

Anthropocentric Attitudes in Modern Society

Halting Climate Change will Require a Cultural Shift toward Eco-centrism

Tag Words: Anthropocentrism, Eco-centrism, Climate Change, Congress, Education

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Summary: Anthropocentrism, or human-centered bias, is an ever-present, yet rarely addressed, issue in modern society. This pervasive perspective, in which human life is seen as inherently valuable while other species and ecosystems are not, has influenced the damaging ways humans interact with nature. Anthropogenic climate change, an outcome of anthropocentrism, and the denial of its existence or effects on the planet can help us understand the pervasiveness of this perspective and the great harm it can cause to human and nonhuman animals alike. We hope to broaden society's awareness of its own anthropocentric tendencies, such as climate change denial, by requesting that Universities consider adding courses on Anthropocentrism in the hopes that it will influence attitudes and behaviors that inherently value not just humans, but all species and environments on earth, many of which have already been damaged or threatened due to pervasive human-centered thinking.

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/7Q-JRAeVBls>

What is anthropocentrism?

The word anthropocentrism comes from the Greek words for “human” and “center” and is defined simply as human-centered thinking (1). The viewpoint holds that human beings are separate from nature and are superior to nonhuman species. Human beings are placed as the “central or most significant entities in the world” (2). Consequently, anthropocentrists may be in favor of any actions that seem to benefit humans, even if the environmental impact is significant, and oppose any actions designed primarily to benefit non-human animals, unless the costs to humanity are minimal (2). Anthropocentrism is often used synonymously with the terms “human exceptionalism” and “human supremacy” (3 & 4). The concept is believed to be an important facet of Western thinking and culture and may be an influential factor to human-caused environmental degradation, mass extinction of nonhuman species, and mistreatment of captive animals (5 & 6).

The problem of anthropocentrism is subtle, and sometimes difficult to define, because it is a problem of perception. Very few people are anthropocentric as a conscious belief or identity in the way that someone might hold their political beliefs. Instead, people are anthropocentric in the way that they intrinsically value human interests above non-human interests, often without even realizing it. In this way, even people who sympathize with the environment or environmental causes might ultimately accept habitat destruction or other environmental harms as “worth it” in the pursuance of human interests. This makes anthropocentrism both dangerous and hard to combat.

The history of anthropocentrism

Many ethicists consider the widespread acceptance of anthropocentric values in the modern world to have originated from Jewish and Christian theologies in the New Testament; specifically in the book of Genesis. The Creation story says that God created humans in his own image and that they shall go forth and “subdue” the earth and have “dominion over...every living thing” (2). Though Christian theology is attributed to the massive expansion of these values in society, it was not a new idea. Many philosophers that have greatly influenced the study of modern philosophy including Aristotle, Kant, and Descartes had human-centered values and beliefs from which they developed their moral and ethical philosophies (5). Examples include Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* published in 350 BC and Immanuel Kant’s *Würde*, or intrinsic value, which he stated could only apply to humanity (7 & 8). Rene Descartes believed that humans were the exceptional species because of his belief that only they could have free will. He thought animals behaved purely instinctually which led him to dissect animals while they were still alive (an inhumane procedure known as vivisection) in an attempt to prove his theory that they could not feel pain (9). Some historians and ethicists say Descartes's philosophies introduced an anthropocentric subjectivism to Western thinking (10).

Anthropocentrism and capitalism

The capitalist economic system has often been seen as a key driver of both anthropocentric thinking and anthropogenic environmental degradation. Capitalism basically boils down to the private (as opposed to governmental) ownership of the means of production (such as corporations and factories). This is significant because without any guidance from a central authority, the only thing that keeps the economy cohesive is the drive of each individual to pursue their own interests as vigorously as possible. “Profiting” drives the average human’s existence. We work to earn a profit to live comfortably or just to survive. But either way, we are supposed to profit as much as possible to earn nicer and nicer things, even if doing so is at the expense of the environment or even other people (11).

Many economists agree that the capitalist system is imperfect, but necessary because of its success compared to massive failures of other economic systems in history, such as the form of communism practiced by such countries as the Soviet Union during the Twentieth Century. This idea is best summed up by Winston Churchill’s famous phrase that capitalism is the worst economic system “save for all the rest” (12). But in times when environmental issues we have caused are threatening so many other forms of life and the quality of our own, we should be able to make the effort to reform some aspects of this system. Oftentimes in trade markets achieving the largest profit involves forgoing sustainability. Increasing production, thus taking more resources from the environment, increases profit, while restoring the environment afterwards costs money, thus decreasing profit.

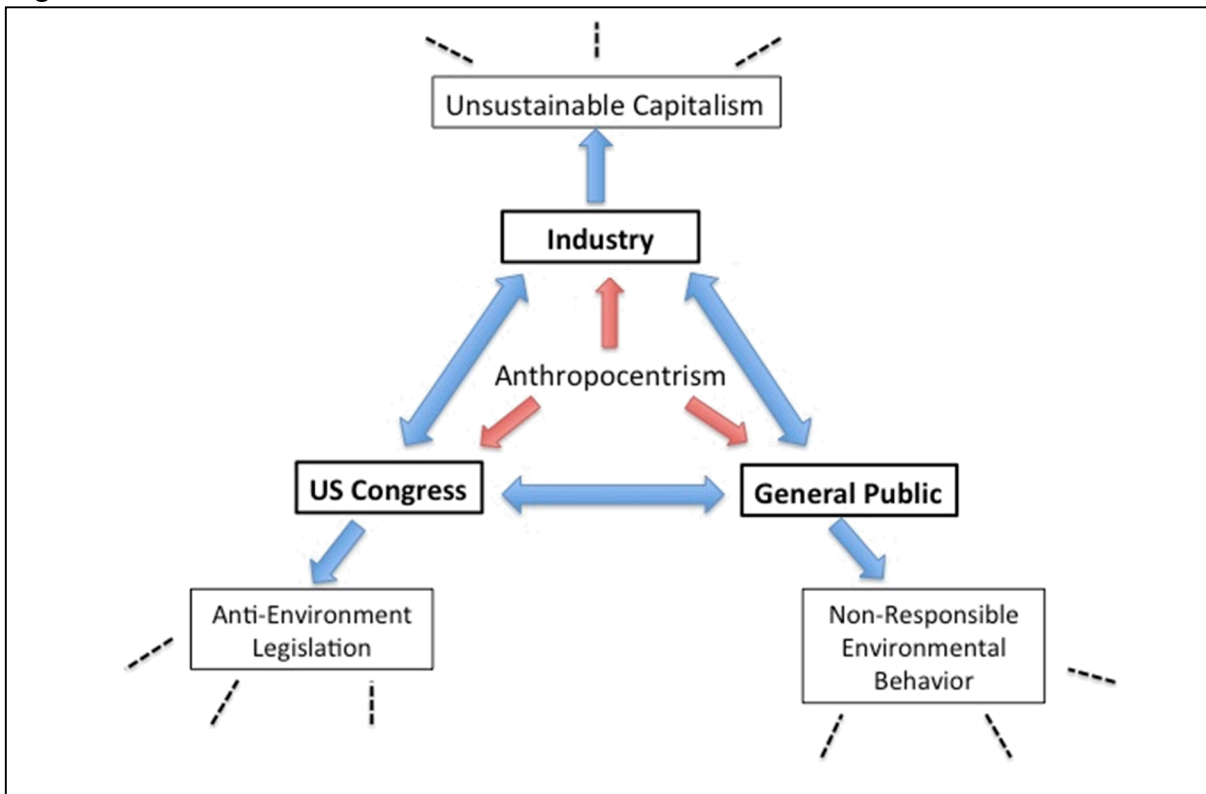
Anthropocentrism in society today

As the standard of living around the world increases and our civilizations get larger, we are only furthering humanity’s isolation from nature. Newer generations are becoming increasingly less educated about the natural world; a phenomenon that has since been coined “nature deficit disorder” (13). Western society is especially anthropocentric because its modern cultural origins stem from the environmentally damaging Industrial Revolution and even further back from the shared cultural morals of human-centric Judeo-Christian religions. As the complexity of society has increased, anthropocentrism has deeply integrated into the intricate web of societal interactions.

One way to conceptualize these interactions is to divide society into three main spheres; governing bodies, industry, and the general public. Each of these spheres greatly influences each other. The general public creates the free market, thus influencing industry. Citizens elect officials into office and public pressure can influence government decisions. Government officials, in turn, regulate the conduct of citizens and businesses, thereby influencing their behavior. Industry affects citizens through advertising and the products it sells in the marketplace, and affects government through lobbying and political contributions. The government and corporations also work together to influence the media, and thus, the general public (Figure 1).

If you add anthropocentrism to this mix (Figure 1) you greatly impact the direction of society. On all fronts you would see decisions that cause mass destruction to the environment. Governing bodies would create anti-environment legislation, the industry would be engaging in unsustainable capitalistic practices, and the general public would exhibit non-responsible environmental behavior. All those anthropocentric behaviors would cause a wave of environmental issues. Sadly, this is happening now.

Figure 1.



(Radiating dotted lines indicate the large number of possible environmental issues that would occur next.)

An alternative: Eco-centrism

There are several concepts attached to the term eco-centrism, but for the context of this paper, eco-centrism will be defined as the opposing environmental value-system to anthropocentrism. Simply, eco-centrism is the belief that all products of nature have intrinsic value and that

humans are a small part of the larger whole of the biosphere. Those with eco-centric values acknowledge the damage that humans have done to the environment and its species and believe that humans are responsible for trying to reduce that impact (14 & 15).

“That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics. That land yields a cultural harvest is a fact long known, but latterly often forgotten.” - Aldo Leopold in the Foreword to A Sand County Almanac (1949) (16)

Ancient Origins

Like anthropocentrism, eco-centrism is first evidenced in ancient religious belief systems. Eco-centrist principles are more often seen in Eastern religious traditions; unlike Western religion, which focused on the inherent value – and, ultimately, the supremacy – of humanity, Eastern religions more often focused on humanity’s place within a broader system (17). One of the earliest examples of eco-centrist values is Chinese Daoism, which is believed to have originated in the late 4th Century BCE. Nature has an important role in Daoism, which teaches that harmony and balance between humanity and nature is of paramount importance. Daoists believe that the excessive exploitation of nature in the pursuit of development will lead to disaster by disrupting that crucial balance (18). Buddhism, which arose between 500 and 1 BCE in India, also rejects a self-independence from the rest the universe, and believes in an interconnectedness between all living and non-living entities (19). These themes of universal connectedness seen only in ancient eastern religions partly explains why it has taken so long for environmentalism to take hold in Western civilization. As shown in the diagram earlier, anthropocentric attitudes are so encompassing that they effect perception of the world from the very core. As a human, humanity is inescapable. Eco-centrist values would have to work that much harder to penetrate as deeply as anthropocentrism. Since these ancient religions in the East incorporated nature into a religion so long ago, these values were able to continue. Western civilization was greatly influenced by the Greeks, which were extremely anthropocentric in religion and culture (human-like gods represented all aspects of life, including nature; no theme of interconnectedness) (20). Eco-centrism was not incorporated early on in Western culture. We have to wait much later, in the 20th century, to see environmentalism and eco-centrism emerge and evolve into what it is today in the Western world. Even then, it is our own Eurocentric brand of “green” (21).

19th Century

In 1836, writer Ralph Waldo Emerson published the essay *Nature*, in which he put forth the philosophical idea of transcendentalism: a belief system that espoused the inherent purity and goodness of nature (22). Transcendentalism was actually influenced by Indian religions (23). The works and philosophies of acclaimed writer Henry David Thoreau were inspired by Emerson, and the two became acquaintances. In 1854, Thoreau published *Walden*, the American literary classic in which Thoreau details his experience living away from contemporary society in a cabin by Walden Pond near Concord, Massachusetts (on land owned by Emerson). The text portrays his interactions with nature as a deeply spiritual and necessary experience, while condemning the “desperate”, hectic life that is evolving in the city. *Walden* was not widely received until after his death in 1862 (24). Another influential naturalist and author of the 19th century was John Muir.

Muir founded the Sierra Club and was an activist for the preservation of the National Parks (25). Muir was a transcendentalist also influenced by Emerson, writing about the spiritual qualities of nature. However, these beliefs placing nature in a spiritual role clashed with 19th century conservationists, who believed in sustainably utilizing forests (a positive position on nature for the time), but lacking any deeper connection or inherent value to nature itself, instead seeing it in a more utilitarian way (26). As we see the different ways in which eco-centric philosophies emerged in European-colonized America, it is worth noting that this was not the first instance of these values present in the Americas. Native American religious beliefs held animals in mutual respect to humans, also believing in a “natural order” that many other eco-centric religions have. When Europeans first colonized America in the 1600s, much before the emergence of transcendentalism and other naturalist philosophies, Native Americans viewed their attitudes as completely opposite of theirs; European colonists seemed to value destruction of nature for resources, threatening this “natural order” of the world (27).

20th Century

In 1949, *A Sand County Almanac*, written by ecologist Aldo Leopold, was published. The concluding essay of the book called, *A Land Ethic*, has become a rationale for the modern conservation movement. Leopold writes that there is a need for a “new ethic” that incorporates “human’s relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it” and preserves the “integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community” (16). In 1962, the groundbreaking book, *Silent Spring*, was published by Rachel Carson. This book is sometimes (falsely) credited with starting the modern environmental movement, although this was an extremely influential and popular book documenting the environmental issues of the use of the pesticide DDT (28). Not much later was the introduction of the “deep ecology” movement, started by Arne Naes in 1973 (29). Deep ecology is a more radical environmental movement that promotes the inherent worth of all non-human animals, rejecting their utilitarian value, while calling for a restructuring of modern human society. The three main principles of this philosophy include preserving wilderness and biodiversity, controlling human population growth, and lowering human impacts on nature (30). The philosophy emphasizes a consciousness that goes beyond the human viewpoint, or anthropocentric tendencies. Deep ecology is notably influenced by Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, and Daoism. The movement has also denounced the anthropocentric philosophies of Descartes (31).

Climate Change Denial: A Case Study on Anthropocentrism

What is Global Climate Change?

Climate change refers to a significant and lasting change in global climate, mostly in the form of increasing average global temperature, but also in major changes to precipitation and wind patterns. Earth’s average temperature has increased by 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit over the past century, and has been accompanied by severe drought and heat waves, more intense storms and flooding, and increases in sea level and ocean acidification. A little over a 1 degree difference may not sound like much, but earth’s climate record has shown that it maintains stable average global temperatures for long periods of time. For example, during the end of the last ice age when parts of the planet were underneath 3,000 ft of ice, the global average temperature was only 5 to 9 degrees colder (32).

Life on earth depends on a layer of “greenhouse gases” trapping enough heat from the sun in our atmosphere to protect us from the coldness of space. These gases include water vapor, methane, nitrous oxide, and carbon dioxide. This process of trapping heat has been called the “greenhouse effect,” and has been greatly accelerated and increased by humans. Human activities such as burning fossil fuels for energy and undertaking mass-scale agriculture for food are releasing much more of these greenhouse gases into the environment, causing the planet to gradually get warmer. For example, industrial activities have caused atmospheric carbon dioxide levels to rise from 280 ppm to 400 ppm in the last 150 years (33). The consensus on the human causes of global warming are almost unanimous within the scientific field; at least 97% of actively publishing climate scientists agree that humans are responsible for recent trends in warming (34). Also, 1,300 independent scientists for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) agreed that there was over a 90% probability that human activities over the past 250 years have warmed the planet (35). Many American scientific societies have also made public statements endorsing this position, such as the American Chemical Society, American Medical Society, American Physical Society, and the U.S. National Academy of Sciences (36).

Climate change is a gradual process, but we are starting to see massive effects to the world’s ecosystems now. Rapid loss of arctic sea ice due to rising temperatures is threatening polar bear populations (37). Many migratory animals are changing their routes and behaviors because of changing temperatures and food sources (38). King crabs have been forced to migrate to find colder waters and are now threatening those ecosystems that are not adapted to that level of predation from the crabs (39). Pest species such as ticks, mosquitos, and invasive grasses are predicted to grow in range and population with warming temperatures (40). Coral reefs are bleaching as a stress response to warmer temperatures: 10% of the world’s coral reefs have been destroyed (41). Scientists are also seeing a rise in fungal infections possibly due to warming temperatures that increase the ability of fungi to survive and spread. The decimated populations of North American bats (white nose syndrome), many amphibians species (Chytrid fungus), and coffee plants (coffee rust), are all due to fungal infections (42 & 43).

US political party stances on environmental issues

In the US Congress, the major political party putting forth the most effort towards protecting the environment and taking action on climate change would be the Democratic Party (although the rising-in-popularity Green Party makes this an even bigger priority, but they currently have no seats in Congress). The official platform of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) states that the American lifestyle is not sustainable and that they are dedicated to finding sustainable solutions and curbing climate change (44). The official Republican Party platform does not contain a stance on climate change, except to criticize the current president’s interest in these issues, which is supposedly at the expense of our national security and economy. The GOP does have a stance on protecting the environment, but it comes from a much different reality than the DNC. The GOP claims that the planet is only getting healthier and that environmental efforts have already been a success (45).

The GOP’s denial of climate change

Republican US Congress members are also notorious for denying anthropogenic climate change, despite the vast scientific evidence and unanimous agreement within the scientific field (46). One particularly noteworthy climate change denier in Congress is Oklahoma Senator Jim Inhofe, who is known both for authoring a book about “global warming” called “The Greatest

Hoax” and for bringing in a snowball to the Senate floor to show that the Earth isn’t warming. Ironically, Senator Inhofe, is currently the Chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (47). The 2016 Republican presidential candidate Senator Ted Cruz has expressed that the Earth, even if it was warming previously, has since returned to a stable climate (in his words, that “global warming has paused”) (48).

The Republican party’s denial of anthropogenic climate change is also in contrast with the rest of the world: 195 countries signed the Paris Agreement on December 12th, 2015, which acknowledges the threat of global climate change and promises to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (49). Even though environmentalism has often been seen as a “liberal” position, many of the world’s most conservative parties have come to admit that climate change is real and likely anthropogenic; some even seem to endorse a form of environmentalism (50). For example, the far-right and virulently anti-immigrant Danish People’s Party has, among other policies such as ending multiculturalism, a pledge “to ensure that the way in which the earth’s resources are used bears the stamp of consideration, care and a sense of responsibility for the natural world and all its living creatures” (51). Although more conventional environmentalists have plenty of reasons to be skeptical of the sincerity of such promises, it does seem like environmental issues, such as climate change acceptance, are far less controversial in other countries.

Climate change denial in the conservative movement is part of the Republican Party’s anti-environmental stance that started in the early 1990s which coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Earth Summit, signifying the end of the “red threat” and rise of the “green threat”. The Earth Summit brought on a sweep of carbon emission regulations, threatening the profit from coal energy. Along with the party’s stance on smaller government clashing with increasing national environmental protection regulations and the very strong religious ties to the movement, the green movement and the science that backs it have become the conservative movement’s “bête noire” (52).

In this way, the GOP platform is entirely anthropocentric, focusing on issues, such as the economy and national security, that would protect and enhance only the human population, and often with no consideration of long-term consequences to non-human life and the environment. The GOP is very fond of framing environmental issues as a choice between either sacrificing the health and security of the country for the benefit of a few, insignificant animal and plant species, or essentially taking no environmental action at all (53). Indeed, many Republican leaders have called for the EPA to be gutted or abolished (54). According to them, environmental action might sound nice, but it directly threatens the national defense and the economy by getting in the way of those sectors and imposing limits on the environmental impact of their actions.

Environmental problems such as global climate change stand to impact our safety and prosperity in a much more dramatic way than environmental regulations do. The United States has already been rocked by an increased number of “superstorms”, like Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, which have killed hundreds, caused millions of dollars in damage, and, at least temporarily, caused a breakdown in law and order in the affected regions. Many scientists agree that global temperature conditions have contributed to the increase in large storms (55).

Anthropocentrism is not the answer to climate change

Climate change and its anthropogenic causes has been called the greatest issue facing our generation. Climate change is such an ubiquitous concept that we often don't realize what it represents. The fact that our climate, the entirety of physical conditions of the atmosphere, is *changing* across the globe is an enormous, inescapable issue. Changing the weather used to be a power reserved for fantastical magicians and wizards, but our daily human existence has done just that. An anthropocentric viewpoint minimizes the severity of climate change by only paying attention to a narrow range of societal issues, and ignoring the greater effects to the planet as a whole. To climate change deniers and skeptics, the non-human element of this issue has been missed so much they believe it is a hoax rather than an actual environmental issue affecting all life on earth. By politicizing a scientific issue, we make decisions that are anthropocentric and not based on fact, but on selfish human-centered beliefs. Because of the GOP's skeptical, anti-science response to climate change, the US has responded partly with inaction that has so far only caused more humans and animals to suffer.

Incorporating eco-centrism

One way to increase awareness of anthropocentrism while replacing it with eco-centric perceptions is through teaching. If we see anthropocentrism as important as other historical "centrism", we could start explaining and analyzing it in the classroom. The room for discussion on this topic is large especially in areas of philosophy, environmental studies, and human ecology. It is important to incorporate eco-centric attitudes now, since environmental problems are increasing exponentially due to rates of human population growth. Environmental issues are especially detrimental because a complex ongoing system is altered. The sooner we start to make a change, the sooner we can slow the acceleration of these issues. It is important to ask ourselves in context to where we are now: what would have happened if we had been eco-centric in the first place?

Dismantling harmful centrism

The success of progressive movements around the world is already showing a cultural shift towards equality and away from other "centrism". Anti-racism, anti-colonialism, feminism, and gay rights movements are working on dismantling the systems of oppression caused by ethnocentrism, euro-centrism, andro-centrism, and hetero-centrism (56). While the fight for all human rights continues, we must now extend our progress to dismantling the centrism that unfairly harms nonhuman animals. It is hoped that, by exposing anthropocentrism as a harmful centrism to both humans and nonhuman animals, humanity can learn and adapt in the future. Equality is something that we have worked hard for and continue to work hard for in order to secure a brighter future for all ~~mankind~~ *life*.

Community Action: Advocating for increased knowledge and awareness of anthropocentric attitudes

In order to promote greater reflection and awareness about anthropocentrism in academia, letters were sent to the Presidents or Chancellors of the top forty "greenest" universities in America based on several lists, which asked them to forward the message on to the appropriate persons or departments at the university (57, 58, 59, & 60). The universities were encouraged to consider adding a course on anthropocentrism to their curriculum or give the subject more attention in existing courses. Seven staff members from the offices of university presidents or chancellors or the presidents/chancellors themselves have responded to the letter below sent out in March of

2016. Some have passed on the message, while others have detailed how they are already incorporating teaching anthropocentrism.

1. Colorado State: presofc@colostate.edu
2. University of Maryland, College Park: president@umd.edu
3. University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh: Leavitt@uwosh.edu
4. Dickinson College: presofc@dickinson.edu
5. Harvard: president@harvard.edu
6. Green Mountain: fonteynp@greenmtn.edu
7. University of California, Irvine: chancellor@uci.edu
8. University of California, Berkeley: chancellor@berkeley.edu
9. Colby College: president@colby.edu
10. Stanford University: president@stanford.edu
11. American University: president@american.edu
12. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: chancellor@unc.edu
13. Middlebury College: president@middlebury.edu
14. University of California, San Diego: chancellor@ucsd.edu
15. University of Washington, Seattle: pres@uw.edu
16. Cornell University: president@cornell.edu
17. Lewis & Clark College: president@lclark.edu
18. University of California, Santa Barbara: president@as.ucsb.edu
19. Arizona State University: OfficeofthePresident@asu.edu
20. Furman University: elizabeth.davis@furman.edu
21. University of New Hampshire: presidents.office@unh.edu
22. Oberlin College: Marvin.Krislov@oberlin.edu
23. Duke University: president@duke.edu
24. University of Connecticut: president@uconn.edu
25. Emory University: james.wagner@emory.edu
26. University of North Carolina at Greensboro: chancellor@uncg.edu
27. Chatham University: barazzone@chatham.edu
28. George Mason University: president@gmu.edu
29. Portland State University: president@pdx.edu
30. Appalachian State University: evertssn@appstate.edu
31. California State Polytechnic University, Pomona: jarmstro@calpoly.edu
32. University of Minnesota: upres@umn.edu
33. Willamete University: president@willamette.edu
34. University of Vermont: Thomas.Sullivan@uvm.edu
35. University of Northern Iowa: president@uni.edu
36. Smith College: presidentmccartney@smith.edu
37. Iowa State University: sleath@iastate.edu
38. Pennsylvania State University: president@psu.edu
39. Columbia University in the City of New York: officeofthepresident@columbia.edu
40. Rutgers University: execdean@sas.rutgers.edu, jwhughes@rci.rutgers.edu,
ludescher@aesop.rutgers.edu, jonathan.potter@rutgers.edu

Dear President _____,

As the president of a learning institution, you know how important it is to facilitate discussion on a diversity of opinions and ideas on campus. My research of climate change denial has led me to realize how important personal perspectives are to anti-environmental decisions. The pervasive perspective I'm talking about is anthropocentrism, or human-centered thinking. This is a central part of Western thinking and society. Most people do not realize that they are anthropocentric, and that such thinking can lead to unnecessary damage to the environment and other species. If we are to successfully address climate change, we need to educate people around the world. Not just scientists and policy makers, but everyone. We all play a role. If we can discuss the societal effects of other "centrisms," such as ethnocentrism, in depth in other courses (and majors), then we should give the concept of anthropocentrism more attention in higher academics where we are educating the next generation of teachers, scientists, civic leaders, parents, and citizens. I encourage you to consider creating a course focusing on anthropocentrism or incorporating awareness of this attitude in existing courses. Such a course would draw from philosophy, religious studies, environmental science, public policy, science education, ecology and evolution, and sociology. I truly think that it would lead to rich, multi-disciplinary discussions and leave a lasting, positive impression on students who take the course. Please pass on this message to the appropriate persons or departments.

Thank you for your time,

Jennifer Gribben
Ecology, Evolution, & Natural Resources, Class of 2016
Rutgers University, New Brunswick

Response from University of California, Irvine:

Dear Jennifer,

Thank you for your email to Chancellor Gillman. We have taken the liberty of forwarding it to the appropriate department for consideration.

Best,

Office of the Chancellor
University of California, Irvine

Response from Harvard University:

Dear Ms. Gribben,

Thank you for your email to President Faust. We appreciate your taking the time to share your thoughts on anthropocentrism. A *Harvard Magazine* article on the subject, <http://harvardmagazine.com/2007/11/the-undiscovered-planet.html>, will give you an insight into

some of the ways professors at Harvard have been thinking about this subject. You may also be interested in the exciting research going on at the Harvard University Center for the Environment: <http://environment.harvard.edu>.

Thanks, again, for being in touch, and best of luck with your endeavors.

Sincerely,
Amy Fantasia

Response from Pennsylvania State University:

Dear Ms. Gribben:

Thank you for your email. As Vice President for Administration and Secretary of the Board of Trustees I help President Barron and the Board respond to emails and important issues. We appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts. I'll be sure the President sees your email.

Sincerely,
Tom Poole

Response from Arizona State University:

Dear Jennifer:

Thank you for your e-mail to President Crow. I was asked to reply on his behalf. I took the liberty of sharing your suggestion with Professor Matthew Garcia, who directs ASU's [School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies](#), for his review. Thank you again for taking the time to write and the opportunity to be of assistance.

Sean Storrs
Constituent Communications Coordinator
Arizona State University

Response from Emory University:

Dear Jennifer,

Thank you for your email and for the suggestion of a course designed to get at the roots and consequences of anthropocentrism. As it happens, several courses at Emory do currently address this way of viewing the world, and one of them, taught by a distinguished faculty member in our ethics center, specifically takes the important approach you underscore -- namely, pointing to the ecological implications of anthropocentrism.

Best wishes as you prepare for your graduation and for your own next chapter. I wish you every success.

Sincerely,

Jim Wagner

Response from University of Minnesota:

Dear Ms. Gribben,

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts with me. I have, in turn, shared your email with the appropriate senior leader at the University of Minnesota. Congratulations on your upcoming graduation from Rutgers University, and best wishes to you.

Sincerely,

Eric W. Kaler
President

Response from University of New Hampshire:

Dear Ms. Gribben,

I am responding to your email on behalf of President Huddleston. Thank you for taking the time to share your suggestion for a new course of study. I have shared your email with the Office of the Provost and asked them to share it with the persons they deem most appropriate.

Best regards,
Annie

New Course Proposal for Rutgers University School of Environmental and Biological Science

Course Justification:

The School of Environmental and Biological Sciences at Rutgers University in New Brunswick NJ currently has no courses on the Anthropocene and only one 3 credit undergraduate course on Ethics as it applies to biochemistry and one 1 credit course on Ethics as it applies to microbiology. Thus, a course with a focus on the Anthropocene and ethics would be expected to be welcomed. The course would best be homed in the undergraduate program Environmental Policy, Institutions and Behavior (EPIB) in the Department of Ecology. The Interdisciplinary Studies (554) Department might be another logical home for the course as it would attract School of Environmental and Biological Sciences students with varied interests and perspectives. As the course would draw from multiple disciplines, such as philosophy, religious studies, environmental science, public policy, science education, ecology and evolution, and sociology, it would be hoped that rich multi-disciplinary discussions between students with different perspectives would ensue; leaving a lasting, positive impression on students who take the course. The Department Chairs of these above two departments were sent the skeleton syllabus below on Apr 27, 2016 for their review and feedback.

New Course Proposal

The Anthropocene: Humans, Ethics and Planet Fitness

Instructor: Dr. Julie Fagan fagan@scarletmail.rutgers.edu

Course Description:

This course will address anthropocentrism and how human activity and ethical perspectives have impacted decisions and policies that have changed the planet on which we live. The course will consist of roundtable discussions on specified material provided by the professor. Issues to be covered will include anthropocentrism and the animal and plant kingdom, feeding the planet, energy, economic and technological approach to the environment, conservation, preservation and restoration (and access to and control over) natural resources, environmental justice and pollution; and environmental activism, climate change, technology and medical advances, as well as current issues in the media relating to human activities and their impacts on the planet. Several in class quizzes after discussions of the material will be given to reinforce material learned. Students will write an impact paper and produce an accompanying video on one of the topics presented in class. Students will present to the class the content of their paper and their video. Each student will be assigned a student paper to critique and asked to moderate the discussion on the student's paper.

Course Materials: Students will be provided with links to articles, podcasts, and other media to be reviewed prior to class period. A number of useful introductory texts will be put on course reserve at the library.

Learning Goals:

Students will learn material that will enable them to articulate verbally and in writing problems/issues on how humans have impacted the planet.

Students will develop a thorough understanding of identified topics. They will then be given the opportunity to create novel or at least workable solutions to current events as they apply to the identified course topics.

Students will develop an appreciation for community outreach and the effects that they can have in society. Students will get involved and be able to engineer new perspectives on how to make a difference and change the issues that are being addressed in the course.

Week Topic

1 Course Overview. Defining the Anthropocene.

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/what-is-the-anthropocene-and-are-we-in-it-164801414/?no-ist#oid=JzajdmeTp-rZW6QciB-u9Gbidlecsb8f>

Lewis SL, Maslin MA. (2015) [Defining the anthropocene.](#)

Nature. 2015 Mar 12;519(7542):171-80. doi: 10.1038/nature14258.

2. What's the debate all about?

<http://www.nature.com/news/anthropocene-the-human-age-1.17085>

3. Anthropocentrism versus Non-anthropocentrism; Ecocentrism

Bryan G Norton: 'Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism'

Katie McShane: 'Anthropocentrism vs. Nonanthropocentrism: Why Should We Care?'

Wilfred Beckerman & Joanna Pasek: 'In Defense of Anthropocentrism' Mary Midgley: 'The End of Anthropocentrism?'

4. Anthropocentrism and the Animal Kingdom

5. Anthropocentrism and the Plant Kingdom

6. Anthropocentrism and Feeding the Planet

Holmes Rolston III: 'Feeding People versus Saving Nature?'

7. Anthropocentrism and Energy

8. Anthropocentrism and the economic and technological approach to the environment.

9. Anthropocentrism and Conservation, Preservation and Restoration (and access to and control over) natural resources.

10. Anthropocentrism and environmental justice and pollution; and environmental activism

11. Anthropocentrism and climate change

12. Anthropocentrism, technology and medical advances

13. Student presentations

14. Student presentations

Grading is based on:

10% Attendance

20% Class participation - discussion in class of assigned reading and other material.

40% Impact Paper on one of the topics covered in class focused on the student generated "what's the right thing to do?" solution.

10% Video to accompany the paper topic

10% Quizzes on assigned class material

10% Paper Critique - A brief written review of one of the student impact papers

Format:

Two 80 minute class periods per week; or one 3h class

Trial run ?Fall 2016 on Wed periods 1,2?

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(Targum, NJ Star Ledger, and The Washington Post on March 27th)

Mass Extinction and Speciesism

Dear Editor,

In the 4.54 billion years earth has been a planet only 6 mass extinctions have occurred, in which 70% of all species are lost over spans of millions of years. Each extinction had a different cause, mostly abiotic factors. According to extinction rates now we are quickly heading toward a potential sixth mass extinction. Extinction is a natural part of life, some argue, and mass extinctions have happened before, but it still is a terrifying thought that for the first time in earth's history has one species knowingly driven so many other species extinct.

It is estimated that 10,000 to 100,000 species will go extinct each year, most directly or indirectly from anthropogenic degradation (caused by humans). Would this be taken more seriously if we considered all life equal? The progression of social justice today shows civilization's continued movement towards equality in people of all races, sexual orientations, genders, and many, many more factors. However, this still only applies to humans. Will species equality become a movement soon? And why is it not a large cultural movement now? If we don't have rights for all humans it cannot be expected that we can extend rights to all organisms as well. Because of this, social justice movements are extremely important. However, I believe that valuing all life needs to be addressed now, as more and more species are eradicated from our universe because of human activity.

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