In his book "**Practical Ethics**", **Peter Singer** begins the chapter on Environmental Ethics with a description of an idyllic valley which is destined to be dammed by a hydro-electric facility.
Φ   Singer outlines all the benefits for the population of cheap power.
Φ   He then goes on to describe the ecological significance of the valley.
He then poses the question "Should the Dam be built"?

Most people would base such a decision on a **Utilitarian** process – they would weigh up the "pros" of the cheap power against the "cons" of the loss of habitat.

The statistics suggest that for a long time humanity has felt that the price of industrial and technological progress was a price worth paying. Unique ecologies have been destroyed to provide farmland, power, fossil resources and more to feed the requirements of the modern world.
Φ   Fossil Fuels, burned to turn steam turbines for power generation or to power internal combustion engines, have released colossal amounts of fine particle pollution into the atmosphere.

People living close to the Trafalgar Road in Greenwich (London SE10) noted a higher than normal incidence of asthma in their children. The road is a main route into central London from the North Kent coast, and was often choked by heavy trucks and buses as well as car traffic.

So great were the emissions from houses burning coal in London that notorious "smogs" (known as pea-soupers) occurred when the pollution was trapped beneath descending cold air. It then reacted with the sunlight to create dangerous levels of poisonous gases. During the last smog (in the 1950s) people died from respiratory diseases connected to the smogs.

Although many of the emissions from Fossil Fuels have been "cleaned up", there are still concerns about pollution. In particular, the release of CO_2 into the atmosphere is thought to cause "Global warming".
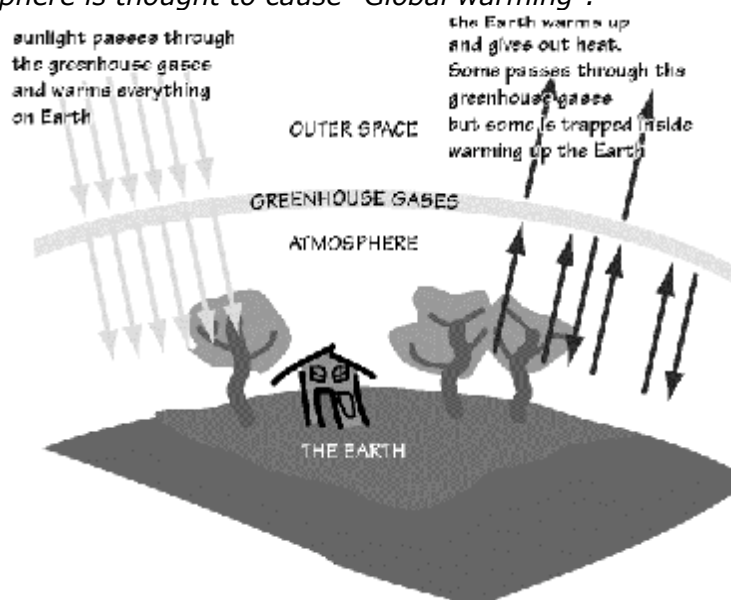
On a purely Utilitarian basis, environmentalists and scientists are arguing that continued wanton pollution of the environment is potentially disastrous, and therefore wrong. The argument goes something like this:

Burning fossil fuels releases large amounts of CO_2 into the atmosphere.

CO_2 appears to cause Global Warming.

It is **wrong** to pollute the atmosphere.

Some philosophers criticise the line of this argument. David Hume famously criticised the idea that an **is** can lead to an **ought**. He meant that you cannot arrive at an ethical imperative from the observation of situations. The observation of a person's behaviour cannot be used to "invent" a

Look back as **AS Foundation** notes and remind yourself of the three foundations of Ethics:
1. Descriptive Ethics
2. Normative Ethics
3. Meta-Ethics

rule or principle. For example, a person observes a number of Sixth Formers performing stunts in their (Mothers'?) cars close to a large crowd of students crossing sites. They conclude that it is ethically acceptable to behave in this way.

This is the philosophical error behind the defence many people offer when caught with cannabis, or speeding, or fiddling their taxes. The **fact** that everyone is "doing it" is not justifiable grounds for a person to adopt the same behaviour pattern.

This problem applies whether the "imperative" leads to negative **or** positive results.

When applied to the Environment, this becomes an argument that might go as follows:

Φ Pollution leads to damage to the environment. Global Warming may completely wreck the planet's climate system.
Φ We **should** not pollute the environment.

N.B. The "Ought/is" controversy doesn't apply to the truth of the conclusion – it simply casts doubt on the way that the conclusion is reached.
  Φ It means that environmentalists need to find more logically consistent ways to argue for environmental concerns.

Some environmentalists argue that "logical consistency" doesn't matter when the planet is dying!

Some Philosophers argue that Hume's objection to the "Is/Ought" Controversy may not apply because the consistency of the argument is found in the "connectedness" of human knowledge and experience.

Φ Our planet is threatened.
Φ Our own existence is therefore threatened.
Φ The fields of Human Knowledge (the *"is"*) and Environmental Ethics (the *"ought"*) are therefore connected.

MacIntyre (see Vardy "Ethics", p221) gives the following sequence:
Φ He is a sea-captain (*this is the "Is" or "prescriptive" statement*)
Φ Therefore he should do what sea-captains do (this is the "*ought*" or "*pre-scriptive*" statement.

Vardy (quoting Alan Marshall) breaks Environmental Ethics into three approaches:

1. The Libertarian Extension

Most people understand what is meant by "Human Rights". These rights can be extended into the non-human world.

> **Peter Singer** argues that moral worth should be applied to the animal world, but not to the plant world. In this way, he reflects Aristotle's views about the Natural World.
> Φ However, Singer believes that there is an argument for the protection of plant life based on the need to preserve complete ecosystems.
> Φ These ecosystems have intrinsic value, even though it is difficult to imagine the rights of individual microbes!

Some environmentalists have argued for an "eco-humanism" ascribing the same rights to animals as to humans.

2. The Ecological Extension

Rather than concentrating in the intrinsic rights of individual life-forms, environmentalists can look at the environment as a whole. Every life-form is reliant on other life-forms for its existence. There is an inter-relatedness between all Life on Earth. The very diversity of life on earth is a key to its survival, as life struggles to survive in a variety of habitats.

Resist the temptation to sing "The Circle of Life", please!

The environment is fragile, and tiny variations can be catastrophic. The introduction of an "alien" species into an ecosystem can have dramatic and unforeseen results (Cane Toads in Australia, or Hedgehogs in the Outer Hebrides).

Deep Ecology

A combination of these two approaches has become popular. For example, the Norwegian **Arno Naess** suggested an approach called **Deep Ecology**. Naess argues for **intrinsic value** for all life on earth, regardless of their usefulness or otherwise for humanity.

> "By an ecosophy I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. A philosophy as a kind of sofia (or) wisdom, is openly normative, it contains both norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements and hypotheses concerning the state of affairs in our universe. Wisdom is policy wisdom, prescription, not only scientific description and prediction. The details of an ecosophy will show many variations due to significant differences concerning not only the 'facts' of pollution, resources, population, etc. but also value priorities."
>
> Arne Naess, quoted on
> http://www.deep-ecology.org/drengson.html

Deep Ecologists have extended this principle of innate value to the inanimate environment, arguing that landscapes have rights as well. For example, some sites have attracted specific attention, and have been designated sites of World significance (for example, the Grand Canyon). **Peter Singer** argues that such "World Heritage" wildernesses should be preserved as a legacy to future generations in a similar way as examples of the built environment have been designated World Heritage Sites (for example, the Taj Mahal, or Palace Green in Durham). The Deep Ecologists do not necessarily have the same concern for our children's children – they argue that the natural environment is valuable in itself.

Conservation Ethics
This is a more Utilitarian approach to the environment. It argues that we should take steps to preserve the environment because it is our home. The futuristic concept of the city planet (such as Coruscant in the Star Wars series) is untenable because we rely on the rest of the ecosphere for our existence.

Φ We would be unable to live in the way that we have become accustomed.
Φ Massive technological advances would be needed to synthesise the operations of the living planet – we would need to replace the process of photosynthesis in order to produce oxygen.

Vardy (and others) identify this thinking as being behind the various commitments and accords on global environmental concerns.