fundamental debates between deontologists and consequentialists, albeit in a slightly altered context.

Some modern defenders of anthropocentric ecological ethics propose expanding our understanding of welfare rather than abandoning it. They argue that beyond supplying essential goods like energy, food, medicines, and raw materials, as well as services such as oxygen replenishment, crop pollination, and water purification, an unspoiled natural environment plays a crucial role in enhancing human well-being on psychological, spiritual, and scientific levels. Pristine landscapes, free from deforestation or strip mining, and clean air contribute significantly to human aesthetic satisfaction. Resources like clean water, green spaces, diverse ecosystems, national parks, and wilderness areas are considered

vital “amenities” for human life. The solitude of the wilderness and encounters with unique wildlife enrich the human experience, suggesting that interacting with and preserving nature’s integrity can be transformative, fostering moral growth. Norton emphasizes that intergenerational justice demands we preserve natural resources, intact ecosystems, environmental amenities, and opportunities for future generations to experience the psycho-spiritual benefits of nature and to study disciplines like ecology and taxonomy. By expanding the opportunity and temporal perspective of human well-being, Norton contends we can build a compelling environmental ethic without delving into the more complex and contested realm of non-anthropocentric ethics.

As was previously noted, many thinkers have endorsed biocentric principles while refusing anthropocentric ethics. They argue that human actions should be evaluated based on their involvement in ecological well-being rather than solely on their impact on human welfare. This biocentric perspective is often linked to a holistic approach, valuing nature as an interconnected whole rather than prioritizing any single species or element, including humans. While some environmental damage caused by humans such as ozone depletion and global warming poses direct threats to human well-being, these issues also highlight broader social injustices. Historically, environmental degradation has disproportionately harmed society’s most vulnerable populations, including the impoverished and marginalized. This has underscored the urgent need for environmental justice.

Mainstream environmentalism has traditionally focused on protecting forests, rivers, and wildlife, often overlooking the human dimension of environmental harm. However, grassroots movements have drawn attention to how societal threats like pollution, industrialization, resource exploitation, pesticide overuse, radioactive waste, and toxic industrial byproducts have specifically impacted marginalized groups, such as Indigenous communities and the poor. These communities, long subjected to “no-win exchanges,” have begun to resist and demand justice. In response, grassroots movements led by marginalized groups have emerged, advocating for political equality, self-control, and environmental justice. These movements have also inspired new forms and interpretations of environmental justice, expanding its scope and influence.

Some environmental theorists argue that the struggle for environmental justice has significantly reshaped the concept of environmentalism due to its close connection with it. Environmental rights, often associated with environmentalism, represent both social movements and a broad philosophy that emphasizes protecting and improving the environment, particularly when efforts to achieve these goals incorporate the interests of non-human entities. Environmental movements, they suggest, are rooted in an awareness of environmental rights. Nevertheless, some advocates argue that there is a meaningful distinction between traditional environmentalism and the environmental justice movement. Whereas environmentalism addresses environmental degradation and advocates for justice, it primarily focuses on the exploitation of nature stemming from a hierarchical worldview that places humanity above all other life forms, leading to the systematic misuse of the natural environment. On the other hand, proponents of environmental justice place greater emphasis on what is known as "social ecology" or "human welfare ecology." A defining feature of environmental justice is its focus on injustice as a collective and shared experience. Consequently, its members strive to actively pursue, develop, and establish better living conditions for collective entities, encompassing both humans and non-humans. Central to the movement's mission is empowering those impacted by environmental injustice to achieve self-sufficiency, self-organization, and self-governance.

Social justice aims to focus on achieving fairness and equity in social and environmental matters. It advocates for worthy housing, meaningful employment, and equitable educational opportunities while prioritizing the health and well-being of the environments where persons, families, and communities reside. The environmental justice movement has broadened the focus of environmentalism to include elements of daily life that might otherwise seem insignificant. This encompasses activities such as education and recreation, along with essential concerns like the habitats of humans, animals, and plants. The struggle for environmental justice has integrated the physical, societal, and cultural aspects of human, animal, and plant life within the broader framework of environmentalism, with a specific focus on justice. By doing so, it has indirectly elevated awareness and concern for the well-being of humans, as well as the welfare of animals and plants.

Likewise, Bunyan Bryant proposes a definition of justice that integrates various concepts, illustrating how it can serve as a tool for restoring and strengthening functional communities. He emphasizes that fairness is a cornerstone for ensuring a community operates effectively. Environmental justice goes beyond the concept of environmental equity by addressing a broader range of cultural norms, values, policies, regulations, behaviors, and decisions that contribute to the development of sustainable communities. These communities provide an environment where individuals can thrive, assured that their surroundings are safe, supportive, and conducive to productivity. Achieving environmental justice means empowering individuals to realize their full potential without encountering discrimination or oppression. This can be realized through well-paying and secure employment, access to quality education and recreational facilities, adequate housing and healthcare, inclusive decision-making processes, personal empowerment, and communities that are free from violence, drugs, and poverty. Such communities celebrate and protect both cultural and biological diversity, grounded in the principles of distributive justice.

This explanation of environmental justice incorporates the idea of distributive justice while acknowledging its dependence on other dimensions of justice. As a result, it provides a thorough and well-rounded perspective on environmental justice that extends beyond the simple idea of fair distribution. Additionally, environmental justice supports localized initiatives that unite community members to recognize the root causes of inequalities and work toward solutions. Since then, it has grown to be a crucial framework for comprehending conflicts over the state of the environment and places of worship on native territories.

The previous discussion emphasizes that there is no universally accepted definition of environmental justice. However, a widely recognized legal definition provided by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) characterizes environmental justice as the equitable treatment and meaningful participation of all people irrespective of race, ethnicity, income, national origin, or educational background in the creation, execution, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Equitable treatment means that no

community, especially those marginalized by economic or policy decisions, should bear an undue burden of the negative health or environmental effects caused by pollution or other environmental challenges resulting from industrial, municipal, or commercial activities, as well as the implementation of programs and policies at various governmental levels.

Thus, environmental justice aims to transform the conventional environmental movement by incorporating the issues faced by marginalized groups into environmental policy decisions, ultimately fostering environmental equity. This movement shifts the focus from purely environmental issues to prioritizing the well-being of people, particularly communities. Its goal is to emphasize that environmental objectives must account for social, political, and economic authenticities rather than being pursued in isolation. Broadly, environmental fairness advocates for a method of "affirmative action," aiming to redistribute the burdens associated with environmental harm and alleviate the disproportionate impact on specific segments of society.

However, environmental justice extends beyond the scope of individual rights, communities, and minorities. It introduces a transformative perspective to mainstream environmentalism by shifting its core emphasis from predominantly middle-class concerns, such as aesthetic values and environmental enhancements, to addressing social relationships and inequalities among various communities. In this way, environmental protection is incorporated into a broader social justice framework that seeks to safeguard nature while ensuring a more equitable distribution of the expenses and benefits associated with environmental preservation throughout human societies.

In the past, the concept of environmental justice was narrowly defined, emphasizing a universal approach rather than embracing pluralistic or practical perspectives. The absence of justice is not caused by pluralism in definitions. Acceptance of these diverse viewpoints, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of justice because there are several ways to define it. Pluralistic ideas of justice are significant from a theoretical and practical standpoint. Instead, the

emphasis is on the diverse and overlapping range of ecological justice and environmental discourses that are already in use.

From the above discussion, it is clear that many philosophers have emphasized various and frequently contradictory stances on justice for nature. These differing conceptions of environmental justice arise from varying theoretical, ideological, temporal, and geographical contexts. Social scientists and philosophers, depending on their focus and priorities, have emphasized distinct aspects of environmental justice over time. On one side, environmental justice movements emphasize addressing social and political dimensions of environmental inequality, seeking remedies through changes in socio-political and economic systems. On the other side, liberal theories prioritize individual freedoms, sometimes at the expense of sustainability. While many environmental theorists define environmental justice as a matter of equity centered on the circulation of environmental harms and benefits activists within environmental justice movements challenge this narrow interpretation. They argue for a broader understanding that extends beyond mere distribution.

Traditional environmental ethics have often focused on abstract debates, such as whether trees and rocks should have rights or whether nature possesses inherent value. There is also a tendency to perceive traditional environmentalism as being at odds with the objectives of environmental justice. However, justice fundamentally concerns how we coexist and treat one another. Justice itself is a contested concept, especially in determining what individuals deserve. In Western philosophical traditions, discussions frequently refer to Aristotle's view that justice entails treating equals equally. This idea, known as the "formal principle of justice," asserts that individuals should receive equal treatment unless relevant differences justify unequal treatment. However, this principle remains open to interpretation, allowing for varied understandings of equality and its implications.

Environmental justice primarily examines how environmental benefits and burdens are socially distributed. It asks critical questions: Who suffers the consequences of environmental harm, and who reaps the rewards of the activities causing it? Who benefits from environmental policies, and who bears the costs of

their implementation? Social ecologists and ecofeminists criticize generalized claims such as "humans suffer from environmental destruction" or "humans benefit from wilderness preservation" arguing that such statements ignore crucial differences among people. Instead, they advocate for a more nuanced analysis that identifies who specifically benefits, who bears the costs, and who is responsible for environmental problems and proposed solutions.

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