

Essential terminology

Anthropocentric
 Biocentric
 Biodiversity
 Conservation ethics
 Deep ecology
 Dominion
 Ecosophy
 Gaia hypothesis
 Geocentric
 Holistic
 Intrinsic value
 Instrumental value
 Sentience
 Shallow ecology
 Stewardship

15 Environmental and Business Ethics

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT IN THIS CHAPTER

- Different ethical approaches to the environment and business, both religious and secular.
- An understanding of the underlying principles and implications of these different approaches for making decisions about the environment and business.
- How to assess the different approaches and to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.
- The approaches of different ethical theories to the environment and to business ethics.

KEY SCHOLARS

- St Francis of Assisi (1182–1226)
- Aldo Leopold (1887–1948)
- Alan Marshall (1902–1984)
- Rachel Carson (1907–1964)
- Arne Naess (1912–)
- James Lovelock (1919–)
- Richard Sylvan (Routley) (1935–1996)
- J. Baird Callicott (1941–)
- Peter Singer (1946–)

THE OCR CHECKLIST

Ethical theory (Natural Law, Virtue ethics, relativist views, Kant, various forms of Utilitarianism) and religious ethics as applied to:

- Environmental and business ethics.

From OCR A Level Religious Studies Specification H572.

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS?

Environmental ethics considers the ethical relationship between people and the natural world and the kind of decisions people have to make about the environment:

- Should we continue to cut down the rain forests for the sake of human consumption?
- Should we continue to manufacture petrol-driven cars when we have the technology to make cars which do not pollute the environment?
- Should we knowingly cause the extinction of other species?
- What are our environmental obligations to future generations?
- Should humans be forced to live a simpler lifestyle in order to protect and preserve the environment?

Most people recognise that our planet is in a bad way and we all seem to have an opinion on environmental issues, such as climate change or the use of four-wheel drive cars in cities. The importance of environmental ethics is brought home daily by the news of global warming and its effect on our lives, both now and in the future.

There has been a rapid growth in knowledge and technology, so that humans now face choices we have never had to face before that affect the continuation of humanity and the world within which we live.

Environmental ethics has grown in importance in our times because to make no decisions about environmental issues is to decide in favour of the status quo, and that, we are told, is no longer an option.

However, there is no agreed ethics for environmental issues, and no international environmental code. Environmental ethics simply tries to answer the questions of how humans should relate to their environment, how we should use the Earth's resources and how we should treat other species, both plant and animal, but there are also those who are of the opinion that constant change is simply a fact of this planet and the planet will readjust to new conditions as it did in the past. There are differences among scientists as to the exact cause and nature of environmental problems and how to solve them, and so there are differences in the approaches to environmental ethics; some think the traditional forms of ethical thought are good guides and some that these traditional forms (at least in the West) are too human-centred.

There are also the views of Christians and other religious believers who have a particular take on their role and responsibility towards the natural world.

THE RELIGIOUS APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

For the purpose of this book a Christian approach will be followed.

Dominion

The foundation for a Christian approach to the environment is seen by many believers to be the Bible, but as with many ethical issues biblical teaching is not always clear, and the idea that we humans have ‘dominion’ over the natural world is seen by many as **anthropocentric**. **Peter Singer** criticises this tradition in his book *Practical Ethics*:

Anthropocentric

An approach to the environment that places human interests above those of any other species.

According to the Dominant Western tradition, the natural world exists for the benefit of human beings. God does not care how we treat it. Human beings are the only morally important members of this world. Nature itself is of no intrinsic value. . . . Harsh as this tradition is, it does not rule out concern for the preservation of nature, as long as that concern can be related to human well-being.

Singer points out that the teachings of **Aristotle** influenced **Aquinas** and continued to view humans as the only morally important beings – there being no intrinsic value in the natural world.

The value of creation

However, the story of creation, upon which so much of this understanding is based, is itself open to interpretation.

God seems to value the natural world, ‘God saw that it was good’ (Genesis 1:10a), and the blessing to ‘Be fruitful and multiply’ (Genesis 1:22a) is given to all creation. Creation is called to praise and glorify God (e.g. Psalm 148:3–10; Isaiah 55:12; Micah 6:1–2).

God is shown as having continuing concern about his creation – not even a sparrow falls without God’s knowledge and permission:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:29)

Intrinsic value

Something’s value lies in itself.

If God values creation and creation in return can respond to God, then it seems that the Bible says that all of creation has **intrinsic value**.

This contrasts with the view that God has a special concern for humanity – we are made in God’s image:

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

We are given **dominion** over all creatures:

Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ (Genesis 1:26)

This surely backs up Singer’s view of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism in the biblical texts. Or are humans, being made in the image of God, also supposed to delight in the intrinsic value of the natural world?

St Francis of Assisi understood that God communicates to us through the natural world – through animals, birds and trees – and that it is a sin to destroy them. In general, his attitude towards the environment was typical of his time: the natural world is inherently good and it is a sign of God’s goodness, and so its purpose is to inspire our respect and love. However, he took this a stage further, as he believed that *all* creatures had the ability and the duty to worship God, all are part of the same creation with the same intrinsic value.

Stewardship

Dominion may be understood as considering that the natural world can be treated however we wish and be tamed for our use. According to **Singer** this is the root cause of our environmental problems, and it is true that the command to ‘subdue’ the Earth (Genesis 1:28) needs looking at.

When the second creation account in Genesis 2 is compared to the first, we are told that man is put in Eden to protect and preserve it: ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it’ (Genesis 2:15).

Humans may be the peak of creation, but only because we have the role of **stewardship** – we are to care for and conserve creation because it belongs to God: humans are merely caretakers of this property. Humans are co-creators with God and need to use and transform the natural world with care. Creation is made by God and is good, and so must be preserved because it has intrinsic value.

Dominion

The Judaeo-Christian idea that humans have a special place in the natural world and have responsibility for it.

St Francis of Assisi (1182–1226)



St Francis of Assisi, c.1490
(tempera on panel) by Francia
(Francesco di Marco Raibolini) II
(1450–1517)

© Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence,
Italy/The Bridgeman Art Library

St Francis of Assisi was born in Assisi as Giovanni Francesco Bernardone. He came from a rich family but, after being held prisoner for a year in Perugia, he suffered a severe illness and then changed his way of life. In 1205 he began working with lepers and

continued

started to restore damaged churches. He was disinherited by his father and spent three years working with lepers in the woods of Mount Subasio. He then founded the First Order with twelve disciples. In 1212 the Order of the Poor Ladies (later the Poor Clares) was established. After several missionary trips to Spain and Egypt, Francis went to the Holy Land until 1220. On his return to Assisi there were disputes among the friars, and he resigned as Superior and formed the Third Order of Franciscans. In 1224 the marks of Jesus' crucifixion (stigmata) appeared on his body after a period of fasting and prayer. In 1225 he wrote *Canticle of the Creatures*. He was made a saint in 1228 and in 1980 he was proclaimed the Patron Saint of Ecologists.

Stewardship

A way of interpreting the use of dominion, which sees humans as caretakers of the natural world.

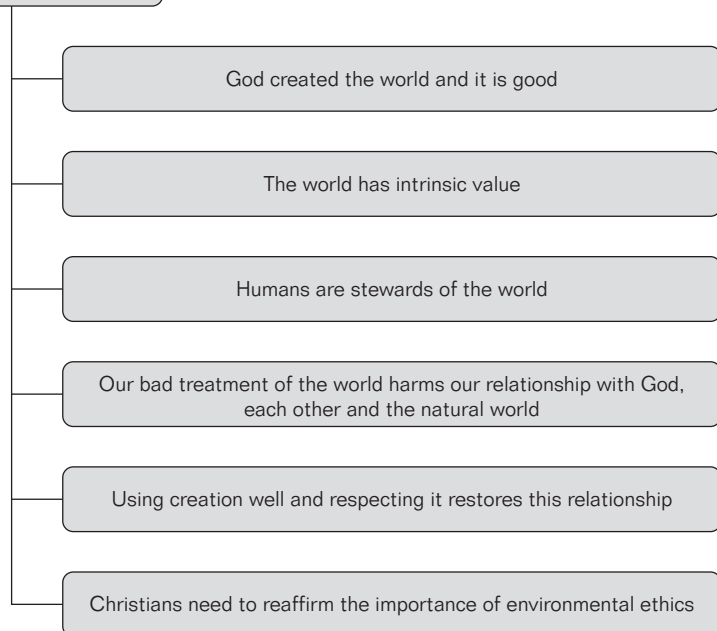
The effect of man's sin

The Fall (Genesis 3) is seen by some as the reason for our environmental problems because from this point we became poor stewards of creation:

The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. (Isaiah 14:4-5)

Christians teach that we need to use our increasing knowledge to rectify this and re-establish the bond between God and man, between God and the natural world. Thus for Christians the environment must be protected, and past mistakes must be used as learning tools and rectified where possible – this will ensure that the Western style of life does not impinge unfairly on the lifestyles of those in poorer nations and on the natural world as a whole.

Christian environmental ethics



Christians believe that care for the environment and the avoidance of needless exploitation of the natural world for selfish gain will help bring

about peace, harmony and justice. Ultimately, Christian ethics is rooted in the relationship with God and a Christian's relationship with God depends on how he uses creation and contributes to bringing about the Kingdom of God (I Corinthians 15:21–22; Romans 5:12–21). Love of God and love of one's neighbour are fundamental in Christian ethics and also apply to the environment.

Rapture and end-time theology

However, there are some Christians, especially an influential group of right-wing fundamentalists in the USA, who would follow Singer's interpretation of biblical teaching. They do believe that humans have 'dominion' and that the Genesis creation story teaches that 'man' is superior to nature and can use its resources unchecked. Those who believe in the 'end-time' feel that concern for the Earth and the natural world is irrelevant because they have no future. Destruction of the environment is to be welcomed, and even helped along, as it is a sign of the coming of the Apocalypse and the Second Coming of Christ:

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. (Revelation 6:12–14)

Pastor John Hagee from Texas says that the environmental and social crises of today are portents of the Rapture, when born-again Christians living and dead will be taken up into heaven: 'All over the earth, graves will explode as the occupants soar into the heavens', he preaches. Non-believers left behind will have seven years of suffering, culminating in the rise of the Antichrist and the final battle of Armageddon. Once the battle is won, Christ will send the non-believers to hell and re-green the Earth, where he will reign in peace with his followers.

All this may sound totally far-fetched, but this view is powerful in the world and held by many Americans in positions of power – why care about climate change or signing the Kyoto Agreement to limit greenhouse gases if you and those close to you will be rescued in the Rapture?

Biocentric

An approach to the environment that considers the biological nature and diversity of the Earth to be of supreme importance.

Rachel Louise Carson (1907–1964)

Rachel Carson was born in Springdale, Pennsylvania and studied at the Pennsylvania College for Women and Johns Hopkins University. From 1931 to 1936 she taught zoology at the University of Maryland. She held the post of aquatic biologist at the United States Bureau of Fisheries from 1936 to 1952.

Deep ecology

An approach to environmental ethics that sees all life forms as of value and human life as just one part of the biosphere. It rejects anthropomorphism.

Gaia hypothesis

A theory of James Lovelock.

Shallow ecology

The Earth is cared for to make conditions better for humans.

Thought Point

- 1 If all life is created by God, show how the teleological argument for the existence of God implies respect for his creative design.
- 2 Explain how the biblical sources could back up differing approaches to the environment.
- 3 Explain why it is important that the natural world should have intrinsic value.
- 4 'Humans should care for their own kind first.' How far do you think religious ethics would agree with this?

SECULAR APPROACHES TO ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

The modern study of environmental ethics was a response to the work of scientists such as **Rachel Carson** and her influential book *Silent Spring*, which explored the idea of interconnectedness through a study of the use of pesticides and how their effect is felt through the food chain. The fate of one species is linked with that of all other species, including humans.

The Australian writer **Alan Marshall** wrote that over the past twenty years there have been three main ethical approaches to the environment:

- 1 libertarian extension or **deep ecology**
- 2 ecologic extension or eco-holism (including the **Gaia hypothesis**)
- 3 conservation ethics or **shallow ecology**

These divisions within the environmental movement are separated by the terms shallow and deep and, when applied to thought, shallow is bad and deep is good, so today they are often referred to as dark green and light green, including all possible shades in between.

Libertarian extension – deep ecology

This really began in 1949 when Aldo Leopold's book *Sand County Almanac* was published shortly after his death. This inspired a new approach to the environment and an interest in ecology as a science. The book is a mixture of natural history and philosophy, and calls for a new approach to the environment: 'A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the bionic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.'

Leopold stated that we need to develop an ethics to deal with man's relationship to land, animals and plants, and to extend our social conscience from people to land, and that it is not right to see the natural world simply in terms of its economic worth to humans.

In 1973 one of the founding fathers of environmental philosophy, **Arne Naess**, published a short paper called 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement'. He basically stated that there are two ecology movements: the first is concerned mostly with pollution, the depletion of natural resources and the usefulness of the Earth for humans (anthropocentrism), and the second is concerned with the richness, diversity and intrinsic value of all the natural world – this is deep ecology.

He argued for the intrinsic value and inherent worth of the environment. According to Naess, every being, whether human, animal or vegetable, has an equal right to live and blossom. He called this **ecosophy**, which he defined as follows: 'By an ecosophy I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium' (*The Deep Ecology Movement*, p. 8).

Naess rejected any idea that humans were more important because they had a soul, use reason or have consciousness. So nature does not exist to serve humans; humans are simply a part of nature and all species have a right to exist for their own sake, regardless of their usefulness to humans. This view requires a complete change in how humans relate to the natural world, and Naess actually opposes the Christian view of stewardship as arrogant and depending on the idea of superiority which underlies the thought that humans exist to watch over nature like some sort of middleman between God and his creation.

Naess and the American philosopher George Sessions listed an eightfold deep-ecology platform that may be summarised as follows:

- 1 All life has value in itself, independently of its usefulness to humans.
- 2 Richness and diversity contribute to life's well-being and have value in themselves.
- 3 Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs in a responsible way.
- 4 The impact of humans in the world is excessive, and rapidly getting worse.
- 5 Human lifestyles and population are key elements of this impact.
- 6 The diversity of life, including cultures, can flourish only with reduced human impact.
- 7 Basic ideological, political, economic and technological structures must therefore change.
- 8 Those who accept the foregoing points have an obligation to participate in implementing the necessary changes and to do so peacefully and democratically.

Ecosophy

A word formed by contracting the phrase 'ecological philosophy'. It refers to philosophies which have an ecocentric or biocentric perspective such as deep ecology.

Naess proposes therefore that humans should:

- radically reduce the Earth's population
- abandon all goals of economic growth
- conserve diversity of species
- live in small, self-reliant communities
- 'touch the Earth lightly'.

However, many consider these ideas are simply not practical or realistic, especially as the human population is increasing rapidly and humans have just as much right to reproduce as any other species.

As a result of these problems, **Richard Sylvan** developed an alternative approach to deep ecology called *deep green theory*, which involves respect but not reverence for the environment.

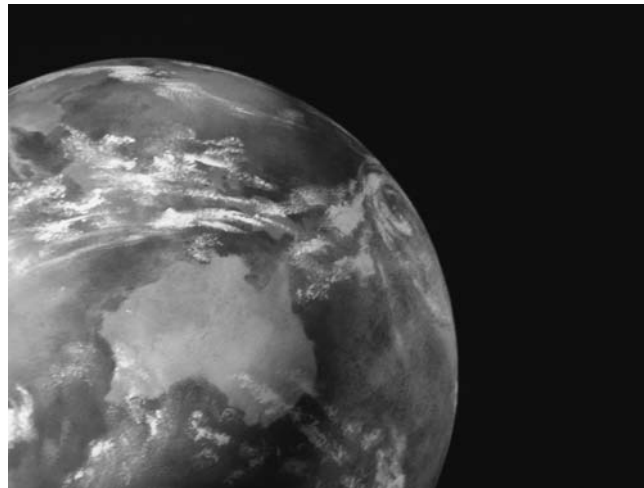
Ecologic extension – eco-holism

This emphasises not the rights of humans but the interdependence of all ecosystems and sees the environment as a whole entity, valuable in itself. This is often known as *eco-holism* and its most popular form is **James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis**.

The Gaia hypothesis challenges the view that humans are the most important species and sees humans as part of a living whole – Gaia. Gaia theory was put forward by James Lovelock in a number of books. The word 'Gaia' was first used by William Golding and comes from the name of the

Holistic

An approach to the environment that considers a range of factors, including the importance of balance within the ecosystem.



Gaia – Earth from space

Greek goddess of the Earth. All the life forms of the planet are a part of Gaia – looking at the Earth from space, Lovelock saw not so much a planet of diverse life forms as a planet transformed by a self-regulating living system; it was almost a living being.

In his early work Lovelock argued that Gaia is regulated by the living organisms within it to maintain suitable conditions for growth and development – he later rejected this position and saw the regulation as conducted by the whole of Gaia, not just the living organisms. He examined the fossil evidence which showed that climatic change had, in fact, taken place within a very narrow range so that life was never destroyed. Conditions seem to have favoured life; they are not random but intelligently organised – this he claims was not carried out by God, as religious believers maintain, but by Gaia herself. However, God could be an explanation for the existence of Gaia and for maintaining her in existence. This theory opposes the Darwinian idea of the survival of the fittest, whereby species evolve to suit the conditions available, and says that the conditions on Earth are actually managed by Gaia herself. The world is not a result of chance but of self-engineering.

According to Lovelock, life could not be destroyed. There are many types of algae that are resistant to ultraviolet radiation, so even if the ozone layer were to be destroyed, life would continue and new life would evolve. On the Bikini atoll where nuclear bombs were tested, life has returned; the same may be said for the site of the Chernobyl disaster. Human life may be wiped out, but humans are just a part of Gaia, and Gaia herself would survive without our presence. This theory challenges humans to change their perceptions and see themselves as part of a whole. If we abuse Gaia then we risk our own survival, as Gaia owes us nothing and we owe her our very existence.

The Earth, then, is a unified, holistic living entity with ethical worth, and in the long run the human race has no particular significance, but we are part of it and all the organisms on Earth are interdependent.

Lovelock's latest book, *The Revenge of Gaia*, is more pessimistic about climate change and our reluctance to confront it. He now considers that as the global temperatures rise higher and higher and there are more climatic disasters, the planet may not be able to recover as he previously thought. With a three-degree rise the rain forests will start to die, releasing vast new amounts of carbon dioxide; in the oceans the algae will fail and stop absorbing carbon; there will be floods, crop failures and massive human migrations. Lovelock advocates the rapid expansion of nuclear power to cut fossil fuel emissions. He writes:

Renewable energy sounds good, but so far it is inefficient and expensive. It has a future, but we have no time now to experiment with visionary energy sources: civilisation is in imminent danger and has to use nuclear energy now, or suffer the pain soon to be inflicted by our outraged planet.

James Ephraim Lovelock (1919–)

James Lovelock was born on 26 July 1919 in Letchworth. He read chemistry at the University of Manchester and then biophysics in London. He held posts at Harvard Medical School and Yale University.

In 1957 he invented the electron capture detector which has since been used to study the global atmosphere. His studies of the differences between the atmospheres of the Earth and other planets led to the development of the Gaia theory.

Instrumental value

Something's value lies in its usefulness for others.

Conservation ethics

The ethics of the use, allocation, protection and exploitation of the natural world.

Biodiversity

The variety of living things on Earth.

Conservation ethics – shallow ecology

This approach takes a conflicting view to the two previous ones – the only value in animals and plants is their extrinsic, **instrumental value** for humans. They are a means to an end – conservation is important for our welfare and that of future generations.

Conservation ethics looks at the worth of the environment in terms of its utility or usefulness to humans. Conservation is a means to an end and is purely concerned with humanity – so a person chooses to avoid pollution and to reduce, reuse and recycle because these actions seem beneficial to humans in one way or another.

This is the ethic which formed the underlying arguments for the three agreements reached in Rio in 1992 and for the Kyoto summit in 1997.

Shallow ecology or light green environmentalism restricts independent moral status to humans – it is anthropocentric. **Biodiversity** should be preserved, as particular species of animals and plants provide us with medicines, food and raw materials. So shallow ecology will accept that environmental damage can continue if humans benefit from it. The clearing of rain forests can be justified if it can be shown to benefit humans – making space for people to live or for farming. The preservation of a rain forest may also be the right thing to do provided it can be shown to benefit humans. Neither animals nor plants have rights, and any respect shown to them depends on how humans benefit.

However, for many people contact with the natural world is a part of the good life – part of having a good quality of life – so swimming with dolphins, hill walking, seeing cherry trees in bloom are experiences that are valued for their own sake, not just as an instrumental good.

Looking at this from another angle, **Michael La Bossiere** argues in the *Philosopher's Magazine* (issue 15) that species should be allowed to die out, as this is just part of the natural process of evolution – humans, he says, are a natural species and so any species that becomes extinct due to human activity is simply becoming naturally extinct. Humans have no obligation to prevent natural extinction, but this does not mean that humans should have a free hand in eradicating species, even when it would benefit humanity.

Humanist theories of the environment – Peter Singer

Sentience

The ability to feel pleasure and pain.

Peter Singer used a set of criteria for moral status based on **sentience**. This means that moral worth includes animals – if not, we are guilty of 'specieism'. Our treatment of all humans and animals should be equal –

Shallow ecology versus deep ecology

<i>Shallow ecology</i>	<i>Deep ecology</i>
Natural diversity is valuable as a resource.	Natural diversity has intrinsic value.
Species should be saved as a resource for humans.	Species should be saved for their intrinsic value.
Pollution should be decreased if it threatens economic growth.	Decrease in pollution has priority over economic growth.
Population growth threatens ecological equilibrium.	Human population is excessive today. Overdeveloped countries.
'Resource' means resource for humans.	'Resource' means resource for living things.
Decrease in standard of living is intolerable.	Decrease in quality of life is intolerable.

Singer is a preference utilitarian, and so believes that animals should receive equal preference. Singer argues that because plants are non-sentient, there is a problem in trying to determine their interests in staying alive. He is not, therefore, convinced by the arguments of deep ecology and admits that, although the argument for the preservation of the environment may be strong, it is difficult to argue for its intrinsic value.

In his book *Practical Ethics*, Singer advocated the preservation of 'world heritage sites', unspoilt parts of the world that acquire 'scarcity value' as they diminish over time. Their preservation ensures their survival for future generations to enjoy. It should be left to future generations to decide whether they prefer unspoilt countryside or urban landscape.

A tropical rain forest would be a good example of a world heritage site, as it is a very specialist ecosystem with vegetation that has taken years to evolve. Clearing the rain forest to develop farmland is often pointless due to the soil conditions, and once destroyed the rain forest cannot be replaced.

Geocentric

An approach to the environment that considers the geological nature and diversity of the Earth to be most important.

APPLYING ETHICAL THEORIES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is not a single theory, but more of a family of theories with different variations. Some utilitarian approaches are more useful than others when applying them to environmental issues.

As may be seen from the different approaches to the environment examined already in this chapter, many are based to some extent on Utilitarianism. Since it is clear that destroying the environment will bring long-term harm to all species, including humans, utilitarians will weigh up the long-term harm against the short-term gain made from exploiting natural resources.

Quantitative Utilitarianism looks at a situation and weighs up whether the moral course of action is the maximisation of higher pleasures for present and future generations. So, for example, when in the Lake District there was a proposal to impose a 10mph speed limit on Windermere, a lake that lies within the National Park, a designated area of peace and tranquillity, but which is much used by power-boat enthusiasts and water-skiers, whose activities contribute substantially to the local economy, Bentham would weigh up the amount of pleasure and pain of all those involved. However, the assumption that pleasure is a uniform feature of different types of experience, and simply varies according to how much there is, is questionable. Modern utilitarians would use a cost-benefit analysis, and this was the approach of David Pearce's *Blueprint for a Green Economy*. Applying this approach to Windermere, it is easy to assess the economic benefit of some of the elements in the situation: power boating brings money into the area. But how can this be weighed against the loss of tranquillity? Environmental economics would say that tranquillity is also of value and it is simply a case of determining the strength of preferences for it – but is money an appropriate measure of environmental goods? And do people's preferences accurately reflect what is good for them? Should the fate of the environment be dependent on human preferences? In addition, we never know the final result of our actions. What may seem to be to the advantage of the environment now, may in the long term prove to be harmful.

It is worth noting the approach of qualitative Utilitarianism; Mill puts the enjoyment and study of nature at the top of his list of higher pleasures – and therefore environmental preservation is imperative.

Preference Utilitarianism considers that the moral course of action is the maximisation of preference satisfaction for the current generation. Assuming that neglecting the environment has no major effect on the current generation, then the case for preserving the environment is weak.

In *Practical Ethics* **Peter Singer** uses the example of building a hydroelectric dam across a gorge that would create employment, stimulate economic growth and provide a cost-effective energy supply but have associated costs. Such costs would include the loss of a beauty spot favoured by walkers and a good place for white-water rafting and the destruction of the habitat of some endangered species and wildlife.

For the preference utilitarian, the preference satisfaction of a cheap source of electricity would outweigh the preferences of the walkers and the white-water rafters, as well as those of the animals and plants. However,

the qualitative utilitarian would consider the long-term interests of future generations.

Kantian ethics

Kant's ethical theory is generally seen as anthropocentric, based on the idea that rational nature alone has absolute and conditional value. It may seem that a theory of this kind would allow the exploitation of the natural world; if only rational nature counts as an end in itself, then everything else may be used as a means to an end. However, Kant denies that domestic animals are only to be treated as tools and insists that there are moral limits on how we should use them. Animals should not be worn out and overworked, nor should they be cast aside once they are too old. Kant thinks it is all right to kill animals for food, but killing for sport he sees as morally wrong. Kant also thinks that we have moral duties regarding the natural world and must not destroy it. This seems at odds with Kant's statements that we only have duties towards rational beings, but he explains that treating animals or the natural world badly makes us into cruel and callous people who will then treat other people badly. People who torment animals are likely to do the same to humans, according to Kant. So cruelty towards animals would not be condemned in its own right, but due to its consequences for humans it should be considered intrinsically wrong. According to Kant, a person cannot have good will unless he shows concern for the welfare of non-rational beings and values the natural world for its own sake.

As well as this approach we can also consider the first formulation of the categorical imperative – that of making a maxim into a universal law. This would forbid much of the exploitation and pollution of the natural world, as it would be illogical to want everyone to be able to act so. The neo-Kantian Paul Taylor takes the view that respect for nature is a universal law for all rational beings – but he would not go so far as to accord animals and plants moral rights; instead he suggests giving them legal rights so that they are protected.

Virtue ethics

Environmental ethics seeks to examine human relationships within the natural world. As we have seen, in the past the emphasis has been on anthropocentric theories based more on duty and consequences, which has led to environmental ethics being somewhat unbalanced. Environmental Virtue ethics is a new approach which attempts to meet the challenge of a non-anthropocentric theory of values which looks at our relationship with the natural world more objectively.

Environmental Virtue ethics does not ask why environmental preservation is important for humanity, but what characterises an environmentally good person. It shifts the emphasis from duty and consequences to who we are and how we are to live in the natural world. Environmental Virtue ethics sees a virtuous life in nature as a necessary condition of human flourishing, *eudaimonia*. Extremes of behaviour are unhelpful both for society and the environment.

Virtue ethics also looks at examples of virtue to follow and might look at the example of people such as Rachel Carson and Aldo Leopold.

Thought Point

- Read the passage below assigned to your group.
- Summarise the main points.
- Identify the key ethical arguments in the passage.
- Choose one environmental problem (e.g. destruction of the rainforest, saving an endangered species, pollution or global warming) and consider the implications of implementing the environmental ethic from the passage you have read. Look at both positives and negatives.
- Give your own views on the environmental ethic put forward in your passage – as a group or as individuals if there is disagreement.

Reading 1 'The Land Ethic' from Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (pp. 201–4)

There is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants that grow upon it. Land, like Odysseus' slave girls, is still property. The land relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges, but not obligations.

The extension of ethics to this element in human environment is, if I read the evidence correctly, an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity. . . .

The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.

This sounds simple: do we not already sing our love for obligation to the land of the free and the home of the brave? Yes, but just what and whom do we love? Certainly not the soil, which we are sending helter-skelter downriver. Certainly not the waters, which we assume have no function except to turn turbines, float barges, and carry off sewage.

Certainly not the plants, of which we exterminate whole communities without batting an eye. Certainly not the animals, of which we have already exterminated many of the largest and most beautiful species. A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these 'resources' but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state.

In short, a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.

Reading 2 'Utilitarian Environmental Ethics' from Peter Singer's *Practical Ethics* (pp. 56–7)

The argument for extending the principle of equality beyond our own species is simple, so simple that it amounts to no more than a clear understanding of the principle of equal consideration of interests. We have seen that this principle implies that our concern for others ought not to depend on what they are like, or what abilities they possess (although precisely what this concern requires us to do may vary according to the characteristics of those affected by what we do). It is on this basis we are able to say that the fact that some people are not members of our race does not entitle us to exploit them, and similarly the fact that some people are less intelligent than others does not mean their interests may be disregarded. But the principle also implies that the fact that beings are not members of our species does not entitle us to exploit them, and similarly the fact that other animals are less intelligent than we are does not mean that their interests may be disregarded. . . . A stone does not have interests because it cannot suffer. Nothing that we can do can possibly make any difference to its welfare. A mouse, on the other hand, does have an interest in not being tormented, because mice will suffer if treated in this way.

Reading 3 'Instrumental Environmental Ethics' from Pearce *et al.*'s *Blue Print for a Green Economy* (pp. 5–7)

One of the central themes of environmental economics, and central to sustainable development thinking also, is the need to place proper values on the services provided by natural environments. The central problem is that many of these services are provided 'free'. They have a zero price simply because no market place exists in which their true values can be

continued

revealed through the acts of buying and selling. Examples might be a fine view, the water purifications and storm protection functions of coastal wetlands, or the biological diversity within a tropical rainforest. The elementary theory of supply and demand tells us that if something is provided at a zero price, more of it will be demanded than if there was a positive price. Very simply, the cheaper it is the more will be demanded. The danger is that this greater level of demand will be unrelated to the capacity of the relevant natural environments to meet the demand. For example, by treating the ozone layer as a resource with zero price there never was any incentive to protect it. Its value to human populations and to the global environment in general did not show up anywhere in a balance sheet of profit or loss, or of costs and benefits. The important principle is that resources and environments serve economic functions and have positive value. To treat them as if they had zero value is seriously to risk overusing the resource. . . . We have a sound *a priori* argument for supposing that the environment has been used to excess.

Reading 4 'Deep Ecology' from Devall and Sessions' *Deep Ecology* (p. 70)

Basic Principles:

- 1 The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
- 2 Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realisation of these values and are also values in themselves.
- 3 Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy *vital* needs.
- 4 The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
- 5 Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
- 6 Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
- 7 The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an

increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.

- 8 Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

Look back over the chapter and check that you can answer the following questions:

- Explain religious approaches to the environment and Singer's objections.
- Make bullet point notes on the Gaia hypothesis. List reasons for and against it.
- Make a chart comparing deep (dark green) and shallow (light green) ecology.
- List the strengths and weaknesses of a utilitarian approach to the environment.

Essay question



'Utilitarianism is the best approach to environmental issues.' **Discuss.**

In your answer to this question you will need to explain the main principles of Utilitarianism and how they might be applied to the environment. It would be better to concentrate on one or two environmental issues such as pollution or global warming or your essay may tend to be too much about environmental issues and not enough about ethical theories.

You will need to examine what is included in the greatest good principle – just humans or also animals and plants? You will need to consider the different forms of Utilitarianism to come to a conclusion about its usefulness.

However, you also need to ask if it is the 'best' approach and this means contrasting it with other approaches (e.g. religious ethics, deep ecology, Gaia hypothesis).

WHAT IS BUSINESS ETHICS?

Business ethics considers the ethical relationship between businesses and consumers, between businesses and their employees. It also considers the impact of globalisation on the environment, and on society at large.

Ethicists do not always agree about the purpose of business in society – some see the main purpose of business is to maximise profits for its owners or its shareholders. In this case, only those activities which increase profits are to be encouraged as this is the only way that companies will survive – this was the view of the economist Milton Friedman. Others consider that businesses have moral responsibilities to their stakeholders; including employees, consumers, the local community and even society as a whole. Other ethicists have adapted social contract theory (based on the ideas of John Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice*) to business, so that employees and other stakeholders are given a voice as to how the business operates. However, this view is criticised as businesses are property, not means of distributing social justice.

Times have changed, however, and ethics in business and corporate social responsibility are becoming crucial. There are many reasons for this, driven by the social, political and economic developments in the world. Consumers have shown their dissatisfaction through taking to the streets, and there have been riots from Genoa to Seattle, bring together many different types of activists and protestors campaigning on a variety of business related issues from globalisation and human rights to third world debt. Stakeholders, and especially consumers, are becoming increasingly empowered and vocal, forcing businesses to review their strategies.

Organisations like The Body Shop and The Co-operative Bank have led the way and brought business ethics and social responsibility into the public eye and onto the business agenda, championing key issues such as human and animal rights, fair trade and environmental impact. Consumers now expect businesses to be socially responsible, and businesses are increasingly thinking about what they can achieve by putting the power of their marketing behind some key social issues so that they can help make a positive social difference.

However, business ethics is not as simple as it looks as there is no longer one agreed moral code and multinationals operate in different parts of the world, employing and serving people from different cultures. Profit will still be the main motivating factor for businesses and this affects all the people who work there, generating its own culture with its own standards, so it becomes difficult for individuals to stand up against any attitudes and decisions they disagree with.

Modern technologies also create ethical dilemmas for businesses that never existed until quite recently – such as medical products and gene

technologies: should parents be allowed to alter the genetic profile of their unborn child, and should businesses sell products to do this?

All these issues pull businesses in different directions, so that many now set up their own ethical committees. Businesses that get caught acting unethically are publicised in the press, and pressure groups that oppose the activities of certain businesses are better organised, better financed, and so better able to attack such businesses. An extreme example of this is Huntingdon Life Sciences in Cambridge where the Animal Liberation Movement set up a splinter group called SHAC (Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty) which started an international campaign to close the company down, often using ethically dubious methods; threatening employees and employees of shareholders and banks. The opponents of this business understand business and its weak points very well as the company nearly went bust, however, the company changed tactics, the public reacted against the extreme methods of SHAC, and in 2007 reported a 5 per cent increase in profits, leading the managing director to plead with the banks to no longer treat the business as 'radioactive' (Financial Times, 16 September 2007)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BUSINESS AND CONSUMERS

Customer rights – quality, safety, price and customer service were once the most important ethical concerns in business. Now consumers influence business ethics, and have been instrumental in bringing about change: consumers expect businesses to demonstrate ethical responsibility in its widest sense – affecting the treatment of employees, the community, the environment, working conditions etc. Some companies have been the focus of consumer criticism and forced to change their practices – Shell over Brent Spar and Ogoniland; Monasato over GM food; Nike and Gap over child labour. Shell bowed to consumer pressure and did not sink the Brent Spar, and Nike now monitors its factories following the BBC Panorama programme.

One of the first ethical businesses was The Body Shop pioneered by the late Anita Roddick. The company became a great success in the mid-1980s following a change in consumer awareness in how beauty products were tested and began to look for alternative ways. However, an ethical business does not need to be at the level of The Body Shop as even small gestures like participation in community events or collections for charities can improve a company's appearance to consumers.

Consumer action, therefore, can be very effective, as if enough consumers stop buying from a business then the business will be forced to change or go bust. Ethical business practices will give a better image to the consumer and better sales.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

Much of the employer/employee relationship now consists of them working together. In 1978 in the UK the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) was set up to try and create good and harmonious working relationships. It negotiates in disputes, and has been very successful, as there have been few major employment disputes, and ACAS has been able to suggest guidelines for better relationships in most situations.

For employer/employee relationships to be successful there has to be a balance of interests: the employer wants to plan for the future of the business, make profits and keep employees motivated; the employee wants the best possible conditions and living standards. If employees are unhappy there will often be high turnover of staff, poor time-keeping and much absenteeism – as a result of this discontent profits will suffer.

However, relationships between employers and employees do not always work out. The internet now allows for rapid sharing of information across the world – and multinationals operate across the world. There are a multitude of web sites that publicise and discuss the behaviour of businesses. Whistleblowing is now more acceptable – access to secret information is now better and it is even protected by law in some countries. From ‘Deep Throat’ (the codename of the informant in the 1972 Watergate Scandal) to Dr David Kelly, whistleblowers have risked their lives to tell what they perceive to be the truth and to make organisations accountable. Whistleblowers have even gained the respectability of being the subject of a television drama series.

The question of whether or not it is ethical for an employee to blow the whistle, especially in the public domain, raises questions of confidentiality and loyalty – there is no simple answer to cover all cases. However, neither confidentiality or loyalty imply that the unethical conduct of others should not simply be reported, especially when product safety or the severe financial hardship of others is concerned. Whistleblowers often risk dismissal and may find it difficult to find similar employment in the future, they may be frozen out or ostracised. There are now organisations to protect whistleblowers such as ‘Freedom to Care’ which promotes our ‘ethical right to accountable behaviour from large organisations’ and that employees have an ‘ethical right to express serious public concerns’ in the workplace and, if necessary, to go public.

Thought Point

'Business exists to make a profit.' Is it society's task to protect those who are badly affected in the process?

Do you think standards of integrity in business are declining or not? Give reasons and examples.

Do you think workers should participate in management?

CASE STUDY

- 1 There are three area managers in a company: Tom, Steve and Tim. Tom was the latest to join the company and has learnt from Tim and from his own observations that Steve is not to be trusted. Steve seems to have no morals and his only goal seems to be his own advantage. He 'manages upwards', always trying to please the director; he lies to cover up difficulties or shortfalls; he tells his staff to take no notice of established policy – but never in writing and never to more than one person at a time. At the same time Steve gives the impression of a straight-talking man of the people.

Tom finds this really hard to deal with but is unsure how to respond. Sinking to Steve's level would not be acceptable, but just putting up with it like Tim does, and Dave's own staff do, really goes against the grain and all that Tom holds dear. How do you accuse a colleague of dishonesty?

What are the choices facing Tom?

What principles do you think are relevant when dealing with a colleague of this sort?

- 2 The head of a department in a medium sized company with a good profit record is 55 years old and has worked for the company for 20 years. He is married with two children at university. His life is his work. However, he is becoming less effective and no longer inspires those who work for him. Several of the brightest young people in his department have left because of the situation.

If you were his boss would you:

continued

- 1 Declare him redundant with compensation?
- 2 Retire him prematurely on a full pension?
- 3 Transfer him to an advisory post?
- 4 Take corrective action and leave him in his job?
- 5 Transfer him to a new executive position on the same pay until he is 60?
- 6 Do nothing or take some other course of action?

Why is it important for a business to behave in a socially responsible manner?

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BUSINESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Environmental responsibility is a vital component of a business strategy as it not only helps the environment, but it wins the trust of communities and gains the respect of the governments of the countries in which the business operates. All businesses impact on the environment: they emit pollution, they produce waste and use resources. Businesses, however, are continually being encouraged to improve their approach to environmental issues. Every year there is a prestigious award, the Business Commitment to the Environment Award, and in 2007 the Co-operative was one of the winners for its response to global climate change. Some of its efforts for the environment include: the reduction by 86 per cent of its CO₂ emissions, use of 98 per cent green electricity and the ethical investment policy of the Co-operative Bank.

However, balancing business growth and environmental quality is always going to be a challenge for business. Businesses are encouraged to have an environmental policy, just as they do for many other issues – again this has often been a reaction to consumer pressure, and also international pressure from organisations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature. UK law and the UN Global Compact also provide minimum standards for how businesses treat the environment, and not only the small but also the large multinational businesses will generally seek to operate within the law to protect their reputation.

Example – The Anglo American Mining Company

Anglo American is one of the twenty largest UK based companies, heavily involved in mining and quarrying – activities which have an immediate impact on the environment. When Anglo American carries out its mining operations it tries to have a positive effect in three areas:

- 1 In the area where the mine is located, it carries out its operations with care and tries to improve the lives of local people, e.g. minimising noise and other types of pollution.
- 2 In the area immediately surrounding the mine, it is active in conservation and improvement.
- 3 In the wider region around the mine, it contributes financially to local communities and helps generate new businesses.

An example of Anglo American's environmental conservation projects is at Tarmac's Langford Quarry in the UK, where the company has created reed beds in streams and ponds surrounding the quarry. Reed beds are an endangered habitat and local people worked with Tarmac to plant the first 10,000 reeds.

Supermarkets have been one of the businesses where the importance of 'green credentials' has become increasingly important. Concerns about 'food miles' and plastic and packaging are growing among consumers. Supermarkets have realised that they must compete on their environmental ethical credentials as well as price, availability, accessibility, etc., as all these factors influence where consumers shop. Responding to consumer preferences, helping the environment, profitability and corporate social responsibility go hand in hand.

GLOBALISATION

Globalisation means 'the reduction of the difference between one economy and another, so trade all over the world, both within and between different countries, becomes increasingly similar'. This has been going on for a long time, and used to be quite a slow process, but in recent times it has speeded up. The reasons for the increase in the pace of globalisation are:

- 1 Technological change – especially in communications technology.
- 2 Transport is both faster and cheaper.
- 3 Deregulation – an increase in privatisation, and countries now able to own businesses in other countries, e.g. some UK utilities which were once government-owned are now owned by French businesses.

- 4 Removal of capital exchange controls – money can now be moved easily from one country to another.
- 5 Free trade – many barriers to trade have been removed, sometimes by grouping countries together such as the EU.
- 6 Consumer tastes have changed and consumers are now more willing to try foreign products.
- 7 Emerging markets in developing countries.

All of this means that businesses are now freer to choose where they operate from, and can move to countries where labour is cheaper. This has meant, for example, that much manufacturing has moved to countries such as Indonesia, and many telephone call centres have moved to India.

National borders are becoming less important as markets stretch across them, and multinationals have taken advantage of this. Consumers are alike, but not the same, in different countries, and businesses have needed to consider local variations.

However, globalisation also brings problems – especially those of justice towards poorer countries. Trade between countries is not totally fair, and some of the richest countries, such as the United States, have very strong trade barriers to protect their national interests. It could be said that globalisation means that the interests of the shareholders are more important than the interests of the employees or the consumers, and it means that the poorest people have just 1.4 per cent of the global income. The disaster at Bhopal in India is a prime example, as the chemical companies concerned continued to deny responsibility for a long time, and some survivors still await compensation. Toxic waste still pollutes the environment.

Anti-globalisation movements campaign against the bad effects of globalisation:

- Amnesty International campaigns for a global human rights framework for business based on the UN Norms for Business.
- The WCC campaigns for responsible lending and unconditional debt cancellation.
- There are also campaigns for ecological farming practices, the imposed privatisation of public services, especially water.

In his book *One World: The Ethics of Globalisation* Peter Singer lists the various global problems that we face and challenges us to develop a system of ethics and justice that can be accepted by all people, regardless of their race, culture or religion.

BENEFITS OF ETHICS FOR BUSINESS

One of the main benefits for a business of behaving ethically is that a better image is given to the world at large, and especially to consumers, resulting in greater profit. It also means that expensive and potentially embarrassing public relation disasters are avoided. As far as employees are concerned, if the business is seen to behave ethically, for example with regard to the environment, it will recruit more highly qualified employees, and this leads to better employee motivation as the employees are proud of their jobs.

PROBLEMS OF ETHICS FOR BUSINESS

Being ethical can increase costs for the business, e.g. they have to pay reasonable wages to all employees. If a business is truly putting its ethics into practice it will have to pass on the same standards down the supply chain and this will mean no longer doing business with suppliers who are not prepared to meet the same standards.

However, businesses are products of the society in which they operate, and if society does not always have clear standards it is not always easy for a business to decide what to do, e.g. some people in our society are completely opposed to experimenting on animals, but others would argue that it is alright for a business to do so if it benefits human health.

Sometimes a business needs to consider that its role is to make a profit, provide jobs and create wealth for society as a whole, and it may consider that ethics are good if they help achieve these aims, and to be ignored if they do not.

Ultimately to really be ethical a business may have to change its whole business practice and organisational culture.

THE RELIGIOUS APPROACH TO BUSINESS ETHICS

For the purpose of this book a Christian approach will be followed.

The Bible gives guidelines that can easily be applied to the ethical issues surrounding business. The Old Testament contains laws and injunctions about the fair treatment of employees, e.g. Leviticus 19:13; about justice, honesty and fairness in business, 'Do not steal'; and laws about just weight, e.g. Deuteronomy 25:13–15, giving the full amount for fair payment. The prophets, especially Amos, spoke out about the unfair treatment of the poor by the rich. People are told to treat others as they would be treated – and in

the New Testament Jesus was concerned with not amassing wealth for the sake of it, and sharing with those in need.

In the Middle Ages just price, usury, property and work were the only ethical approaches to business, and it was some time before Christian ethics looked at the real ethical problems facing modern businesses.

Protestant social teaching pulled in two different directions: first, the individualistic approach was concerned with the individual's calling and personal integrity, so a businessman could be praised for his charity; and second, was the concern about the competitive individualism of capitalism and the great social inequalities that it brought about, so social solutions were offered.

Catholic thought was never very individualistic and very early on addressed the problems of modern industrial life. The encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 and *Centesimus Annus Laborem Exercens* in 1981 recognised the needs of workers, argued for trade unions and for the protection of the needs of poor countries to correct the defects of the world market. The idea of the common good, of solidarity, is a basic value in Catholic social teaching and has led the Catholic Church to criticise both communism and free market capitalism which acts against the poor and leads to the selfish pursuit of wealth.

Christian churches have increasingly, as organisations and as individual Christians within those churches, monitored and corrected the harm done by the businesses in which they are shareholders. This has led to changes in behaviour in areas such as environmental impact and marketing practice in the developing world. This role of the ethical investor is not new – in the eighteenth century the Quakers refused to invest in companies that were involved in slave trade.

APPLYING ETHICAL THEORIES TO BUSINESS ETHICS

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism considers the majority affected by a certain action – general welfare is important, and this is often seen as good business policy: the general good of the organisation is more important than that of individuals. So, for example, an employee, though qualified for a certain position, will have to give way to another so that the interest of the business as a whole can be preserved. A farmer may have to give up some of his land for a dam project, because it will provide irrigation for lots of farmers and generate electricity for the whole community. However, the best business transactions are the ones in which the best result is achieved, when both business and

consumer, employer and employee, shareholders and stakeholders are considered and benefited. This means that when making business decisions all options need considering – no one can just act on intuition if they wish to maximise utility.

Economically, Utilitarianism would seem to be a good ethical approach to business, however, in many cases it is not simple and clear cut. For example, closing a polluting factory may be good for the environment, but not for the local community who may need the jobs. Whatever the business does it is going to upset one group of people or another. Utilitarianism does not always help here.

Kantian ethics

Kant believed that morality, in all spheres of human life, including business, should be grounded in reason. His Categorical Imperative held that people should act only according to maxims that they would be willing to see become universal norms, and that people should never be treated as a means to an end. Kant's theory implies the necessity of trust, adherence to rules, and keeping promises (e.g. contracts). Kant argued that the highest good was the good will – the importance of acting from duty – so, for example, if a merchant is honest in order to gain a good reputation, then these acts of honesty are not genuinely moral. Kant's ethics are ethics of duty rather than consequence: a business behaving morally in order to impress consumers is not truly moral according to Kant. Kant's ethical theory applies well to both employees and consumers as it does not permit people to be treated as means to an end – even if that end is profit. Kantian ethics would also see a business as a moral community – employers and employees, stakeholders and shareholders, standing in a moral relationship with each other which would influence the way they treat each other. This seems to require that the work that employees are given is meaningful, and that businesses should be organised more democratically.

Kant's universalisation means that business laws would have to be universal, e.g. no bribery or corruption, and this would have a beneficial effect on international business. However, Kantian ethics has far more to offer to international business ethics as it shows how business can contribute to world peace. N.E. Bowie quotes Kant as saying:

In the end war itself will be seen as not only so artificial, in outcome so uncertain for both sides, in after effects so painful in the form of an ever-growing war debt (a new invention) that cannot be met, that it will be regarded as the most dubious undertaking. The impact of any revolution on all states in our continent, so clearly knit together through commerce

will be so obvious that other states, driven by their own danger, but without any legal basis, will offer themselves as arbiters, and thus will prepare the way for distant international government for which there is no precedent in world history.

If business (commerce) brings people together than the chance of peace among nations improves. Bowie considers that Kantian ethics has rich implications for business ethics.

Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics from Aristotle shows that business cannot be separated from society – everyone is part of the larger community, the *'polis'*, the corporation, the neighbourhood, the city, the country or the world and our virtues are defined by that larger community. Business is part of that community. Virtue ethics focuses on the character and motivation of the agent and on the agent's ability to pursue eudaimonia. Virtue is also learnt through observation of others' behaviour – as far as business is concerned an individual cannot be ethical in a vacuum, but always as part of the ethical community. This applies to the employers as well as the employees who must show the virtues of character such as honesty, prudence, fairness and courage.

The virtues of co-operation seem to triumph over competition, but does this mean that the virtuous person in business will be the good corporate citizen rather than the high-flier, wheeler-dealer or the entrepreneurial innovator?

Virtue ethics is interested in the most general traits that make a harmonious society possible, so the traits that make for good business must be the same as those of a good society; the virtues of a successful businessman and those of a good citizen must also be the same. In business, as in society, trustworthiness and co-operation are essential; even the most devious business dealings presuppose an atmosphere of trust, and competition is only possible (as in sport) within a context of general co-operation. Business is an essential part of society, not separate from it, and, as in society, living together is central, making a profit is just a means.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

Look back over the chapter and check that you can answer the following questions

- Explain how consumers can influence business ethics.
- Why is environmental responsibility a good business strategy?
- List the benefits and the problems of ethics for businesses.
- List the strengths and weaknesses of a Utilitarian approach to business ethics.
- How does Kant think business can help world peace?

Essay question



'Kantian ethics is the best approach to the issues surrounding business.' Discuss. (35 marks)

In your answer to this question you will need to explain the main principles of Kantian ethics – e.g. duty, good will, the Categorical and Hypothetical Imperatives – and how they might be applied to business.

It would be better to concentrate on one or two business issues, such as relations between business and shareholders, the question of profit and what business methods could be universalised, the relations between employers and employees, and the importance of not treating others as a means to an end, or your essay may tend to be too much about business issues and not enough about ethical theories.

However, you also need to ask if it is the 'best' approach and this means contrasting it with other approaches (e.g. religious ethics, Utilitarianism or Virtue Ethics).

FURTHER READING

- Benson, J. *Environmental Ethics*, London, Routledge, 2000.
 Bowie, N. E. *Business Ethics: A Kantian Perspective*, Oxford Blackwell, 1999
 Devall, B. and Sessions, G., *Deep Ecology*, Salt Lake City, Gibbs M. Smith, 1987.
 Dregson, A. and Inoue, Y. (eds) *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*, Berkeley, North Atlantic Books, 1995.

- Frederick, R. *A Companion to Business Ethics*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1999
- Leopold, A. *A Sand County Almanac*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Lovelock, J. *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Pearce, D., Markandya, A. and Barbier, E.B., *Blue Print for a Green Economy*, London, Earthscan, 1989.
- Singer, P. *Practical Ethics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Singer, P. 'All Animals Are Equal' in Sterba, J. (ed.) *Ethics: The Big Questions*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1998.
- Singer, P. *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*, Yale, Yale University press, 2004.
- Solomon, R. C. *Ethics and Excellence*, New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press 1993
- Taylor, P. 'The Ethics of Respect for Nature' in Sterba, J. (ed.) *Ethics: The Big Questions* Oxford, Blackwell, 1998.
- Walker, J. *Environmental Ethics*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2000.

For those who want to take the topic further than the limitations of A level, I suggest they look at ecological feminism – a good introduction is to be found in Warren, K. 'The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism' in Sterba, J. (ed.) *Ethics: The Big Questions*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1998.