

## Topic Page: [Environmentalism](#)

Definition: **environmentalism** from *Dictionary of Energy*

*Social Issues.* an active social movement of the contemporary era focusing on the threats to human health, and to the earth itself, posed by various types of damage to natural systems; includes a broad range of concerns, such as air and water pollution, climate change, loss of biodiversity, threats of extinction for certain species, conversion of wilderness land for commercial purposes, and expanding human population.



Image from: [Ocean formation in Guide to the Oceans](#)

### Summary Article: **ENVIRONMENTALISM**

From *The Dictionary of Alternatives*

Emerged out of concerns over pollution, global warming, soil erosion, deforestation, waste disposal, and resource depletion. To the extent that many of these environmental problems have been created by industrial production, economic growth and Western-style consumption, environmentalists often offer a critique of the model of economic growth on which they are based. Although environmentalism has a long historical lineage

that can be traced back to ROMANTICISM and critiques of the impacts of industrial development on the environment during the Industrial REVOLUTION (NEWS FROM NOWHERE; WALDEN), as a modern social movement, it emerged in the 1960s. A significant milestone was the publication of Rachel Carson's (1962) *Silent Spring*, which denounced the impact of agricultural chemicals on wildlife. The early 1970s saw the emergence of two major groups: Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, as well as the first Earth Summit. Another defining moment was the publication of a report by the Club of Rome in the early 1970s entitled *Limits to Growth* (Meadows *et al.*, 1972). The report put forward the notion of 'natural limits': because the earth has finite resources and a limited ability to support growth and absorb pollution, continued economic growth is unsustainable.

The notion of natural limits has since become central to the environmental movement, as has SUSTAINABILITY. However, environmentalists are divided over the proposals they put forward. One line of division within the environmental movement concerns ethics, and in particular the question of why we should care for the environment. Those holding biocentric views, such as DEEP ECOLOGISTS, argue that nature has value in itself and should be preserved for its own sake. They call for changes that promote closer harmony between all forms of life on the planet such as voluntary simplicity and the replacement of materialistic values with spiritual ones. Other environmentalists place humans at the centre and suggest that we should care about environmental problems because they are deeply connected with human and social issues such as justice or health. For example, for SOCIAL ECOLOGY environmental problems are rooted in an economic system that is deeply exploitative not only of nature but also of humans; overcoming the environmental crisis involves a radical overhaul of economic and social organization, and in particular the overthrowing of capitalism. The Environmental Justice Movement that emerged in AMERICA in the 1980s also links environmental and social problems by denouncing environmental racism: the dumping of toxic waste or polluting industries in locations or neighbourhoods inhabited by non-whites.

Another line of division within the environmental movement opposes reformists and radicals. Reformists argue that the switch to environmentally friendly technologies (renewable energies,

recycling, non-polluting technologies), the use of green taxes, and increasing pressures from consumers for 'green products' will ensure the greening of capitalism and economic growth. Those on the radical side, on the other hand, do not think that these measures would go far enough in addressing environmental problems and propose drastic measures that include reduced levels of consumption and economic growth (see DECROISSANCE). They also often call for the breakdown of the global economy into SMALL communities relying on SELF-SUFFICIENCY and LOCAL exchange in order to lower the environmental cost of transportation and sensitize people to the environmental impact of their actions.

Environmentalism does not constitute a united movement but has many currents associated with different political orientations. It interacts with various other social movements such as the peace movement, the antinuclear movement, the animal rights movement, the human rights movement, or FEMINISM (see ECOFEMINISM). It consists of a variety of groups ranging from well-funded large international organizations, to Green political parties, to small GRASSROOTS groups that may campaign on single issues (CHIPKO) or organize to create more sustainable ways of living (ECOVILLAGES). In addition, its critique of industrial development, economic growth and Western patterns of consumption has made it, in particular its more radical currents, a central part of the ANTI-CAPITALIST movement.

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Environmentalism. (2007). In M. Parker, V. Fournier, & P. Reedy, *The dictionary of alternatives*. London, UK: Zed Books. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/environmentalism>

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## Chicago

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## Harvard

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## MLA

"Environmentalism." *The Dictionary of Alternatives*, Martin Parker, et al., Zed Books, 1st edition, 2007. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/environmentalism>. Accessed 14 Oct. 2019.