

Why do humans treat their environment in the way that they do?

It's all the fault of Descartes!

Descartes (1596-1650) is regarded as the “father” of modern philosophy. He is also regarded by many philosophers as the philosopher who created a way of looking at the environment that encourages its maltreatment.

Descartes regarded mind and matter as two separate substances. This belief is known as *Cartesian Dualism*. Humans are made up of mind **and** matter (our bodies), whereas the rest of nature (including animals) is simply matter.

Because only humans have minds, they are viewed as somehow superior to all other aspects of nature. Nature is, therefore, *only* matter.

Some environmental philosophers argue that to view nature as only matter encourages an exploitative attitude towards it. Nature is not intrinsically valuable. It is mere stuff to be manipulated by humans. We do not need to respect nature in any special way because it is only valueless matter.

Because the environment has no special value, we can use it as a resource in any way we choose. We can take what we like from it and we can pollute it. Human interests come first because humans are more valuable than any other aspect of nature.

This human-centred view of the world is known as **anthropocentrism**.

If the environmental problems that we face today are to be addressed then it is argued that we must radically change the Cartesian anthropocentric worldview and replace it with a more environmentally friendly one.