

# ECO-ETHICS INTERNATIONAL UNION

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## Humanity can survive only with a new concept of ethics: eco-ethics

Eco-ethics differs from historical ethics. The roots of eco-ethics are not revelation, faith and philosophy, but scientific research, knowledge and compatibility between nature and humanity. The subject of eco-ethics is not a single species but communities of different, co-existing forms of life.

We hope that our views will fertilize discussions on modern ethics, open up new avenues into the future of mankind, and assist in bringing together different groups with aims similar to ours.

There have been several, partly diverging, attempts to address and respond to the increasingly pressing need for a new, world-wide ethical concept. As research ecologists and natural scientists, we respond to this need from the perspective of ecosystems. The cradle of life on earth, ecosystems continue to determine birth, development and death of all forms of life on this planet, including our own species *Homo sapiens*.

Developing and employing the recently founded (1998) Eco-Ethics International Union (EEIU) as a global instrument, we attempt to bring eco-ethics to the brains and souls of many people. And we hope that those who share our views will join us in our efforts to assist in constructing a new house for humanity — a house built on love of nature, respect for her, and increasing insights into her grand ways and designs.

Our forces are weak, our commitments strong, our hopes for support boundless. Our aims? They may be summarized as follows:

(1) Found and develop Task Forces, Youth Groups and Local Chapters in all parts of the world. Discuss, develop and implement eco-ethic concepts and theses (p. 2).

(2) Teach eco-ethics to children at home, to pupils in schools and to students in universities. Only if we succeed in bringing eco-ethics to the heads and hearts of the

young generation can there be hope for the future of our species.

(3) Invite interested people to join us as members; ask related groups and organizations to cooperate with the EEIU.

(4) Inform and motivate the media, decision makers, and the general public, and ask them for moral and material support.

(5) Seek sponsors and solicit donations to the EEIU (p. 4) (to be used to assist Task Forces, Local Chapters and Youth Groups).

Nothing is now more important for the future of humanity than to know that our very existence depends on an intact nature and that we have to protect such intactness from our excessive egotisms. Further, we must correct our one-sided views of the world around us and of our own significance; such one-sidedness includes the anthropocentric and geocentric constructs of most conventional ethics. Finally, we must commit ourselves more decisively to future generations.

For the latest information on the rapidly growing EEIU, please consult our Internet Forum ([www.eeiu.org](http://www.eeiu.org)).

The following pages outline basic concepts and theses of eco-ethics and introduce its instrument, the EEIU.

**You are cordially invited to join the Union as a member.  
Please support our efforts!**

# ECO-ETHICS: CONCEPTS AND THESES

Life on earth has evolved and exists in ecosystems. Healthy ecosystems are the prerequisites for the continuation of life on earth as we know it.

Traditional ethics focus on one form of life among millions: *Homo sapiens*. To meet the unparalleled challenges confronting modern humanity, we need a new ethical construct — a concept that extends beyond the narrow world we have built for our own immediate ends.

## Ethics in religion and philosophy\*

Ethics has been a major concern of religious people and philosophers for many centuries. Both have invested immense efforts in the examination and interpretation of human behavior, and they must be accorded great merit for developing the concepts and ideals of ethics that we have today.

Theologians and philosophers have used the term 'ethics' practically synonymously with the term 'morals'. Both terms refer to human behavior held to be standard for the majority of a given people. The standard reflects what is right or wrong, good or bad in inter-human relationships. Theological considerations are based on the authority of revelation, philosophical considerations on the authority of reason. One leading school of philosophers has analyzed and formulated normative criteria for developing ethical concepts and rules; another, ethical principles and methods of formulating moral judgment of what is good or bad. Most theologians and philosophers assume that standards of global dimensions can be developed. However, certain traits of ethics have strong local roots (situation ethics), as do the people who created them. Global standards should formulate basic principles, but leave space for religious and cultural variation. Some people insist that what they have regularly practiced successfully over long stretches of time is right and good, and hence moral. Can we accept different ethical standards? Why not, as long as they respect human dignity, rights and freedoms as defined by the United Nations. Ethics will always contain subjective components; it should remain open to debate and be subject to change with time — as everything else.

Being believers, religious people side with supernatural phenomena. Their God makes the decisions and formulates the rules. Believers are allowed to interpret the decisions and to discuss the rules, but not to disobey them. Philosophers have developed complicated, partially contradictory, systems and terms. They concentrate on theory and side with rational argumentation. The world of theologians consists mainly of extrapolations of their beliefs; the world of philosophers, of extrapolations of their thinkings.

Both theologians and philosophers have created anthropocentric and geocentric models of the world — models with insufficient relevance to the realities around us. *Homo sapiens* is not the center of the earth, and the earth is not the center of the universe. *H. sapiens* is one species among millions and part of the life process — just as a dolphin, a mouse or a virus. Earth is a planet among billions in our galaxy, and there are billions of such galaxies.

## Ethics in ecology: eco-ethics\*

Life on earth evolved over billions of years firmly integrated within the dynamics of ecosystems. No species, not even *Homo sapiens*, can live by itself. Ecosystems consist of non-living and living components. These connect in diverse, mostly complex ways. The living components react with and against each other, they utilize each other as sources of energy and matter, and they interact with, and modify, their non-living environments. Such are the basic realities of life on earth as we ecologists can grasp them. Principal elements of evolution, these realities provide the life process with drive and direction. What is good here, what bad? There are no such things in nature's original plan.

Life unfolds under the harsh grip of ecosystem laws: (1) Ruthless competition, exploitation and maximization of selfish advantages; transformation of foreign materials into own materials. (2) Integration into the patterns of flowing energy and recirculating matter. (3) Maturation with time; diversification, self-regulation and building up of interspecific ties. (4) Merciless punishment of law breakers. This is the an-

cient world in which *Homo sapiens* was born, in which our species lived 99% of its time, and in which all its essential structures and functions formed. In each of our billions of cells we still carry the genetic programs devised for ecosystem members, for our ecosystem past.

What went wrong? Never before has a form of life disregarded ecosystem health as much as modern humankind. Never before has a single species changed Planet Earth so ruthlessly and relentlessly and attained an ecological dominance of such outrageous dimensions. And never before has the discrepancy been so large between what we are doing and what we ought to be doing. In order to meet the extraordinary challenges modern humanity faces, we must enlarge the traditional concept of ethics to embrace not only *Homo sapiens*, but also environments and other forms of life. The word proposed for this enlarged concept is 'eco-ethics', i.e. human thought and conduct oriented to what is right or wrong, beneficial or destructive for the total system '*Homo sapiens plus nature*'.

Our dilemma is this: we were born in, and built for, a world from which we have, to a considerable extent, escaped. In this sense, we are runaways and law breakers who have become experts in bending or evading nature's rules for our own ends, and masters at replacing patterns of coexistence with patterns of dominance. We will be punished severely unless we establish a new balance between our modern ways and those of our ecosystem past — unless we re-establish compatibility between nature's metabolic patterns and those of the human population. This is the first thesis of eco-ethics.

'Environmental protection', as presently practiced, is a misleading and dangerous concept. Why? Because it seeks primarily to protect the environment of nature's worst enemy. The result? Additional support for the already towering human dominance. We need a new concept of environmental protection. It must also strive to protect the environments of our fellow creatures. They cannot speak out for themselves. We must act on their behalf according to the best of our knowledge. Our societies and educational systems have to take

\*Based on O. Kinne, Marine Ecology Progress Series 153:1-3, 1997

this into account. They must obtain and teach ecological knowledge and ecological thinking. And they must insist on accepting human responsibility for other ecosystem components. This is the second thesis of eco-ethics.

Survival in our new world requires control of the animal in us. We cannot break ecosystem laws without devising new rules, designed to tame our ancient urges, desires and instincts. Based on nature's grand designs, we need to develop and to enforce new values, such as self-restriction, modesty, responsibility, honesty; to formulate aims, such as peace, freedom, dignity, justice, human rights; to further ideals, such as virtue, altruism, help, love. Here extends ground common with moral theology and moral philosophy. This is the third thesis of eco-ethics.

Nature evolves through harsh conflicts. Human societies must avoid harsh conflicts. To keep our complex societies intact requires the wisdom of conflict reduction and the will to reconcile economy and ecology. Both are different sides of one coin (see below), and both must be measured against moral principles. In order to achieve that, we have to define what is beneficial, good, and what is detrimental, bad, for the development of our economic systems and for their ecological fundamentals. And we have to decide how we can best enhance such good and reduce such bad. This is the fourth thesis of eco-ethics.

In a human world of wars, hunger, poverty, disease and misery for millions of people, is there enough will-power, time and energy for responding to the challenges outlined above? If the answer is 'no', *Homo sapiens* will disappear from the stage of life in the not-too-distant future. This is the fifth thesis of eco-ethics.

Originally foreign to life on earth, ethics — and especially eco-ethics — has become the most important single prerequisite for protecting life on earth from the ecosystem runaway *Homo sapiens*, for maximizing the life span of our species, and for avoiding a catastrophe of gigantic dimensions.

### More about economy and ecology

In the fourth thesis of eco-ethics it was stated that economy and ecology are different sides of one coin. Here we elaborate on the differences.

Economy refers to the activities of a single species, *Homo sapiens*. Human economies strive to maximize the use of nature's resources for selfish ends. In the long run, they tend to endanger or even disrupt natural harmony.

Ecology refers to the interrelated activities of many different species co-existing in ecosystems. Such systems balance out individual egotisms and promote overall harmony.

The working principles of economies are linear. They involve production processes that begin at a natural source but end in materials more or less foreign to nature. Economies remove or isolate resources from ecosystems and transform them into products for human use. The transformations require much energy and they result in much trash. Economies sell their products to customers who — in the end — also transform the products into trash: A gigantic and still growing process of one-sided, unidirectional degradation. Ultimately, such working principles lead to impairments of nature's capacity to support life.

The working principles of ecosystems are cyclic. Ecosystems do not remove or isolate resources, nor do they transform these into materials foreign

to nature. They transform old resources into new resources, using naturally available energy: a network of multi-sided processes that support life and provide it with evolutionary power.

What are the consequences for eco-ethics?

(1) We must, as much as possible, re-harmonize our human world with the world around us and reduce our detrimental impacts on nature. (2) We must increasingly replace linear resource degradation by cyclic resource re-utilization. (3) We must learn more about the working principles of ecosystems and use the insight gained for reconstructing our economies and societies accordingly. (4) The number of people on earth and their per capita use of energy and matter must be reduced in accordance with the carrying capacities of ecosystems. This complex task must be handled primarily by governmental and intergovernmental bodies. Global application of eco-ethics concepts and theses by EEIU members will provide support and additional thrust to these vital issues.

Eco-ethics can achieve the necessary changes neither overnight nor easily. Time and political will are needed for developing and implementing new concepts, laws and technologies. But, we must begin to act. NOW!

Economies cannot be successful without ethics. Economical Ethics means, first of all, restraint in exploiting nature, re-integration, and respect for healthy ecosystems.

If we succeed in approaching the aims outlined, we shall be able to satisfy all our essential requirements and lead a pleasant life — without critically deforming nature and without diminishing the chances for future generations.

## ECO-ETHICS INTERNATIONAL UNION

### Founders

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(Vice President)  
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survival and welfare; and the health of ecosystems.

**Top Books.** They are written by authors with scientific backgrounds in the form of literature (novels, plays, scripts). Top Books focus on failures, challenges, chances and responsibilities of modern humanity; they address a wide readership.

*Marine Ecology Progress Series* and *Aquatic Microbial Ecology*. These two leading scientific journals publish important research results on the dynamics of aquatic ecosystems and open their pages to ecological studies *immediately* relevant to eco-ethics.

### EEIU structures and activities

The scenarios referred to above are global, but may differ locally. Hence the EEIU must have global as well as local components.

There are 6 Components: Headquarters, General Office, Task Forces, Youth Groups, Local Chapters and Internet Forum (Table 1). Headquarters and General Office provide overall continuity and coordination. The Union strives for a minimum of centralism and bureaucracy, but a maximum of independent brain nuclei in Task Forces, Youth Groups and Local Chapters.

The first Chairpersons for Task Forces (TF), Youth Groups (YG) and Local Chapters (LC) are to be nominated by TF, YG and/or LC members and to be appointed by the EEIU President or Vice President for a period of 2 years. Thereafter, nomination, elec-

tion and appointment will be the responsibilities of TF, YG, and LC. These EEIU Components are also to work out election procedures and to decide on office terms and related matters.

We support diversity and independence in reaching our common goals.

### Very first steps on a very long road

Some activities of TF, YG, and LC have started. Several Local Chapters have been enrolled, others are in the process of formation. Some already existing organizations devoted to causes similar to ours are considering joining the EEIU.

General programs and activities of EEIU Components are published on the EEIU Internet pages ([www.eeiu.org](http://www.eeiu.org)). Details on programs and activities of TF, YG and LC can be accessed via the links provided.

The founding of the EEIU has received world-wide attention, interest and applause. This has encouraged us to proceed with our plans.

For further steps, news, criticisms, and progress reports, please consult the Internet Forum.

### Financing

The costs for running EEIU Components are hoped to be covered by sponsors. The Founding Sponsor is Inter-Research. Additional Sponsors are invited to donate contributions.

Donations are tax deductible. EEIU Components receiving a donation will supply the sponsor with appropriate documents upon request.

Donations may be made to Headquarters or to other EEIU Components.

Sponsors—unless they instruct us otherwise—will be listed in our Internet Pages and in our printed communications.

Sponsor donations will be used *exclusively* for supporting eco-ethics activities, especially those in Youth Groups. Headquarters will provide annual information on Sponsor money use.

### Fees

There is no membership fee. There are no salaries for Headquarters personnel; we work on an honorary basis.

### Publication

The publication medium for all EEIU affairs is the *Internet Forum* coordinated at Headquarters (General Editor: [eeiu@eeiu.org](mailto:eeiu@eeiu.org)).

TF, YG and LC publish their own news, criticisms, proposals, etc. on the Internet Forum, which provides links to these Components. EEIU Components shall elect their own editors. Prior to publication, Local Editors should consult with the General Editor. For questions please contact the General Office or Headquarters.



Table 1: EEIU Components and their main activities

Components	Main Activities
<b>Headquarters (HQ) General Office (GO)</b>	Coordinate global EEIU policies; appoint Task Forces, Youth Groups, Local Chapters; operate Internet Forum; establish contacts to related organizations; plan and conduct meetings, discussion forums, etc.
<b>Task Forces (TF)</b>	Adult generation, professionals; establish Local Chapters, develop programs; recruit members; seek sponsors; promote, teach and practice eco-ethics; organize meetings
<b>Youth Groups (YG)</b>	Young generation, school pupils, students; establish Youth Groups; learn, practice and promote eco-ethics; recruit members. YG develop their own programs, hold their own meetings, and seek their own support
<b>Local Chapters (LC)</b>	Focus on local (city, university, school, etc) affairs; LC recruit their own members, create their own programs, elect their own chairpersons and seek their own sponsors. LC contribute situation-specific input to the global eco-ethics movement
<b>Internet Forum (IF)</b>	Permanent stage for EEIU matters: news from TF, YG, and LC; critique and discussion. <a href="http://www.eeiu.org">www.eeiu.org</a>