

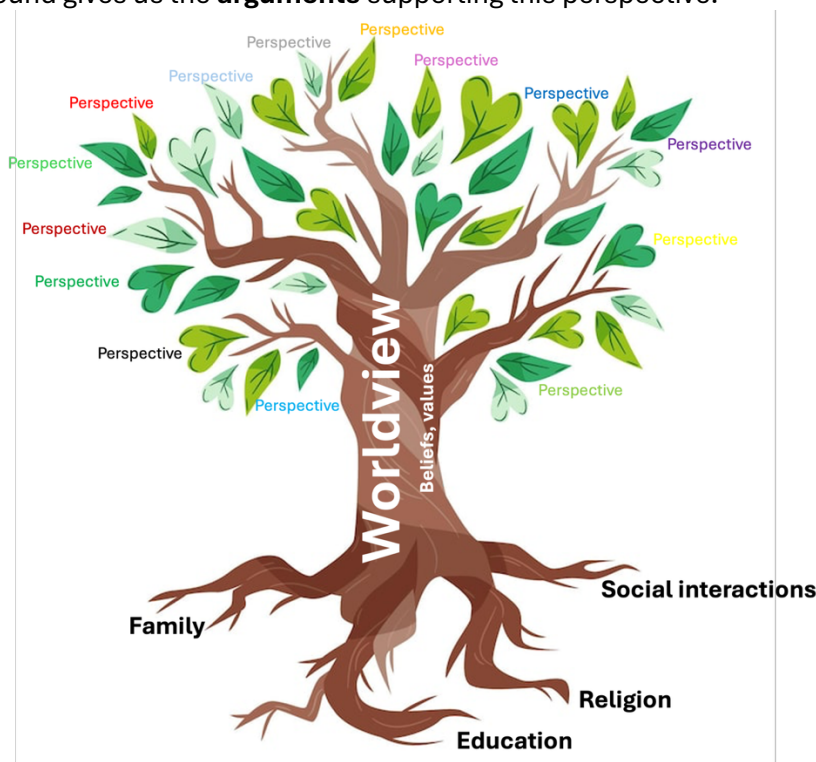
Perspectives

How we perceive our environment

We all grew up in different environments, whether family, social, religious, economic, cultural, educational, political, ... This environment has an influence on who we are, and the qualities or principles that we feel have worth and importance in life: we each have our own set of **beliefs** and **values**.

This set of beliefs and values form our **worldview**. It shapes how we understand our environment and our place in it, and acts as a lens through which we form our **perspective** when facing particular subjects or situations

Our personal background gives us the **arguments** supporting this perspective.



Groups of people can share common worldviews, through which they perceive, make sense of and act within their environment. They structure our societies in different groups.

Ex: Note that the descriptions below should be read with a nuanced approach, as values cannot be summarized in such limited number of words. Individuals also rarely are part of one unique group.

Situation	Humanist worldview	Materialist/pragmatist worldview	Religious/spiritual worldview
Poverty	Poverty is unjust; reduce it through education, healthcare, and social support.	Poverty solved through economic growth, jobs, and market-driven solutions.	Helping the poor is a moral duty; respond with charity and compassion.
Education	Education should nurture critical thinking, empathy, and individuality.	Education is for skills, employability, and economic development.	Education should pass on ethical values, traditions, and higher purpose.
Healthcare	Healthcare is a basic right; it should be accessible to all.	Healthcare should be efficient, cost-effective, and productivity-focused.	Healthcare is an act of compassion; provide care with dignity and morality.
Justice	Justice protects rights and dignity, ensuring fairness and equality.	Justice maintains order and deters crime; laws ensure stability.	Justice aligns with divine or moral law; wrongdoing corrected ethically.

Focus on THE Environment

1. Environmental Value System (EVS)

When focused on the Environment, a worldview is called an Environmental Value System (EVS).

It is a model that shows the inputs affecting our perspectives on Environment, and the outputs resulting from our perspectives.

Note: The environment in general, or any organism can have its own intrinsic value, regardless of its value to humans. How this value is measured is a key to understanding the value we place in our environment.

Ex: The words used until recently in occidental societies showed a confrontation between humans and their environment: “fighting for survival”, “battle against nature”, man or beast”, conquering the Everest”, beating the elements”, ...

Earth’s resources were considered as unlimited and were there to be conquered.

Only recently does this approach become less popular, as it has become clear to our societies that having a finite Earth means that resources cannot be infinite.

Three major EVSs can be described:

- **Ecocentrism:** A nature-centered worldview that sees humans as part of ecosystems, not above them: *“Nature has intrinsic value, and environmental protection should be prioritized even if it limits human activity”*
Ecocentrists support conservation, self-sufficiency, and minimizing human impact.
- **Anthropocentrism:** A human-centered worldview that believes humans are responsible for managing the environment.
“Nature is valued because of its usefulness to people”
Anthropocentrists support sustainable management, policies, education, and regulations that allow humans to use resources responsibly.
- **Technocentrism:** A technology-centered worldview that believes human ingenuity and innovation can solve environmental problems.
“Technology and scientific research provide solutions, and resources exist to be used for human progress”
Technocentrists support large-scale development, engineering solutions, and technological fixes for environmental challenges.

Note: A whole range of different nuances exist, from deep ecocentrism and cornucopianism.



And of course, one might shift from one group to another depending on the situation faced.

2. The environmental movement

Colonial expansion of European countries, driven by the industrial revolution and the need of resources such as timber, minerals and agricultural product to fuel their economies in the 18th and 19th centuries lead to intensive exploitation across Africa, Asia and the Americas.

Ex: Deforestation in India under British rule, overextraction of rubber in Congo, soil degradation in colonial plantations around the World.

Note: Some actions were taken locally, such as the India Forest Act, in 1865, or the creation of National Parks, the first being Yellowstone in 1872

It was only when the negative impacts of industrial growth became visible in the Western countries that awareness rose, and action was taken.

Ex:

- *In December 1952, a severe smog covered London for five days (5–9 December), caused by cold weather trapping air pollutants from coal burning. Smoke, soot, and sulfur dioxide built up into a thick yellow-brown fog that reduced visibility to a few meters. The smog disrupted transport, closed schools, and entered homes, hospitals, and workplaces. It is estimated to have caused the premature deaths of about 4,000 people at the time (later studies suggest up to 12,000), mostly from respiratory and cardiovascular problems, and tens of thousands more suffered*

illness. The disaster exposed the dangers of industrial air pollution and led to major environmental legislation, most notably the UK Clean Air Act of 1956, which restricted coal burning in urban areas.

- In January 1969, a Union Oil drilling platform off the coast of Santa Barbara, California suffered a blowout, releasing an estimated 80,000–100,000 barrels of crude oil into the Pacific Ocean. The spill created an oil slick covering about 800 square miles, coating beaches and killing thousands of seabirds, fish, and marine mammals. Images of oil-soaked wildlife shocked the public and sparked widespread outrage. The disaster became a turning point in US environmental awareness, directly inspiring the creation of the National Environmental Policy Act (1969), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 1970), and the first Earth Day (1970).
- Rachel Carson (1907–1964) was an American marine biologist and writer whose book *Silent Spring* (1962) is often credited with launching the modern environmental movement. In the book, she exposed the harmful effects of pesticides, especially DDT, on ecosystems, wildlife, and human health. Her clear, accessible writing raised public awareness and challenged the unchecked use of chemicals promoted by industry. Despite heavy criticism from chemical companies, Carson's work influenced public opinion and policy, leading to increased regulation of pesticides and the eventual ban of DDT in the US in 1972. She showed that science could be used to defend the environment and inspired generations of environmental activists and policymakers.

These local actions led to a global awareness, through a multiplication of conferences and reports about climate change and global warming.

1972	UN Stockholm Conference	First UN environment summit
1987	Brundtland Report	Introduced sustainable development concept
1988	Creation of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)	UN scientific body to assess climate change
1990	IPCC 1 st assessment report	Highlighted climate change as a serious issue
1992	Rio Earth Summit	Established United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
1995	Conference Of the Parties 1 (Berlin)	Mandate for Kyoto Protocol negotiations
1995	IPCC 2 nd assessment report	Provided evidence of "human influence" on climate
1997	COP3 (Kyoto Protocol)	Binding emission reduction targets
2001	IPCC 3 rd assessment report	Stronger evidence of human role in global warming
2007	IPCC 4 th assessment report	Unequivocal human role in global warming
2009	COP15 (Copenhagen)	Raised awareness, but no binding deal
2013-2014	IPCC 5 th assessment report	Reinforced urgency
2015	COP21 (Paris agreement)	Limit warming below 2°C (aim 1.5°C)
2018	IPCC special report	Showed drastic differences between 1.5°C and 2°C Boosted youth activism
2018	Fridays for Future	Youth-led global climate strikes
2021	COP26 (Glasgow)	Coal phase-down, net-zero pledges
2022	IPCC 6 th assessment report	Warned of narrowing window for action
2023	COP28 (Dubai)	Fossil fuel phase-down talks

Note: Most of the decisions taken during these conferences are non-binding, meaning they do not create any obligation of result.

The few binding decisions taken concern only the states which ratified these treaties.

To finish on a positive note, some conferences lead to decisions that had a global impact, showing that common action can lead to positive results:

- The Montreal Protocol of 1987 led to a global ban of substances that deplete the ozone layer (e.g. CFCs). By 2019, 99% of those chemicals were phased out, and the ozone layer is now recovering. A return to pre-1980 levels can be expected within 30 years.
- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) has been signed in 1975. Its goal was to regulate international wildlife trade. It succeeded in banning trade in ivory, rhino horn, sea turtles, ... thus helping stabilize populations of some endangered species.