

The Promise of Theocentric Environmental Ethics

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Some definitions:

▶ Ethics

- ▶ “a set of moral principles”
- ▶ “a theory or system of moral values”
(Merriam-Webster dictionary)

▶ Environmental Ethics

Environmental Ethics

-can be characterized across a spectrum

Anthropocentric

Ecocentric



Exploitation

Preservation

Instrumental Value

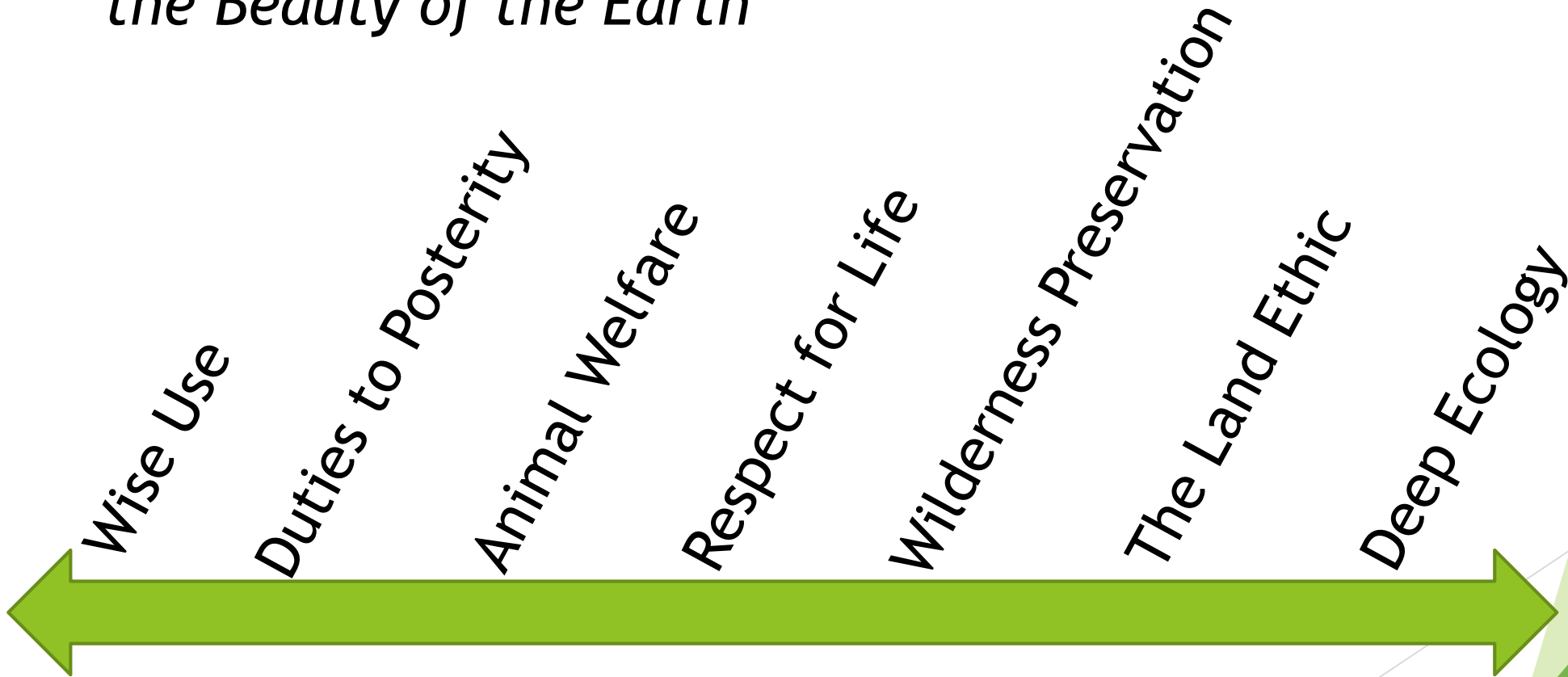
Intrinsic Value

What is best for people?

What is best for nature?

Environmental Ethics

A range of positions from S. Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*



Claims of Christianity as a Problem

The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis

SCIENCE

10 March 1967, Volume 155, Number 3767

Lynn White, Jr.

“Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.”

Claims of Christianity as a Problem

Conservation in Context

David W. Orr

Conservation Biology

Volume 19, No. 2, April 2005

Armageddon Versus Extinction

Thesis: The political persuasions of evangelical Christians are shaped by their apocalyptic vision of people being saved and the earth being destroyed, and this must be opposed.

Theocentric Environmental Ethics

- ▶ An alternative to the anthropocentric-ecocentric spectrum
- ▶ Theocentric
 - ▶ Recognizing God as the center of all there is, of what we know, and of how we then live
 - ▶ God made all of creation and made people bearing his image

Theocentric Worldview

- ▶ Trinitarian theology
 - ▶ Inter-relationship of Father, Son, & Holy Spirit
- ▶ Comprehensive doctrine of creation
 - ▶ Creator/creation distinction
 - ▶ *Ex nihilo* creation
 - ▶ God's mediated action in creation
 - ▶ Functional integrity
 - ▶ God's ongoing activity in creation

Theocentric Worldview

- ▶ Role of humans
 - ▶ Made in God's image
 - ▶ Priestly role of humans
 - ▶ Subdue and rule (Genesis 1:26-28)
 - ▶ Serve and protect (Genesis 2:15)

Theocentric Worldview

- ▶ Doubleness: two things together that seem paradoxical
 - ▶ God as three and as one
 - ▶ Jesus as fully divine and fully human
 - ▶ God's transcendence and immanence

Theocentric Environmental Ethics

- ▶ How can a theocentric perspective help environmental ethics?
 - ▶ Puts humans in a place subservient to God
 - ▶ Values the flourishing of creation
 - ▶ Values human flourishing
 - ▶ Provides a basis for intrinsic value as God's creation

Theocentric Environmental Ethics

- ▶ How can a theocentric perspective help environmental ethics?
 - ▶ Doubleness
 - ▶ People made a part of creation and set apart from creation
 - ▶ Concern is for all of creation and for people
 - ▶ Intrinsic value and instrumental value

Applying Theocentric Environmental Ethics to Environmental Issues

▶ Extinction of Species

- ▶ Background extinction rate
- ▶ Mass extinction events
- ▶ Current situation

▶ Causes of extinctions

- ▶ Habitat loss
- ▶ Invasive species
- ▶ Overexploitation
- ▶ Pollution

Applying Theocentric Environmental Ethics to Environmental Issues

- ▶ Approaches to protecting biodiversity
 - ▶ Value perspective
 - ▶ Instrumental value
 - ▶ Intrinsic value
 - ▶ Science perspective
 - ▶ Compare scientific description to doctrine of creation
 - ▶ Policy perspective
 - ▶ Example: Endangered Species Act

Applying Theocentric Environmental Ethics

- ▶ Climate Change
- ▶ Causes: greenhouse gas emissions
- ▶ Effects
 - ▶ Increased temperatures
 - ▶ Altered climate patterns
 - ▶ Rising sea level
 - ▶ Ocean acidification

Applying Theocentric Environmental Ethics

- ▶ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992)
 - ▶ Basis for
 - ▶ Kyoto Protocol
 - ▶ Paris Accord
 - ▶ Emphasis on both anthropocentric and ecocentric concerns

The Promise of Theocentric Environmental Ethics

- ▶ A way forward that recognizes
 - ▶ Human values
 - ▶ Environmental values
 - ▶ Centered on God's will

A Way Forward: Virtue Ethics

Virtues related to caring for creation

- ▶ Respect & Receptivity
- ▶ Self-restraint & Frugality
- ▶ Humility & Honesty
- ▶ Wisdom & Hope
- ▶ Patience & Serenity
- ▶ Benevolence & Love
- ▶ Justice & Courage

From: Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*