The discussion of ethics here is much longer than the above discussion of science. This is because we assume that you are already well prepared as a science educator to discuss key points of science with your students. In the case of ethics, however, we will not assume that you are experts in this field, though you may well be. Consequently, we offer here some basic ideas and aids to help you bring a serious discussion of environmental ethics into your course.

In the HE Introduction you will find the following definitions of ethics and environmental ethics:

- **Ethics**: the study and practice of human actions that contribute to the well-being of humans, societies, and the natural world.

- **Environmental Ethics**: the study and practice of human actions that impact the environment and contribute to the well-being of humans, societies, and the natural world.

You will note that the focus in both of these definitions is *well-being*—the well-being of the human person, society, and the natural world. This is the traditional ethical focus of Roman Catholic social teaching (RCST). RCST is grounded in the scriptures and traditions of the Christian community dating as far back as the second century. It also has roots in Aristotle’s ethic of *eudaemonia*, or human flourishing (*eu*-good; *daimôn*-spirit). Many Christians, non-Christians, and non-religious people have found this focus on well-being to be a helpful approach in their moral lives.
It was not until well into the 20th century that many people began to recognize that our use of Earth's resources was exceeding the ability of the natural world to sustain itself. Similarly, only late in the 20th century did the well-being of nature become a topic in Roman Catholic social teaching.

To prepare for a fuller discussion of the HE environmental ethic, you may want to discuss with your students the meaning of ‘well-being’. Ask your students how they would characterize personal well-being, well-being for society, and well-being of the natural world?

What, specifically, does HE mean by ‘well-being’? HE follows a ‘realist’ approach (like Aristotle, Roman Catholic social thought, and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment) that links person, social, and ecological ‘well-being’ to attainment of certain objective goods. There is no hard and fast list of such goods, but certainly included would be basic goods for human physical survival (e.g. air, food, water, shelter, medical care, security) and personal growth (e.g. positive human relationships, occupation, social participation, enjoyment of the natural world). Included too would be basic goods for environmental sustainability (e.g. species diversity, abundant natural resources, human use of renewable energy sources, clean water, organic food production, and mitigation of global climate change). Finally, certain basic goods would be included for human society, such as structures and processes of political, economic, cultural, and familial life that make it possible for human beings and the natural world to thrive together.

Published by the Vatican in 2004, The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church is a comprehensive presentation of Roman Catholic social teaching and its key documents.
Students and ‘Ethics’
Your students may not be familiar with ‘ethics’, or they may consider ethics (or, morality) merely a matter of opinion, or as a set of standards that adults impose upon on them. If it is the latter, you may want to begin discussing your students’ viewpoints on ethics and get their ideas ‘on the board’ for future reference.

On the one hand, discussing ethics with students is easy because it is part of their everyday lives. For instance, students are always concerned about their families and friends. They typically value these relationships and honor that value in ways they may not think about, as in their sense of rules (the ‘rules’ that should be followed in a friendship or within their families; how and when rules are ‘broken’; how to respond to broken rules), relationships (what can be expected in relationships; who should I be in relationship with; what goals are reasonable to strive for), and behaviors (what behaviors, or ‘virtues’ are appropriate between friends and family; what behaviors should be avoided).
The classroom itself offers a viable place to begin exploring these issues with your students. Discuss with your students how their expectations of you, their peers, and themselves express an ethic of rules, relationships, and behaviors based on what they consider to be appropriate.

On the other hand, ethics is difficult. Life invariably presents us with complex situations and hard decisions. These situations are often both emotionally and intellectually challenging because

- Difficult situations usually force us to consider things that we do not routinely think about, such as what we truly believe or truly value. Therefore, it is not always easy to get to the bottom of our moral lives; we must first recognize and name the principles, goals, and virtues that guide us.

- Although we admire people who are consistent in their moral lives (e.g. they are trustworthy, honest, reliable), it is not easy—even if you know your moral values well—to behave consistently; life draws us in many directions.

- Moral choices are rarely a matter of deciding between things that are clearly ‘good’ and clearly ‘bad’; most of our choices are between things that are a mix of good and bad; and not everyone knows how to sort things out and arrive at good decisions.

Those of us teaching in Jesuit institutions should agree: no matter what our field of expertise, we have a responsibility to invite our students to explore these difficult areas of life and be willing to offer them our knowledge and guidance. *Cura Personalis*, care for the entire person, is more than a phrase, it is an action we are called to perform.

*Laudato Si’* 210: “Environmental education . . . needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care.”

In this task, the authors of *HE* find inspiration in the words of Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., Father General of the Society of Jesus. In 2010, Fr. Nicolás spoke in Mexico City to representatives of over 200 Jesuit institutions of higher education around the world. His topic was “Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today”. His first and strongest point was this:

*Jesuit education must “promote depth of thought and imagination”. In a world marked by an ever-growing “globalization of superficiality”, where too many people link their self-identity to consumerism and their self-worth to numbers of electronic ‘friends’, Jesuit education must form the “whole person” in the “work of serious, critical thinking” and “creative imagination”.*

*Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, S.J.*
When it comes to ethics, depth of thought means going beneath our “shallow, self-absorbed perceptions of reality” and reaching down into our fundamental moral beliefs. We must ask ourselves and our students questions such as: What are my fundamental values? Do I value human beings, or only some human beings? Do I value the community I live in and participate in it, or do I leave care of the community to others? Do I value the natural world, or am I indifferent to it and simply take from it?

We discuss this at length here because

- Students may not be aware of how important ethics is in their lives.
- Students may not realize the importance of ‘going deep’ into their own moral beliefs.
- Earth’s environmental challenges will neither be reduced nor solved unless people think deeply and ethically.

*Laudato Si’* 215: “If we want to bring about deep change, we need to realize that certain mindsets really do influence our behavior. Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature.”

In the spirit of Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, HE’s discussion of environmental ethics begins with identifying the ‘deep down’ foundations of the ethic used throughout the textbook. We then move to a specification of ethical norms that help guide environmental decision-making. The ethical foundations and norms given here are consistent with those given in the tradition of Roman Catholic social teaching.

The following section discusses each element of HE’s environmental ethic. It is important to recall that in your presentation of environmental ethics in each HE chapter, you may wish to focus on just one or two concepts, rather than trying to cover all elements of HE’s environmental ethic. As noted earlier, feel free to teach for depth, not for coverage.

The Foundations of HE’s Environmental Ethic

HE’s environmental ethic is built on three ethical foundations:

- The natural world has *intrinsic value.*

  *Laudato Si’* 33, 69: "... we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes."

- The natural world also has *instrumental value.*

  *Laudato Si’* 84: "... each creature has its own purpose . . . "


While we utilize the instrumental value of the natural world, we must continue to respect the intrinsic value of nature; we do this by honoring the value of environmental sustainability.

*Laudato Si’* 140: “...when we speak of ‘sustainable use’ consideration must always be given to each ecosystem’s regenerative ability in its different areas and aspects.”

At this point, it is usually beneficial to discuss with your students the ideas of intrinsic value, instrumental value, and the value of environmental sustainability. Here are some resources that can be helpful:

- The Khan Academy has a clear video presentation on the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value, check it out here. ([https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/wi-phi/critical-thinking/v/intrinsic-extrinsic-value](https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/wi-phi/critical-thinking/v/intrinsic-extrinsic-value))


**Ethical foundations are like a ship’s ballast.** Ethical foundations provide life with moral stability so that shallow opinions and rhetorical arguments do not easily turn us upside down. But the ballast does not make the ship move. That requires energy and moving parts. The day-to-day decisions—whether big or small, conscious or habitual—that move our moral lives require the energy of ethical norms. These are the principles, goals, and virtues that operate our moral lives.

**The Norms of HE’s Environmental Ethic**

*HE’s* environmental ethic gets its energy from three sets of moral norms that are expressed in
- **Moral principles** (the *rules* we ought to follow).
- **Moral goals** (the *aims* that are worthy to achieve).
- **Moral virtues** (the *character* we want to possess).

**Moral Principles**

*HE presents six moral principles to consider when making decisions that impact the environment.* Depending on your course structure, you may want to introduce these moral principles one at a time over several weeks; or, you may want to limit your presentation to just two or three principles. Perhaps it could be helpful to have your students write a short report on one of the moral principles. There is a great deal of material on the internet and in the library treating each of these principles. It may help students to understand a moral principle more fully if they are encouraged to relate the principle to a current environmental problem.

**Moral Principle 1: Care for Creation**

Care for creation, sometimes referred to as *stewardship*, is the moral principle that calls us to care for the Earth in a way that preserves and protects the integrity of the natural world while making its fruits available for the legitimate needs of human beings. Keep in mind:

- *Care for creation* combines the three ethical foundations (described above) into one principle.
- *Care for creation* highlights our moral obligation to preserve and protect the *gift* of the Earth that has been given to us by God.
- The Catholic Rural Life Conference has a clear discussion of the principle of care and stewardship for creation [here](https://catholicrurallife.org/category/stewardship/).

*Laudato Si’* 70, 116: “... our ‘dominion’ over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship.”

**Moral Principle 2: Human Dignity and Rights**

Human dignity is the moral quality of an individual human being rooted in his or her God-given, intrinsically valuable body, mind, and soul. Human rights are moral powers human beings have by virtue of their dignity. By having rights, a person or group is both morally *immune from* unjust harms (e.g. the right not to have my bodily integrity abused, the right not to have my expression of ideas suppressed, the right not to have my practice of religion forbidden) and
morally entitled to the basic goods necessary for life (e.g. my right to food, my right to shelter, my right to health care). Keep in mind:

- **Human dignity and rights** highlights the moral standing of the human being in light of being created in the image and likeness of God.


  **Laudato Si’ 43:** "Human beings too are creatures of this world . . . and endowed with unique dignity."

### Moral Principle 3: Common Good

The **common good** is the sum total of those conditions of the natural world and of humanity’s physical, social, and spiritual life that allows groups of people and their individual members relatively free and equal ability to achieve a fulfilled life.

The common good is a longstanding and vital moral principle in Roman Catholic social thought. It communicates what the American and British political traditions have meant by the commonweal, or the common welfare. Today, that welfare includes not only human life, but also all life on Earth and all the natural processes that make life possible.


  **Laudato Si’ 156:** “Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good . . .”

### Moral Principle 4: Universal Destination of Goods

The **universal destination of goods** is a moral principle that requires the basic goods necessary for human life be made available to all human beings. This is what is meant by saying that basic goods have a ‘universal destination’. According to this moral principle, basic goods such as water, food, air, land, shelter, and clothing should not be withheld from human beings who are in absolute need. Keep in mind:

- You may want to spend some time on this principle with your students, as it may run counter to their assumption that water, food, land, shelter, and clothing are the absolute property of the person who owns them.
You may wish to explore with your students situations such as natural disasters where the legitimate, immediate needs of people take precedence over private property and the universal destination of goods is honored. Your students may find this video helpful in discussing this idea. (http://www.pjstar.com/article/ZZ/20141027/News/141029953)

Further explanation of the universal destination of goods is given in the Roman Catholic Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, beginning here. (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#Origin and meaning)

Laudato Si’ 89, 93: "The principle of the subordination of private property to the universal destination of goods, and thus the right of everyone to their use, is a golden rule of social conduct and ‘the first principle of the whole ethical and social order’. The Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute or inviolable, and has stressed the social purpose of all forms of private property."

Moral Principle 5: Preferential Option for the Poor
The moral principle of the preferential option for the poor requires that people in absolute need of the basic goods of life (e.g. water, food, air, land, shelter, and clothing) be given priority in caregiving. It may be helpful to spend some time on this principle with your students, as it likely contradicts their assumptions about what it means to treat people ‘equality’.

A metaphor that you can use to help students understand the preferential option for the poor is the practice of medical triage. Triage is performed in emergency situations and consists of prioritizing people based on their need for immediate medical treatment.

Further explanation of the preferential option for the poor is given in the Roman Catholic Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, beginning here.

Laudato Si’ 196: “The mindset which leaves no room for sincere concern for the environment is the same mindset which lacks concern for the inclusion of the most vulnerable members of society.”

Moral Principle 6: Subsidiarity
The moral principle of subsidiarity requires that community problems be resolved at the appropriate level. This means that proposed solutions to a community problem should be neither overly-localized if the problem requires regional, state, or international assistance, nor overly-globalized if the problem can be handled at the state, regional, or community level.

The principle is meant to safeguard both a local community’s freedom to solve its own social problems (if possible) without undue interference from larger regional, state, or international authorities, and the global community’s right to solve its social problems (if possible) without
undue interference from state, regional, or community authorities. The following may be helpful for explaining *subsidiarity*:

- Debates about what governmental level is appropriate for creating and policing carbon emission controls is a question of *subsidiarity*.

- You may want to discuss whether your students support the idea of an international organization like the United Nations. A good debate on this topic can be accessed here. (https://www.debate.org/opinions/value-of-the-united-nations-does-the-united-nations-have-good-value-in-the-world-yes-or-is-it-irrelevant-and-worthless-no)


  *Laudato Si’* 157, 196: “Let us keep in mind the principle of subsidiarity, which grants freedom to develop the capabilities present at every level of society, while also demanding a greater sense of responsibility for the common good from those who wield greater power.”

**Moral Goals**

*Moral principles guide our actions toward the accomplishment of goals. But the goals we strive for must also be moral.* Perhaps you have heard this common phrase: “the end does not justify the means”. This phrase explains that even when a goal is morally good, doing evil actions to achieve this goal is not acceptable. One could also say, “the means do not justify the end”, meaning that good actions do not justify a bad goal. Along with good principles, we need good goals.

  *Laudato Si’* 109: “We fail to see the deepest roots of our present failures, which have to do with the direction, goals, meaning, and social implications of technological and economic growth.”

*HE’s* environmental ethic offers seven moral goals, six specific to each chapter and one overall moral goal. These moral goals are:
Moral Goal 1: *Protect and preserve biological diversity*

Moral Goal 2: *Respect and wisely manage natural resources.*

Moral Goal 3: *Support sustainable and renewable energy sources for all people*

Moral Goal 4: *Conserve and protect water and its availability to all people and forms of life*

Moral Goal 5: *Make healthy food and a sustainable food system available to all people*

Moral Goal 6: *Reduce human-induced global climate change*

Moral Goal 7: *Encourage authentic, integral development*

You may find it best to wait until you have worked through a topic chapter with your students before discussing the pros and cons of these moral goals. As to the overall moral goal, when international institutions and agencies refer to ‘development’, they ordinarily mean social development of the population within a ‘nation-state’. Nation-states commonly use measures, such as Gross National Product (GNP), which defines ‘development’ according to the monetary value of all the goods and services a country’s labor and property produces in one year. However, if you return to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment graph of ‘Ecosystem Services and Constituents of Well-Being’, it is clear that the enhancement of many of these elements cannot be measured in monetary terms.

To correct for this, some people have proposed a Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI). This indicator is

For a description of the GPI, go here. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genuine_progress_indicator)
designed to take a fuller account of what needs to be included in ‘development’, especially the personal and environmental well-being factors that are overlooked by the GNP measurement.

Further explanation of authentic, integral development in Roman Catholic social teaching is given here.

**Moral Virtues**

Moral virtues are personal attitudes and behaviors that contribute to the well-being of humans, societies, and the natural world. A virtuous person strives for moral goals using moral principles as a compass. Our personal ‘character’ is a reflection of our habituated attitudes and behaviors. Part of the condition of being human is not only that we can always enrich our characters, but that--deep down--we want to.

The people in our lives that we identify as our ‘heroes’ and ‘role models’ say much about our character. Ask your students to consider

- Who they identify as their heroes--and why.
- Do you know an environmental hero? What attitudes and behaviors would characterize an environmental hero?
- Some well-known environmental heroes, many of whom appear in HE’s ‘Inspired People’ boxes.
- If there are environmental role models they know of in their own families or among their friends.

Discussion of virtues is an important part of ethics, especially for young people. They are the future leaders of the community and the future caretakers of the Earth. For true leadership, virtues are essential.

*Laudato Si’ 211: “Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment.”*

The HE environmental ethic focuses on six virtues throughout the textbook chapters.
**Moral Virtue 1: Gratitude** for the existence, beauty, and resources of the natural world.

Gratitude for nature comes from a person’s experience of awe at the diversity, intricacy, and beauty of the natural world. Gratitude is the virtue that makes it possible for a person to truly integrate environmental science, ethics, spirituality, and action. This is why HE emphasizes how important it is for students to have guided sensory experience activities in nature.

**Moral Virtue 2: Courage** to live sustainably and advocate for the good of the natural world.

As students increase their knowledge of today’s environmental challenges, they can become paralyzed by the feeling of powerlessness. Therefore, we must be examples of people who are ‘in-couraged’ to face adversity with an attitude of hope and a willingness to be a positive force for the Earth.

**Moral Virtue 3: Justice** in preserving, restoring, and distributing the goods of the natural world.

From the perspective of an environmental ethic, the traditional definition of justice should be expanded to read “giving to each person and each creature their due”, meaning giving to all what is needed to live a full life.

**Moral Virtue 4: Prudence** in decisions that affect the health of the natural world.

Prudence is the ability to resolve difficult situations by making wise trade-offs for the ‘best good’ possible in the present situation, while also being mindful of the needs, opportunities and rights of future generations.

**Moral Virtue 5: Temperance** in consuming the goods of the natural world.

In many parts of the world, mass product marketing encourages people to pursue lifestyles that measure ‘success’ by ever-escalating consumerism. Temperance is the virtue of self-control and right-minded humility, guiding a person in an environmentally sustainable lifestyle.

**Moral Virtue 6: Loving Generosity** in reaching out to the needs of persons, society, and the natural world with a joyful, hopeful spirit of solidarity and sharing.

Many people today refer to the practice of generous love in society as the virtue of ‘solidarity’; Pope John Paul II defined solidarity as “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself
to the common good”, an affirmation of the bonds with our brothers and sisters, and all the creatures of the Earth.

Concluding Remarks on Ethics
This section has been a short overview of the environmental ethic at the core of HE. It is offered to give you a sense of the underlying ethical theory of HE. It is not offered as a hard and fast model of how best to present ethics in your course. Rather, we recommend that you take elements from the HE environmental ethic that you find useful and manageable for your teaching. Hopefully, knowing the basis of these elements will help you use them.

Specific techniques for using HE’s environmental ethic are given in the guides for each chapter. As stated above, these techniques may include focused discussion of one or more moral principle, goal, or virtue as they bear on your class topic; a mini-debate organized around an environmental topic that presents multiple, conflicting ‘goods’; a case study that focuses on ethical analysis. Here are some final thoughts to keep in mind:

• As you know, organizing good student discussions and debates takes time and preparation. There are many websites that offer helpful suggestions, such as this one from the Newfoundland and Labrador Speech and Debate Union.

• Discussing and debating ethical issues is a great opportunity for students to develop their public speaking and listening skills. It is important that we help our students learn how to ‘argue’ in a respectful and inclusive way. There are many sources with helpful material on listening and public speaking skills, such as this website from Common Sense Education.

• Helping students work through an ethics case study also takes time and preparation. An excellent resource for setting up a case study project is offered by the Markkula Center of Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University. You will find their helpful guide here. (http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision/framework.html)

At the conclusion of an environmental science course that has drawn on HE’s environmental ethic, our hope is that students will understand that

• Paying attention to environmental ethics is an essential part of being an integral ecologist.

• ‘Going deep’ into the moral values that shape our behavior is an essential part of our personal growth as integral ecologists.

• Ethics is a field of study that gives us a vocabulary for leadership. Moving our implicit passions to explicit principles, goals, and virtues makes an integrated environmental science more understandable and communicable.
Knowledge of ethics gives us tools for good environmental decision-making.

This section explained how ethics enables us to identify our moral values, goals, and virtues so that we can use these values when making choices about what is urgently needed for the Earth and human life. However, ethics alone does not explain why we care about moral values. The care and devotion underlying our ethics is the energy of our inner spirit, or spirituality—the movements of our heart that are the awe and respect we feel for the natural world and humanity. The next section addresses spirituality in more detail.

*Laudato Si’ 210*: “Environmental education should facilitate making the leap towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning.”

**Select Background Resources for This Section**


Center of Concern, *Catholic Social Teaching Resources*. [https://educationforjustice.org/catholic-social-teaching-resources](https://educationforjustice.org/catholic-social-teaching-resources)


