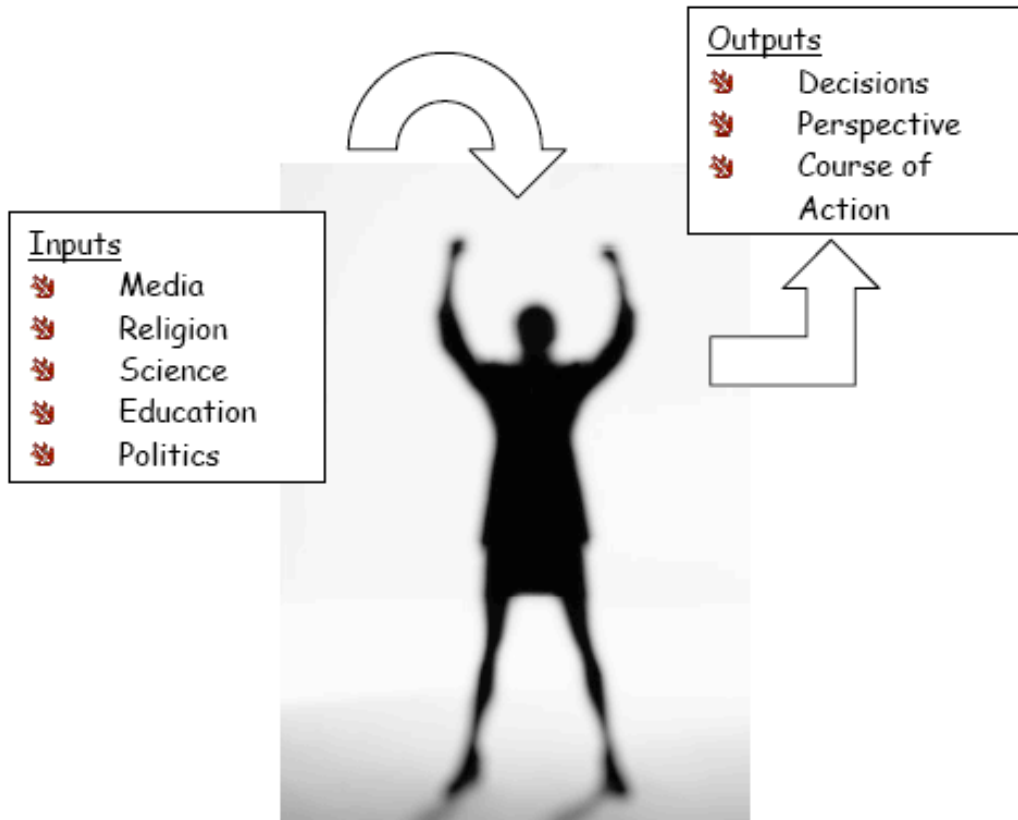


## Environmental Value Systems

What is it? It is the “world view” or set of paradigms that shape the ways individuals and groups approach environmental issues. It can also be viewed as a system as there are inputs and outputs that influence it.



## Continuum of Environmental Thought

A range of perspectives on environmental thought can be classified and ordered into a continuum as shown in the diagram below.



It is important to recognize that this scale and the following outlines represent great generalizations of complicated political beliefs. Individuals are rarely likely to fit such simplistic classifications.

<sup>1</sup> The word “**Anthropomorphic**” has a slightly different meaning, “attributing human like characteristics to living organisms.” IB ES&S Topic 7: Worldviews & Value Systems 2

## 1. ECOCENTRIC PERSPECTIVES

*"Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect."* Chief Seattle, 1855

*"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."* Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

### **The philosophy of Deep Ecology**

Arne Naess is widely regarded as the father of the deep ecology movement, a Norwegian university professor who first outlined this perspective in his book *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*. Central to his ideas is a spiritual belief that human desire was a driving factor in the whole process of environmental degradation. Naess believes that spiritual impoverishment leads to this desire and that this is the driving force behind rapid rise of the global consumer, which has parallels in Buddhist teaching. There are also parallels in the writings of American wilderness authors such as Leopold and Thoreau

### **Self Reliance Ecologists**

Based on the promotion of self sufficiency in resource management. The influences are not necessarily the spiritual ideas of deep ecology, it may stem from other academic readings or other inputs. Systems of land use management such as Bill Mollison's "permaculture" demonstrate how resources can be used more sustainably in way that integrates diverse farming and resource sharing through local economy trading systems (LETS). In economics the teachings of EF Schumacher in his book "Small is Beautiful" focused on the benefits of small scale economy in contrast to the large scale economies promoted under capitalism or communism.

### **Radical Perspectives**

Non-violent direct action (NVDA), following in the techniques of Mahatma Gandhi have come to be the course of action chosen by NGO's such as **Greenpeace** (Whaling protests, Nuclear testing protests) and **Earth First!** (*No Compromise in the Defense of Mother Earth*). Throughout Britain in the 1990's there were many examples of protests organized such as "Pure Genius Campaign" encouraging the homeless to squat on land owned by Guinness in London (Key NGO -The land is ours – for protection of common land, and applying permaculture techniques to the management of this land). The Earth First! style protests at Twyford Down by the Donga Tribe and A380 road protests by Swampy, Animal et al.

The social ecologist Murray Bookchin accuses the whole deep ecology, perspective of being "politically naïve" and "intellectually impoverished". His more anthropocentric approach to environmental problems stems from his own radical political beliefs. Other criticisms of the ecocentric schools of thought include the notion that ecocentrism promotes misanthropy, or dislike of general society. Connected to this is the idea that many ecocentred prophecies of doom may lead to a loss of faith in the ability of society to change and paradoxically help to fulfill those prophecies.

## 2. ANTHROPOCENTRIC PERSPECTIVES

“The most serious, insidious danger in the environmental movement is that it may sap the will of advanced communities to face the problems which no doubt lie ahead. Throughout history, hope for the future has been a powerful incentive for constructive change.”

*Maddox (1972)*

*in Environmentalism T. O’Riordan IB ES&S Topic 7: Worldviews & Value Systems 3*

### Environmental Managers

This perspective does not see any need for a radical political agenda along the lines of some ecocentered approaches, but instead are working to change the existing social and political structures. Those believing in this perspective are unlikely to see a problem with current economic growth that cannot be resolved by legal means or political agreement.

It is the typical approach of those working as Civil Servants for English Nature, Department for the Environment, or for the United Nations. The kind of policy influence of NGOs such as “Friends of the Earth” would be typical of this approach. Campaign material is designed to influence existing government structures to solve environmental problems.

## 3. TECHNOCENTRIC PERSPECTIVES

“Necessity is the mother of invention”

Cornucopian Perspective

This perspective doesn’t really register ecological problems as immanent threats because humans have always found a way out of difficulties in the past. New resources and technologies will solve any environmental problems as they are encountered. There is no need for radical agendas, or socio-economic, or political reform.

Often associated with the idea of “frontier economics” – the seemingly boundless resources found by pioneers and with free market led development. It can also be associated with technical scientific approaches to manage the environment (although not necessarily both of these together).

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### Homework

1. Distinguish between *environment* and *resources*, and among *ecocentric*, *anthropocentric*, and *technocentric* perspectives.
2. Which environmental value system best reflects your perspective? Explain.
3. What obligations do we have, if any, to protecting the natural environment?