Cadernos de Pós-Graduação em Direito Político e Econômico
Published by: Centro de Estudos Acadêmicos Press
ISSN: 1678-2127
Volume 26 *Issue 1,* 2026
Website: https://ceapress.org

Philosophy and the Challenge of the Environmental Crisis: Its Future Direction

Nedjema BOUSSOUAR[1]*, Fayssal ZIAT[2]*
[1] Department of Philosophy, Abdelhamid Ben Badis University, Mostaganem, Algeria.
Human Sciences Research Unit for Philosophical, Social and Humanistic Studies.
[2]Department of Philosophy, Echahid Cheikh Larbi Tebessi University, Tebessa, Algeria.
Human Sciences Research Unit for Philosophical, Social and Humanistic Studies.
* *E-mail:* nedjema.boussouar@univ-mosta.dz; fayssal.ziat@univ-tebessa.dz

Received :15/07/2025 Accepted :03/12/2025 Published :14/03/2026

Abstract
Environmental philosophers can illuminate a variety of distinctive concepts that underlie our environmental crisis. This is achieved through examining both the material effects of human beings on the planet and the individuals who have produced those effects. Historically, the relationship between human beings and nature has passed through three historical stages: from mere dependence upon the forces of nature and their veneration to anthropocentrism, in which human beings believe themselves to be the masters of nature, and then to the contemporary era, a new epoch in which development and the environment are called upon to exist in harmony. From a theoretical perspective, reflecting on environmental ethics from a philosophical standpoint is highly important. Such reflection helps people better understand the source of the environmental crisis and raises public awareness of environmental issues. The study concludes that the field of environmental philosophy can renew its research orientation and content so that its ultimate mission does not diverge from environmental reality. Rather, it engages with the current state of ecological nature and social development, transforms people's behavior and conceptions of environmental protection, and establishes effective methods and measures to improve the relationships between human beings and nature and between nature and society.
Keywords: environmental philosophy, environmental crisis, nature, human beings, ecology.

Introduction
It has increasingly been recognised that our environmental problems are global in scope and that they themselves require effective international cooperation. Nobel Brown, director of the United Nations Environment Programme, has indicated that an Environment Council (in comparison with the Security Council) may become a reality in the near future. With expectations that the population of the Earth will rise to between 10 and 15 billion people, if it is not restrained by the middle of the twenty-first century, the United Nations therefore intends to establish population regulation agencies and environmental protection programs under its

authority to reflect an integrated, effective, and contemporary biosphere-wide approach to environmental problems. The United Nations General Assembly had previously formally adopted an ecocentric orientation when it approved the World Charter for Nature in 1982, where the Charter affirms "that every form of life is unique and warrants respect regardless of its worth to human beings, and in order to grant other living beings such recognition, human beings must be guided by a moral code of action … nature shall be respected and its essential processes shall not be impaired."

Environmental philosophical discourse has emerged with a critical orientation to reveal the reality of the environmental situation, its issues, and its problems. Ecological discourse thus contains theoretical and practical frameworks capable of understanding the environmental crisis and studying nature and its relationship with human beings, that is, studying natural phenomena from a philosophical perspective. In this way, it transcends and rectifies the defects of modernity by rearranging the equation between human beings and the environment. It is a project that diminishes anthropocentrism and the inflated view of human beings while highlighting the importance of the surrounding environment and seeking cultural and ethical explanations for the causes of the comprehensive degradation of nature.

Since important Western traditions exclude any form of environmental ethics, environmental ethics appears entirely new. However, the matter is not entirely clear because the dominant ethics have essentially been moderated by the supplementary principle that one is not always authorised to do whatever one wishes when such an action constitutes a material intervention in the affairs of others. It had been assumed that acting as one wishes about the objects of nature would not affect others (the assumption of noninterference). For many thinkers, the position of domination has gradually diminished and been replaced by a modified position that contributes to progress toward environmental ethics.

Research Problem

The duty of human beings in the presence of these environmental problems, and "in light of the critical environmental challenges they face in the world, requires all religions and beliefs to cooperate in saving our planet from the catastrophic changes caused by human beings. The human element has influenced the course of the Earth's climatic system and has led to a radical change in the nature of the life we live in this world. Therefore, there is a great need for all humanity to cooperate in confronting the challenges of climate change. All communities must rise, including the Islamic community, in the face of these negative consequences resulting from change as part of the responsibility entrusted by God to all His servants. Islam is considered one of the religions that believe in the sanctity of the environment and in the duty to preserve it."

In presenting this subject, we attempt to answer the following questions: How should human beings relate to the natural world? What do we owe to other human beings, including future generations, about the environment?

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Significance of the Research

The importance of this research lies in emphasising the importance of environmental philosophy, given that the problem of defining the concept of the environment has not yet been fully delineated, particularly with the aggravation of environmental crises and problems at the global level. The concept of the environment in earlier eras differs from that in the twenty-first century. Changes in human thought regarding the environment have transformed its features and status for humans and other entities.

Research Objectives

This research aims to highlight the importance of philosophy, through its conceptual capacity, in constructing environmental ethics and in forming a human being who is responsible for their environment. It also seeks to present the principal ideas of contemporary philosophical schools and currents that have called for a profound examination of these problems and for the search for solutions to them to transform the traditional conception of our relationship with the natural world as external to and separate from the human self and to establish a philosophy that respects nature and preserves its resources.

Section One: Conceptual Approach—An Introduction to Ecology

There is a subject that has not received sufficient study in philosophical historical literature, in which the aims of establishing a philosophy of the environmental crisis as a discipline intersect with reflections in idealist philosophy.

1.1. An Approach to the Concept of the Environment

In Arabic, the word *biʾah* (environment) derives from *bawwaʾahu* and *tabawwaʾa*. Ibn Manẓūr states in *Lisān al-ʿArab*: "*bāʾailā al-shayʾyabūʾubawʾan*, meaning he returned to it; and *tabawwaʾa*, meaning he settled and resided ('I settled you in a house', that is, I made a house for you)" (Ibn Manzur, 1999, p. 328).

Thus, the environment signifies the place or dwelling in which a living is settled and adopted as a residence; it is therefore that which surrounds the living being. The Qurʾān referred to this linguistic meaning of the environment in several verses. God Almighty states, "And We inspired Moses and his brother, saying, 'Settle your people in houses in Egypt'" (Sūrat Yūnus, verse 87). Ibn Manẓūr mentioned two closely related meanings of the word *tabawwaʾa*. The first meaning denotes preparing and arranging a lodging place, as in *tabawwaʾahu*, meaning that he prepared and arranged it and made it suitable for residence and then adopted it as a dwelling. The second meaning denotes settlement and residence, as when one says *tabawwaʾa al-makān*, meaning he occupied the place, settled in it, and resided there. From this, it becomes evident that the concept of the environment from the linguistic perspective has the meaning of settling and dwelling in a place; that is, it refers to the homeland or location that a human being adopts as a residence to which he or she returns (Ibn Manzur, 1999, pp. 268–269).

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In English, the term *"environment"* refers to the set of natural, social, economic, cultural, and aesthetic conditions and factors that surround and influence the quality of human life.

In its terminological sense, researchers find it difficult to define this term; it is therefore used to refer to the totality of things and phenomena surrounding the individual and influencing him. Hence, we speak of the natural or external environment, the organic or internal environment, the social environment, and the intellectual environment (Faisal, 2022, p. 28).

It has also been defined as "the framework within which human beings live and from which they obtain the necessities of life, such as food, clothing, medicine, and shelter, and within which they practise their relations with their fellow human beings" (Ibrahim, 1984, p. 51).

It has been observed that the first to use the word *environment* in this terminological sense (since the third century AH) were Muslim scholars. Ibn Abd Rabbih, the author of *Al-ʿIqd al-Farīd*, is considered among the earliest to use the term *environment* to refer to the natural milieu (geographical, spatial, and biological) in which a living being, including human beings, lives. It also referred to the political, moral, and intellectual climate surrounding human beings. In the modern era, the concept of the environment refers to nature in its components: everything that surrounds us and exists within Earth's atmospheric domain, including air, water, soil, and living organisms.

1.2. The Concept of Ecology

Among the terms synonymous with the word environment is the foreign term *"ecology"*, which refers to the science of the environment. The biologist Ernst Haeckel coined this term, which refers to the adaptation of living organisms to their environment. The word is derived from the Greek terms *oikos*, meaning dwelling or home, and *logos*, meaning science; thus, it signifies the science of the dwelling or habitat.

In its technical sense, the term refers to the science that studies the natural relationships between living organisms and the environments in which they live. In international environmental law, the concept of ecology is understood as the science that studies the conditions of the existence of living organisms and the interactions and influences of any kind that occur between those organisms on the one hand and between them and their environment or surroundings on the other (Shaqaar& Khira, 2023, p. 233).

1.3. Concept of Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics is regarded as a branch of environmental philosophy. It studies the ethical relationship between human beings and the natural environment and seeks to understand how biodiversity influences the regulation of a place's ecological functions.

From an ecological perspective, ethics constitute a restriction on the freedom of action in the struggle for survival. Philosophically, however, ethics represents a preference for social behavior over behavior contrary to society. It is also considered a form of guidance for confronting entirely new or complex ecological conditions or for influencing delayed responses (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 141).

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The English philosopher Robin Attfield defined it as "the study of normative issues and principles related to human interactions with their natural environment, and the context within which their consequences are situated. It is an important branch of applied ethics from which individuals, private actors, institutions, and governments should implicitly draw in order to renew and evaluate the principles influencing their policies, lifestyles, and activities related to the totality of environmental and ecological problems" (Al-Atati, 2020, p. 189).

It has also been defined by Abd al-Masiḥ Samaan as a call for a balanced partnership between human beings and the environment, on the basis of a comprehensive and precise understanding of ecological systems, with attention to the formulation of biodiversity and the physical environment and support for cultural development in a manner that prevents the degradation and depletion of environmental components. From this perspective, the most important environmental ethic becomes care and balanced partnership with the environment rather than domination and absolute control by human beings. It has also been described as ethics that lead to the construction of a new perspective, ensuring the protection of the environment, the continuation of development, and the rational use of resources within a sustainable vision. Environmental ethics specifically refers to the study of human position and responsibility toward the environment. Ethical theorists and philosophers are concerned with examining the hypothesis that investigates the nature of nonhuman components and whether they possess intrinsic value in themselves or whether only human beings possess such value and rights. The Greek philosopher Aristotle held that nature exists solely for the sake of human beings and that it, along with all other nonhuman entities, is merely an instrument used by human beings (Al-Atati, 2020, p. 190).

Section Two: Human Beings and the Environment in Philosophical Thought

It is natural that philosophy directs its attention to the environment and accords on its importance, since philosophy originates from the philosopher himself. The philosopher lives within his reality, experiences his existence, and becomes aware of and influenced by what occurs around him. Throughout history, philosophers have sought to transfer environmental problems into philosophy, placing them at the centre of their concern. Philosophical debate concerning the environment has produced a major philosophical transformation: human beings are no longer the centre; rather, nature and life assume that role. In other words, philosophers have abandoned the anthropocentrism that dominated Western thought for a long period and have mobilised themselves in defence of the environment.

In this context, Ibn Khaldūn maintains that human beings are the only creatures capable of cultivating this environment. A particular type of relationship therefore exists between them and all the components of the surrounding environment, including the environments of plants and animals that share life within them. Anyone who reflects upon the definitions of the environment in philosophical dictionaries can affirm that there is a close relationship between human beings

and the environment. Human beings are a part of the environment, and their personal and psychological constitution derives from it. The various sciences, such as genetics and sociology, demonstrate this. Consequently, the concept of the environment is used in more than one domain: the natural environment is represented by climate, soil, and air; the social environment is represented by relations between human beings, traditions, and language; and the industrial environment consists of human activities such as construction, industry, trade, and agriculture. Thus, a strong, extensive, and established relationship exists between human beings and the environment (Jamal, 2009, p. 35).

Ibrahim Özdemir, Professor of Philosophy, Environment, and Religions at Ankara University, explained that the difference between nature and human beings is that "if other creatures proceed automatically according to their innate nature, human beings must follow their innate nature. This transformation from spontaneity to obligation in the case of human beings is an exclusive privilege and a particular risk borne by human beings." The relationship between human beings and nature is not purely theoretical or contemplative; rather, it is dynamic and dialectical. Through their creative activity, human beings have strengthened their ties with nature, which have moved toward spiritual development (Al-Atati, 2020, p. 183).

The cultures, traditions, and religions of people abound with environmental ideas, values, and practices that should be revived and integrated into philosophical thought, having been abandoned because of the dominance of a single way of life, namely, modern Western civilisation. In this context, Islam has received considerable praise from many thinkers in environmental philosophy. This praise includes the Qurʾānic discourse that celebrates nature, its elements, its balance, the Earth, and its living beings. It also includes the prophetic teachings and sayings that call for kindness toward animals, rational management of the Earth's resources, and the rejection of waste and extravagance (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 14).

Section Three: Environmental Crisis from the Perspective of Philosophers

Taylor defines the "environmental crisis" as follows:

"I define an environmental crisis as a severe, unexpected, and irreversible deterioration of the environment that results in substantial losses in welfare… First, the change must be severe and rapid… the environmental change must be 'unexpected', that is, an event with a low probability. The element of irreversibility is also important. If resources or nature recover quickly, it is difficult to understand how any environmental change could cause serious concern; however, if recovery takes a century or more, the situation becomes entirely different. Finally, the environmental change must lead to a significant loss of welfare; therefore, the magnitude of the damage cannot be small" (Mabaquiao, 2024, p. 81).

The environmental crisis is characterised by its comprehensive nature, as it is directly or indirectly connected with all fields of human theoretical and practical activity. A thorough analysis of the crisis, accompanied by the emergence of numerous new branches of knowledge,

risks fragmenting ecological reality, dividing it, and reproducing a reductionist position that runs counter to ecology and to the holistic perspective at its core. Philosophers concerned with environmental issues have therefore raised fundamental questions regarding the relationship between human beings and nature: Are human beings the only entities that possess intrinsic value in the universe we know, or do the natural world, plants, animals, and bioregions possess their own value independent of their usefulness to human beings? Do human beings have moral obligations only toward other human beings or toward animals, plants, and ecological systems? To what extent do environmental problems arise from anthropocentrism and from human–nature dualism? Do human beings have obligations toward future generations? (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 18).

These questions had previously been raised by certain theologians and proponents of naturalism, such as Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and John Burroughs, among others. Their appreciation of the beauty of the natural world and their concern for its fate in the face of what might be inflicted upon it by the rapidly expanding and industrialising American population were particularly evident at a time when the North American continent appeared vulnerable to actual encroachment and damage from settlements and human activity. Although Frederick Jackson had declared a century ago that the era of the American frontier was over, much of the twentieth century witnessed Americans developing the continent with reckless enthusiasm. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Second World War, and the postwar boom, many Americans advised their fellow citizens to conserve natural resources and show respect for the land. Nevertheless, the time had not yet matured for a significant reassessment of the accepted standards concerning the nonhuman domain (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 19).

3.1. Social Ecology: Murray Bookchin

On the other hand, Murray Bookchin maintains that economic, racial, cultural, and gender conflicts lie at the core of the most serious environmental disturbances that we face today. When we trace the idea of the "domination of nature", we find that it originates fundamentally from the idea of the domination of human beings over other human beings. The notion of dominating nature first arose within society itself as part of its institutionalisation in ancient systems that placed the young in varying degrees of subordination to the elderly and within patriarchal systems that placed women in varying degrees of subordination to men rather than from any attempt to dominate nature or natural forces. Consequently, domination over nature cannot be eliminated except through resolving problems whose origins lie in hierarchy, status, and class (Fuchs, 2006, p. 29).

For example, with respect to population growth, traditional environmental movements assume that people reproduce aimlessly, such as fruit flies, thereby harming the environment and depleting resources. Murray Bookchin, however, regards it fundamentally as a cultural and social problem. He reported that adequate standards of living play a role in this process and that

reasonably educated families often have fewer children to improve their quality of life. From this standpoint, Bookchin considers environmental problems essentially social problems, which he described as "social ecology", meaning that they originate in social relations of domination. The way we view the natural world is deeply intertwined with how we view the social world, since the former derives from the latter and, in turn, reinforces social ideology. This implies that every society's view of nature arises from its own conception of itself. It also means that all our present environmental problems originate in deeply rooted social problems, underscoring the importance of addressing these issues decisively within society to resolve environmental problems (Abdel Fattah, 2022, p. 161).

Thus, despite its constant awareness of the need for spiritual change, social ecology seeks to correct the ecological imbalance that society has imposed upon the natural world by penetrating the structural and subjective foundations of ideas such as the "domination of nature." This means that it challenges the entire system of domination and strives to dismantle the hierarchies and class structures that burden humanity. Notably, social ecology derives this idea from the theory of coevolution. This biological theory holds that genetic changes in one living species occur in response to external factors. In presenting his conception of social ecology, this idea was adopted and expanded to include social and environmental interactions, given that the former influences the latter (Abdel Fattah, 2022, p. 162).

The debate over understanding the environmental crisis is linked to the latent capacity for self-destruction. Philosophers should not feel embarrassed by these "transformations;" rather, they should seek them within thought. It is believed that the philosophy of the modern environmental crisis is connected with the concepts underlying the structure of thought. However, Heisenberg frequently used the concept of limits, by which he meant a kind of horizon, something that does not delimit a specific region in the world of nature or culture but rather a particular world, a "world of its own" (Valiullina, 2018, p. 413).

3.2. Natural Ecology: "Land and Agriculture"

This imbalance in the land across much of the world resembles a disease affecting an animal, except that it does not fully reach a climax or death. The land has recovered but is at a reduced level of complexity and has a diminished capacity to sustain human beings, plants, and animals. Many plant and animal habitats currently regarded as "lands of opportunity" are, in reality, dependent on investment agriculture, which means that they have exceeded their sustainable carrying capacity. In arid regions, losses are compensated through land reclamation; however, the only firm fact is that the life expectancy of reclamation projects is often short. In the West in particular, most of them may not endure for a century (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 161).

Scientific agriculture developed effectively before the emergence of ecology; consequently, ecological concepts are expected to permeate it only gradually. Moreover, the farmer, by the nature of his techniques, must modify plant and animal habitats far more sharply than a wildlife manager does. Nevertheless, there is considerable dissatisfaction within the field of agriculture,

which reinforces the emerging perspective of biological agriculture. Perhaps more important than all of this is the new evidence indicating that levies and taxes on crops are not adequate measures of the nutritional value of agricultural produce. Products derived from fertile soil may be superior both qualitatively and quantitatively. We may support the taxation of depleted soil by restricting the import of fertilisers, but we cannot necessarily sustain the nutritional value of the soil. The dissatisfaction expressed under the title of "organic agriculture," although it carries certain elements of admiration, is nonetheless vital in its orientation, particularly in its insistence upon the importance of soil within the plant and animal community (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 163). The public poorly understands the ecological foundations of agriculture, as is the case in other land use sectors. For example, only a limited, educated minority recognises that the remarkable technological developments of recent decades represent improvements in the pump rather than in the well; they have scarcely compensated for the decline in fertility. Alongside these crises, we witness the recurrence of the same fundamental paradoxes: the colonising human being versus the biotic citizen, science that sharpens its sword versus science that illuminates its world, and land as a servile nation versus land as a collective living organism (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 164).

3.3. Economic Ecology: "Industrial Pollution"

Industrial–urban pollution became a major problem after the Second World War and emerged prominently within environmental circles during the 1960s. According to the environmental historian Stephen Fox, "new anthropocentric leaders," such as the Marxist biologists Barry Commoner and Ralph Nader, regarded industrial pollution as the core of the environmental problem. Moreover, they did not attribute importance to issues of human population growth or to the necessity of radically reconstructing the guiding model of industrial growth. Foxes also indicated that they showed little concern for protecting wilderness and the living species inhabiting it.

Chemical pollution and toxic waste represent two clear and alarming aspects of the environmental crisis in industrialised countries. They have led to significant contamination of air and water, as well as the presence of carcinogenic chemicals in food. All of this has posed risks to human health, thereby making the environmental crisis a central public concern, particularly because these problems are closely connected to the daily lives of people in urban areas.

For this reason, it was natural for many people to equate the environmental crisis with urban pollution and the need to clean the environment. In contrast, the rapid decline in wildlife habitats and biodiversity across the planet represented a more subtle issue. Moreover, it was distant from their urban lives and difficult to comprehend from their anthropocentric perspective (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 242).

Industrial pollution is generated by human industrial activity. It arises from industrial processes whose outputs enter the atmosphere, water, or soil, thereby affecting the Earth's biosphere by

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disrupting the relative balance of its components. Since the emergence of the Industrial Revolution, production has been associated with the intensive use of various machines and a multiplicity of energy sources, including various forms of coal, petroleum products, and nuclear energy. These sources produce compounds and gases that harm the balance of the Earth's atmosphere. As industrial development has increased, pollutants and waste have also multiplied, gradually posing a threat to human beings and their environment (Abdel Hamid, 2006, p. 24).

Consequently, a new philosophical current, ecological ethics, emerged, whose subject concerns the standards and values governing relationships between human beings and other living organisms. It documents the negative consequences of technological and economic power and seeks to establish a new vision of human responsibility for the future of life on this planet. This field arose from the severe crisis faced by industrial society and the growing awareness of air, water, and soil pollution, which led to environmental degradation to the point that demonstrations occurred. The Club of Rome Report was issued in 1972, expressing alarm about a problem that could plunge humanity into a serious crisis if the situation continued (Bouhajla, 2020, p. 12).

This ecological current emerged to persuade the industrial mind of the necessity of abandoning the illusion of purely human benefit. Any benefit that does not simultaneously serve both human beings and nature is not a benefit but rather great corruption. However, the only possible benefit is often conceived as a human benefit, since human beings are considered the highest beings, distinguished by reason, spirit, and consciousness; therefore, they are regarded as justified in seeking their own benefit even when it conflicts with the environment's benefit. Many philosophical theories have embraced this idea, and philosophers and religious scholars alike have long held that nature was created for the sake of human beings and is therefore not an end in itself (Dalilah, 2022, p. 264).

3.4. The Deep Ecology Movement: Arne Naess

The major philosophical division that emerged during the 1960s between the anthropocentric industrial pollution wing and the ecocentric wing within the environmental movement prompted the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess to present his brief paper, *"The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements,"* at the Third World Futures Conference held in Bucharest in 1972. The shallow movement, as Naess claimed, was anthropocentric and primarily concerned with "pollution, resource depletion, and the health and affluence of people in developed countries."

The deep ecological movement arose from the experiences of field ecologists and engaged in profound questioning regarding the aims of industrial growth societies and their capacity for sustainability. In his paper, Naess sought to consolidate the intuitions and scientific and philosophical conclusions of the ecocentric environmental revolution, which he argued were shared worldwide. These include the internal interrelatedness of ecological systems; ecological egalitarianism; appreciation of diversity, coexistence, and ecological complexity; and deep

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respect, or even reverence, for wilderness, a nonclassist stance, and local autonomy and decentralisation. As he stated, "The struggle against pollution and resource depletion is included as one aspect of the overall deep ecological perspective" (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 244).

Most governments in the Third World show little concern for deep ecology. When institutions in industrial societies attempt to encourage environmental measures among Third World governments, little is achieved in practice (for example, in addressing desertification). In light of this situation, global action through international nongovernmental organisations becomes increasingly important. Many of these organisations are capable of operating globally, "from grassroots movements to grassroots movements," thereby avoiding negative intervention from governments (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 275).

Conclusion

At the conclusion of this brief philosophical study, it becomes evident that all the fields of environmental philosophy play important roles in analysing and critiquing the reality of the global environmental crisis. Ecological philosophers have attempted to define the concept of the environment and its elements and to identify the causes of environmental problems from their beginnings to the present day. Various philosophical orientations and currents have emerged to interpret the role of human beings within their environment and surroundings and to determine their vital position to establish the rules and systems that achieve ecological balance among different living beings. The Earth's ecological systems as a whole constitute a complex network of interrelated elements in which the sound biological function of each organism depends upon the sound biological function of others.

Everyone must recognise the full magnitude of the environmental crisis. This requires renewed affirmation of the declarations issued by international nature councils and their effective implementation. Humanity has now entered what some ecologists call an era of biological decline. The unavoidable conclusion is the necessity of broad public awareness that the current policies adopted to protect global wilderness and conserve nature are lamentably failing. Previous policies and strategies have been based upon inadequate ecological understanding. In addition to protecting the ozone layer and minimising the greenhouse effect, the most critical ecological task facing humanity in this era is the design and implementation of strategies for protecting nature and its resources, including its plant and animal wealth.

Today, the thinker Aḥmed Shibli may affirm that the need for environmental education has begun to emerge globally. This need was acknowledged at the Stockholm Conference held under the auspices of UNESCO in 1972, whose most significant outcomes and recommendations included the incorporation of environmental programs within the various stages of education. Similarly, the Tbilisi Conference of 1977 recommended confronting environmental problems and promoting environmental advancement through an educational and pedagogical orientation (Ghanaim, 2003, p. 53).

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