The Praxis of Robin Attfield's Conservation Theory

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Abstract

Current interest in environmental conservation is a child of necessity – to avoid an impending doom occasioned by mankind's wanton exploitation of nature's resources. Following a seeming loss of trust in anthropocentrism, various theories have emerged that to offer a new way of viewing and interacting with nature. Robin Attfield's conservation theory rejects holistic approaches (like deep ecology) and presents biocentric individualism, a hierarchical view of intrinsic value, and a consequentialist ethical framework for ensuring sustainability, and biodiversity, whiles preserving the interests of future generations. This aim of this paper is to expose the practicability of Robin Attfield's notion of environmental conservation. Data were sourced from both primary (i.e. Attfield's written works) and secondary sources; including books, journal articles, seminar papers, encyclopaedias, and the Internet. The analytic, hermeneutic, and pragmatic methods were then employed to examine the collated data. The study found that Attfield's conservation principles are applicable in many ways, including biodiversity preservation, resource sustainability, socio-economic development, ethical and aesthetic value systems,

curbing of environmental crises, and fostering of global collaboration and policy. Despite some shortcomings, the study concludes that Attfield's conservation theory possesses actionable points that can contribute to mitigating current environmental crises, promoting conservation, and protecting existing resources.

Keywords: Robin Attfield, Environmental Ethics, Conservation, Anthropocentrism, Non-anthropocentrism

Introduction

In the modern era, humankind has pushed the world to the brink of extinction, through an intensified, and often excessive, exploitation of natural resources. This period has witnessed a growing awareness of global environmental issues, such as climate change, overpopulation, pollution, species extinction, and the loss of biodiversity. This era marked the rise of environmentalism; and as experts in other fields tackled the matter from their various perspectives, philosophical interest in the environment also became more pronounced. Thus, philosophical discussions were expanded to include questions of environmental justice, responsibility towards the natural world, animal rights, the rights of future generations; and of course, conservation.

Robin Attfield's environmental conservation has its origin in the emergence of modern environmentalism. His notion of environmental conservation is deeply rooted in the philosophical underpinnings of ethics and moral theory. He draws on various ethical frameworks (including consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics) to address questions related to the moral value of the environment, the rights of non-human life forms, and the responsibilities of human beings towards nature.

One of Attfield's key contributions to the field of environmental conservation is his view on the intrinsic value of nature. He argues that nature has inherent worth and is not merely valuable for its instrumental uses to humans. Yet his is a hierarchical (or individualistic) approach rather than a holistic claim. This perspective challenges anthropocentric views that prioritize human interests. His approach presses for the remediation of the environment in areas (like climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion) through sustainable policies and practices. Further, Attfield has contributed to discussions surrounding intergenerational justice in the context of environmental conservation. He argues that the current generations have a moral obligation to preserve the environment for the wellbeing and flourishing of future generations. Expectedly, Attfield's conservation thought has been through a lot of criticism. Incidentally, most of his critics have emphasized theoretical issues (such as his attempt to blend biocentrism and ecocentrism) and ignored or simply glossed over the issue of its practical applicability. This research is focused on the issue of practical applicability. Specifically, it evaluates the tenability of Attfield's conservation theory in everyday situations. The paper is divided into five parts. The first contains the introduction; the second contains Attfield's conservation theory; and the third evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of his conservation teaching. The fourth part of the paper exposes various areas in which this theory is applicable; and finally, the fifth part contains the conclusion.

Attfield's Conservation Theory

Robin Attfield is a British philosopher who was born on 30th October, 1940. He studied philosophy, classics, and ancient history at Christ Church, before going on to studytheology at

Regent's Park College, Oxford. He completed his PhD at the University of Wales in 1972. Ethics, History of Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion and Environmental Philosophy are his main areas of interest.[1]

Attfield arrived at his theory of environmental conservation after carefully considering the shortcomings in existing positions on the issues. These include Anthropocentrism, Biocentrism, and Deep Ecology.Attfield rejects the anthropocentrism byarguing that such a perspective often leads to exploitation and degradation of the environment when human interests conflict with conservation goals.[2] Also, he maintains, anthropocentrism undermines the wellbeing of future generations because of its tendency to prioritize short-term human benefits over long-term environmental sustainability.[3]

Turning to Biocentrism, Attfield advances several reasons for its rejection. These include, that biocentrism has failed to distinguish between moral significance and moral standing, thereby opening the door to arbitrariness and inconsistency. He maintains that biocentrism has no sufficiently justified its conferment of moral standing to non-human life forms —except for the fact that they are alive. He also believes that biocentrism is too narrow in scope as it sticks to only sentient beings and ignores the rest of the

1. "Robin Attfield," Cardiff University, 2023, n.p, https://profiles.cardiff.ac.uk/emeritus/robin-attfield.
2. Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 268.
3. Jonathan H. Adler, "Conservative Principles for Environmental Reform," *Duke Environmental Law and Policy Forum*, 2013, 259; Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, Second (New York: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 136.

ecosystem.[4]

Regarding deep ecology, Attfield begins by acknowledging the importance of recognizing the intrinsic value of nature; thus, agreeing with deep ecology's rejection of anthropocentrism. However, he has concerns over deep ecology's complete rejection of anthropocentrism (as it is also the case with biocentrism). Instead, he favours a framework that would strike a balance between human interests and the rest of the ecosystem.[5] He thinks such a blanket rejection of anthropocentrism is impractical. He also decries the ambiguities that are inherent in the deep ecology platform; especially as it tries to synthesise a diverse range of perspectives; suggesting that the movement might benefit from a more clearly defined principles to guide its ethical goals.[6]

By way of summary, while recognizing the importance of human interests and responsibilities, Attfield challenges the anthropocentric view that prioritizes human needs at the expense of environmental justice, sustainability, and conservation for future generations. Similarly, he is sympathetic to biocentric principles that acknowledge and promote the intrinsic value in nature; but he calls for a pragmatic approach that would address practical conservation challenges and ethical complexities. And finally, while acknowledging the recognition of intrinsic worth in deep ecology, he queries its inherent ambiguity or vagueness; and

4. Robin Attfield, "Biocentrism, Moral Standing and Moral Significance," *Philosophica* 39, no. 1 (1987): 48–57.
5. Holmes III Rolston, "Value in Nature and Nature of Value," in *Philosophy and the Natural Environmental*, ed. Robin Attfield and Andrew Belsey (Cardiff: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 13–30.
6. Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, Second (New York: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 117–37.

the consequent inability to outline definite actionable principles that addresses specific conservation concerns. Thus, Attfield's critical examination of anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and deep ecology provides valuable insights into the nature of his proposal for environmental conservation. To this, we may now turn our attention.

Attfield's Principles of Environmental Conservation

Robin Attfield's environmental philosophy calls for the protection of the environment. His philosophy is rooted in the intrinsic value of nature, the principles of sustainability, stewardship and the interconnectedness of ecosystems. The following subsections contain the details of his principles of conservation.

Recognition of Intrinsic Value of Nature: Attfield's theory is non-anthropocentric, emphasizing the intrinsic value of all living and non-living beings. In *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, Attfield argues that every living organism has inherent value and deserves moral consideration. This intrinsic value is not based on the utility of the organism to humans but on its good or welfare.[7] This ethical stance demands a fundamental respect for all forms of life and their habitats, fostering a conservation ethic that values biodiversity and the integrity of ecosystems.

Sustainability: This is a cornerstone of Attfield's conservation ethic. He advocates for policies, practices, and strategies that ensure the long-term health and viability of natural systems. His call for sustainability is meant to address the need to balance human development with environmental preservation. Most

7. Attfield, The Ethics of Environmental Concern, 169.

ecologists and conservation biologists believe the best way to preserve biodiversity is to create a worldwide network of protected areas, but powerful economic and political interests stand in the way. To Attfield, sustainability entails using resources at a rate that does not deplete them, maintaining ecological balance, and protecting the interests of future generations.[8] This approach aligns with contemporary global efforts to combat climate change, reduce environmental degradation, and promote renewable energy sources. Particularly, he emphasizes the need for policies and practices that would not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs.[9]

Stewardship: While acknowledging human interests and needs, Attfield emphasizes human ethical responsibility, in the manner of stewards, towards the environment. He argues that humans have a moral duty to care for and protect nature. This duty is not merely to guarantee that nature benefits humans, but also out of respect for the intrinsic value of non-human life; as well as the integrity of ecosystems.[10] For him, stewardship goes beyond passive conservation; it includes active efforts to restore and manage natural resources in a responsible manner.[11] Thus, his view of stewardship integrates ethical responsibility with practical action and demands for conservation strategies that are proactive and restorative.

Interconnectedness: Attfield's approach to environmental

8. Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of the Global Environment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2015), 34.
9. Attfield, The Ethics of Environmental Concern, 137.
10. Attfield, The Ethics of Environmental Concern, 138.
11. Attfield, The Ethics of Environmental Concern, 138.

conservation recognizes the interconnectedness of all living beings with their ecosystems. He emphasizes that the wellbeing of any single species or habitat is intrinsically linked to the health of the entire ecological network. In his *Creation, Evolution and Meaning*, Attfield explains how evolutionary processes have shaped the natural world and argues for a clear understanding of ecosystems. He suggests that conservation strategies should be informed by an understanding of these interrelationships, so as to promote ecosystems' health and resilience.[12] Attfield's emphasis on interconnectedness encourages comprehensive conservation strategies that consider the broader ecological consequences of human activities. This view fosters an understanding of the environment as a complex web of relationships, where human actions can have far-reaching impacts; and is crucial for developing policies and practices that foster sustainability and conservation.

Moral Consideration for All Beings (Respect for Nature): In his work, *Environmental Ethics: An Overview for the Twenty-First Century,* Attfield elaborates his principle of respect for nature, arguing that it should guide our interactions with the environment. This is a call for the preservation of natural entities and processes. The principle implies a duty to protect and preserve the natural world for its own sake. More so, Attfield has extended moral consideration to all sentient beings, advocating for the welfare and protection of animals and other life forms that can experience suffering. This inclusive approach aligns with broader ethical theories that seek to minimize harm and promote the wellbeing of

12. Robin Attfield, Creation, Evolution and Meaning (United Kingdom: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), 69.

all creatures.[13] Furthermore, Attfield's conservation ethic is a call for humane and ethical conservation practices that respect the intrinsic value and rights of all living beings; and also entire ecosystems, species, and individual organisms.[14] However, we must not mistake his doctrine of moral considerability for all beings as a version of biocentric egalitarianism, like the sort espoused by Paul Taylor. Rather, Attfield proposes biocentric inegalitarianism; by which he holds that moral worth should not be conferred indiscriminately. He favours creatures with higher faculties and ampler interests over those with limited faculties and interests. Where the interests of the higher beings contradicts that of the lesser, he feels that those of the higher should override.[15]

Conservation of Biodiversity: In recent years, there has been a shift towards integrating biocentric and ecocentric perspectives into conservation approaches. These perspectives advocate for an approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of all life forms and ecosystems, and considers intrinsic values alongside the interests of current and future human generations. This paradigm shift reflects a growing recognition of the importance of biodiversity, conservation, ecosystem health, and ethical responsibility towards the nature –that is, beyond anthropocentrism.[16] Furthermore, even though we may not understand completely how species richness contributes to the

13. Robin Attfield, Environmental Ethics: An Overview for the Twenty-First Century, Second (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2014), 47.
14. Attfield, Environmental Ethics: An Overview for the Twenty-First Century, 91.
15. Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of the Global Environment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2015).
16. Bethel Andyson, *Environmental Preservation* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 2002), 99.

wellbeing of an ecosystem, we know enough to realize that rich biodiversity is not only essential for ecosystem health but imperative for the very survival of humans on this planet.

In the light of this important realization, Attfield places great importance on the conservation of biodiversity; arguing that preserving species diversity and protecting ecosystems is an ethical imperative. Each species, he argues, has its intrinsic value and contributes to the overall health and stability of the ecosystem.[17] It must be noted that the foregoing is not his idea, it is rather, his commentary on ecocentrism. In agreement, Rolston notes that by recognizing the intrinsic value of nature, Attfield's thought provides a moral foundation for biodiversity conservation; as an unharmed ecosystem generates a spontaneous order that envelops and produces the richness, beauty, integrity and dynamic stability of all its parts.[18]

It is noteworthy that Attfield's philosophy seems to be particularly relevant in addressing contemporary environmental challenges such as climate change, habitat destruction, and species extinction. In agreement with this view, Kramer observes that by emphasizing the intrinsic value of nature and the interconnectedness of all life, his philosophy encourages a holistic approach to conservation that benefits both humans and the natural world.[19] Thus, Attfield's stance on biodiversity is clear, if humans fail to ensure biodiversity, it could lead to a catastrophe, and reason beckons on

17. Attfield, Environmental Ethics: An Overview for the Twenty-First Century, 100.
18. Rolston, "Value in Nature and Nature of Value," 23.
19. James Kramer, "Anthropocentrism: An Introduction to Conservation," *Environmental Protection*, May 1997, 127.

us to avoid such an end.

Criticism of Attfield's Conservation Theory

While Attfield's contributions to environmental conservation have been influential, his work has not been without criticism. This section considers a few of both the strengths and weaknesses of Attfield' thought as highlighted by different scholars. The very first to be considered as a strength is Attfield's assertion that nature has intrinsic value. In agreement, Andyson avers that this principle shifts the focus from a purely utilitarian view, where the environment is valued solely for its usefulness to humans, to a more holistic view that recognizes the inherent worth of all-natural entities. He maintains that this intrinsic value argument fosters a deeper respect for the natural world and underpins many conservation efforts aimed at protecting species and habitats irrespective of their direct benefits to humanity.[20]

Also, Attfield's emphasis on sustainability is another strength of his conservation ethic. He advocates for practices that ensure the long-term health and viability of ecosystems, which is essential for maintaining biodiversity and the overall resilience of the planet. By promoting sustainable resource use and management, his approach aligns with contemporary efforts to mitigate climate change and environmental degradation, ensuring that natural resources are available for future generations. Even anthropocentrists do not disagree with him on this. Further, Attfield's recognition of the interconnectedness of all living things reinforces the need for comprehensive conservation strategies. By understanding the complex interdependencies within ecosystems,

20. Andyson, Environmental Preservation, 72.

conservation efforts can be more effectively tailored to preserve the balance and functionality of natural systems. This holistic perspective helps in crafting policies that consider the ecological, economic, and social dimensions of conservation, ensuring more robust and effective outcomes.[21] Finally, the extension of moral consideration to all sentient beings is another significant strength of Attfield's conservation ethic. This inclusive approach advocates for the welfare of animals and other life forms, promoting a 'humane' treatment and protection of wildlife. It aligns with broader ethical movements that seek to reduce suffering and enhance the wellbeing of all living creatures, thereby fostering a more compassionate and ethical approach to conservation.

Regarding the weaknesses of Attfield's conservation theory, the first perceived weakness is the issue of its practicality. Although his theoretical framework is robust, critics say that translating these principles into practical conservation policies could be challenging. The intrinsic value of nature, for example, is a philosophical concept that may be difficult to operationalize in policy-making and enforcement. Balancing economic development with conservation goals often requires compromises that may dilute the purity of Attfield's ethical ideals. Again, some critics may argue that despite Attfield's emphasis on the intrinsic value of nature, his approach somewhat anthropocentric, particularly in terms of how humans interpret and implement conservation strategies. Ensuring that conservation efforts genuinely prioritize the needs of ecosystems over human interests remains a complex ethical and practical challenge.[22]

21. Andyson, *Environmental Preservation*, 73.
22. Andyson, *Environmental Preservation*, 74.

Moreover, while Attfield addresses environmental justice, the global disparities in wealth and power can complicate the implementation of equitable conservation strategies. Developing countries, often rich in biodiversity but economically disadvantaged, may struggle to balance conservation with developmental needs. Ensuring that conservation efforts do not exacerbate social inequities is a critical but difficult aspect of applying Attfield's principles globally.[23] Again, conflicts of interest between conservation goals and economic activities, such as agriculture, mining, and urban development, present significant challenges. While Attfield's ethics call for sustainable practices, reconciling these with the economic realities and immediate needs of communities can be problematic. This often requires context-specific approaches that may not always align neatly with his theoretical framework.

Also, it may be added that no one is sure if the interests (and needs) of future generations which Attfield (and others) defend so vehemently might be in tune with those of today's generation. For instance, what if we conserve fossil fuel resources, but the future generations prefer to use renewable energy sources, like electric cars and solar power, instead of devices that use fossil fuel? If their interests vary from today's generation, then our conservation efforts would have all been in vain.

Peter Singer questions the practical implications of Attfield's ethical framework in the face of the several divergent sociocultural and political complexities of modern life. He argues that while

23. Tyler G. Miller, *Environmental Science: Working with the Earth* (USA: Thomson Books, 2006), 82.

recognizing intrinsic value is philosophically sound, it may be challenging to translate these abstract ethical principles into actionable policies and practices. He maintains that a more inclusive approach would acknowledge the diversity of sociocultural attitudes toward nature.[24] Thus, if Attfield's conservation may not provide sufficient flexibility to adapt to different cultural, social, and ecological contexts; a more pluralistic and context-specific approach might be necessary to address the complexities of environmental issues on a global scale.

The issue of interdisciplinary integration to foster conservation is another aspect of Attfield's thought that has faced criticism. Attfield has sought the integration of various philosophical and ethical perspectives (such as blending utilitarian and deontological ethics), but his critics argue that such collaboration is insufficient. Kumar, for instance, has argued that his work could go the extra mile and benefit from more explicit integration with natural and social sciences. Again, he holds that Attfield's ecological ethics does not offer adequate guidance on how to reconcile economic development with environmental conservation in practical terms.[25]

At this point, one response to this criticism is plausible. We begin by conceding that Attfield's conservation principles may be insufficient to address environmental crises on a global scale. However, we refuse to throw out the baby with the bathwater. So, we contend that in the first place, environmental crisis, such as climate change and pollution, may have global impacts; but they

24. Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 129.
25. Kumar, "Brief Introduction of Environment, Ecology and Environmental Pollution," 61.

begin in specific situations, locations, and circumstances. An example may be given of oil drilling. It is not done everywhere, even though the effects may spread to other places. We argue that surely, Attfield's conservation principles, such as that of respect for nature, can be applied effectively in such cases in order to avert excessive damage to the environment.

Better still, we hereby demonstrate with an analogy of paper glue. Suppose we take paper glue and apply it to fix a hole in a flat car tyre, it will surely prove futile. But that does not mean the gum is useless, it has simply been applied in a situation where it could not prove its usefulness. In the same way, even if any of Attfield's principles is found wanting in any specific situation, it could prove useful in some others. To take on a Pragmatist's garb, we argue that instead of holding theoretical debates about the workability of Attfield's theory, let us try it in practice, if it works, then it is worth its salt. Thus, we argue here, that even if any of Attfield's conservation principles cannot be applied everywhere, at least it can be applied somewhere –and that should suffice. Upon this foundation, we demonstrate the practical applicability of Attfield's conservation theory.

The Praxis of Attfield's Conservation Theory

Needless to say, conservation is very important in today's world as a result of the enormous environmental challenges confronting the Earth–man's original habitat. While the significance of environmental conservation can be examined from various perspectives, the focus here is on showcasing the practical applicability of Attfield's brand of conservation philosophy.

Biodiversity Preservation: Biodiversity, the variety of life forms on Earth, is crucial for ecosystem stability and sustenance. Healthy ecosystems provide essential services such as pollination, water purification, and soil fertility, which are vital for human survival and wellbeing. The loss of biodiversity can lead to the collapse of ecosystems, disrupting these services and threatening food security, health, and livelihoods.[26] Given the above, Attfield's call for biodiversity conservation is not out of place. So also, is his call for policies and strategies that could engender more efficient and effective conservation.In practice, Attfield's call for biodiversity preservation could be achieved in the following ways:

- ***Implementation of the Precautionary Principle:*** The Precautionary Principle holds that, "If there is a significant risk, we need to take steps to mitigate it, even if the risk isn't entirely proven or agreed upon."[27] This principle also demands that those who carry out any actions suspected to be harmful to humans or the environment should bear the burden of proving or disproving the harmfulness or not of their actions.[28] In practical terms, this entails halting the suspected harmful action (such as large scale deforestation) until the action can be sufficiently proven to be harmless. Again, restricting the use of harmful pesticides and chemicals until they are proven safe, is a another way of

26. Kumar, "Brief Introduction of Environment, Ecology and Environmental Pollution," 45.
27. Lucy Weir, "The Ethics of the Climate Crisis by Robin Attfield," *Philosophy Now: A Magazine of Ideas* (Philosophy Now, 2025), https://philosophynow.org/issues/167/The_Ethics_of_the_Climate_Crisis_by_Robin_Attfield#:~:t ext=The discussion on the Precautionary,with Attfield's customary good sense.
28. Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of the Climate Crisis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2024), 76.

deploying the Precautionary Principle to save ecosystems.

- ***Adoption and or implementation of international and national policies:*** This includes policies that mandate the use of renewable energy sources and incentivising eco-friendly technologies. The relevance of environmental conservation is recognized globally, as evidenced by international agreements and collaborations. Environmental issues, such as climate change and biodiversity loss, are global challenges that require international cooperation. Conservation itself fosters a sense of shared responsibility, encouraging countries and communities to work together for the common good of the planet.[29] Initiatives such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Paris Agreement on climate change, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the need for collective action to conserve the environment. National and local policies, informed by scientific research and community engagement, are essential for implementing effective conservation measures. Again, as a bonus, the coming together of nations to promote conservation engenders unity among nations —this is what Attfield refers to when he calls for global collaboration to conserve nature.

- ***Establishment of protected areas that regulate resource use:*** This includes the designation of national parks, reserves, and enforcing regulations on actions like fishing, logging, and mining to forestall over-exploitation.

29. Jose, "Ethics of Environment," 76.

- ***Education and moral systems:*** This includes the promotion of biocentric worldviews. This can be achieved by teaching intrinsic value of all life, and deemphasising anthropocentric attitudes towards nature. This sort of educational social re-engineering will cultivate a sense of the moral obligation of care and respect for non-human life forms.

- ***Creating a sense of stewardship:*** Attfield's work is apparently a'secularized' version of stewardship or trusteeship ethics, which places the burden of responsibility to care for nature on humans. This attitude can be encouraged through mass media publicity, theatre for development, environmental awareness training, and other related educational programmes.

Climate Stability: Environmental conservation is intrinsically linked to climate stability. Forests, wetlands, and oceans act as carbon sinks, absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and mitigating the effects of climate change. Deforestation and habitat destruction release stored carbon, exacerbating global warming. By protecting and restoring natural habitats, we can enhance their capacity to sequester carbon, thus contributing to climate change mitigation efforts.[30] Conservation helps in preserving these ecosystems, which is crucial for mitigating climate change, and this is exactly what Attfield stands for. This can be achieved in our everyday lives as explained below:

- ***Preventingharm to non-human life forms:*** Despite Attfield's call for biocentric inegalitarianism, and the

30. Jose, "Ethics of Environment," 61.

consequent position that only individual species (rather than entire species within ecosystems) should be accorded moral status; he does not support mass and wanton destruction of non-human life. This is supported by his acknowledgment of biodiversity and the interconnectedness of life. Moreover, Attfield avers that the humans have moral obligations towards non-human life which stem from the "scientific consensus of climate change;"stressing that "recognizing the reality of climate change is only a first step; taking meaningful action and holding ourselves accountable are [also] crucial."[31] Thisfollows that preventing harm to non-human life forms falls within the scope of Attfield's conservation thought. Therefore, it is arguable that climate stability is achievable through conscious and sustained efforts to avoid harming non-human life forms —especially those whose suffering and possible death would result in instability due to the interconnected nature of the web of life.

- ***Rejection of the so-called cost-benefit delays:*** Flowing from the implications of Attfield's Precautionary Principle, it is apparent that hewould reject economic arguments that call for delays of climate action due to apparent financial profits.[32] An example of this behaviour is the failure of several countries to stop carbon emissions from coal-powered electricity generation. In fact as at November 2024, China and India were still building new coal power stations, while the G7 countries only pledged to stop the use of coal-

31. Tsilavonarivo Heriniaina Johanes Amar Maruf, Ivy Ganadillo, "The Ethics of Climate Crisis," The Philosophical Quarterly 75, no. 3 (2025): 1241, https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqae135.
32. Weir, "The Ethics of the Climate Crisis by Robin Attfield."

power between 2030 and 2035".[33]

Obviously, such reasons tend to ignore the value of future human lives and that of non-humanspecies. A proper valuing of present and future generations of all species should rate them above any short-term economic returns. Hence, rejection of cost-benefit delays is not just an imperative, but a crucial practical step towards ensuring climate stability.

- ***Halting the practice of temporal discounting:*** Attfield emphasises our obligations to future generations and upholds a moral duty not to compromise the flourishing of future generations of all species.[34] In this light, he rejects the economic practice of discounting the value of future goods and well-being.[35] When we finally muster the courage to halt the practice of discountingthe value of future goods and well-being, the moral harm of climate change would become much more noticeable and imperative. Then we would have taken another step closer to ensuring climate stability.

- ***Ethical Allocation of the 'carbon budget':*** By anchoring on the principle of intergeneration equity, humans should avoid exceeding the global carbon budget. To achieve this, current generations must drastically reduce their carbon footprint to

33. Roberta Bocca, "Energy Transition: G7 Countries Agree Phaseout for Unabated Coal Power," World Economic Forum (World Economic Forum, June 3, 2025), https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/05/energy-news-g7-coal-phaseout-renewables-batteries/

34. Amar Maruf, Ivy Ganadillo, "The Ethics of Climate Crisis," 1241.

35. Rebeka Humphreys, "Review of Attfield, Robin, Applied Ethics: An Introduction," Bangladesh Journal of Bioethics 15, no. 3 (2024): 17, https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.62865/bjbio.v15i3.119.

ensure they leave a stable climate for successive generations. To guarantee that humans stick to their carbon budget, cooperation between both governmental and non-governmental organisations would have to be prioritised. Also, there is an urgent need to ramp up the political will to honour agreements and take action towards lesseningthe high human carbon footprint. Most of the developed nations —who are responsible for the largest amount of climate change— appear reluctant to pursue that objective. For instance, the United Nations Climate Change report of 2024 says that "…national climate plants 'fall miles short of what's needed'" due to a lack of political will.[36]

- ***Promoting climate justice:*** Attfield decries the situation where those who have contributed least to climate change have become the most affected by its impacts. Incidentally, these same peoples have experienced historical injustice (in ways like slavery, colonialism, marginalisation, racism, and imperialism) in the hands of the developed nations; thereby violating at least three of their rights: (a) freedom from violence and torture, (b) right to means of subsistence, and (c) the right to life.[37] Thus, a typical Attfieldian approach to climate stability would be include and insist on implementing the principles of climate justice; especially those which demand restitution, remediation, and

36. United Nations Climate Change, "New UN Climate Change Report Shows National Climate Plans 'Fall Miles Short of What's Needed,'" United Nations Climate Change Report 2024 (United Nations Climate Change, 2024), https://unfccc.int/news/new-un-climate-change-report-shows-national-climate-plans-fall-miles-short-of-what-s-needed.

37. Attfield, *The Ethics of the Climate Crisis*, 79.

reparation. Attfield would insist on justice, not just for humans but for other species "on the basis of their sentience and being able to suffer. The lives of animals, domestic or wild, likewise have had little freedom from violence."[38]

In everyday terms, the promotion of climate justice should include the provision of assistance (technological, technical, financial, legal, political, etc) to nations of the global south, so they can both mitigate and adapt to climate change. Furthermore, the implementation of sustainable development projects will enhance biodiversity impact assessments and integrate measures for habitat restoration and species protection. Furthermore, corroborating with host communities who bear the brunt of the natural resource exploration fall-outswould greatly enhance the impact of interventions that guarantee climate justice.

Ecofriendly Socio-Economic Development: Contrary to the view of mega-corporations that exploit nature's resources with reckless abandon, Attfield's stance on environmental conservation has significant socio-economic benefits. It does not negate human interests. Rather, it encouragesa shift from anthropocentrism to biocentric consequentialism; by which the impact of human activity is carefully planned to avoid harm to non-human life forms. Thus, Attfield's approach promotes sustainable tourism, which generates income and employment while preserving natural and cultural heritage.[39] In line with Attfield's thought, guaranteeing anecofriendly socio-economic development would involve the following strategies:

38. Weir, "The Ethics of the Climate Crisis by Robin Attfield."
39. Adler, "Conservative Principles for Environmental Reform," 59.

- ***Preventive action to forestall harm to other sentient beings:*** While planning or even at the stage of implementing developmental projects, prevention of harm can be achieved by applying Attfield's of Precautionary Principle to avertirreparable environmental damage. Thus, instead of waiting for definitive proof of harm, the concerned agencies can be proactive in halting or redesigning projects that pose a significant threat to biodiversity. For instance, a government can refuse to authorize or halt the building of a large-scale dam project if the environmental impact assessment indicates the destruction of a critical ecosystem —despite the estimated long-term benefits.

- ***Aversion of Risks:*** Ecofriendly socio-economic development can also be achieved by avoiding any contact with or approaching new technologies or industries with extreme caution, until their long-term impacts on the local ecosystems and biodiversity are ascertained and sufficiently understood to be harmless. These new technologies might be gene-edited crops, genetically modifiedfoods/organism, pesticides, weedicides, or deep-sea mining. Polzer believes that this strategy is in line with Attfield's argument that we are obligated to future generations and to people in other countries; implying that we should be mindful of development policies that affect them.[40]

40. Thomas Polzer, "Review of Robin Attfield's 'Environmental Ethics: A Short Introduction'" (ResearchGate, 2019), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330338162_Review_of_Robin_Attfield's_Environmental_Ethics_A_Very_Short_Introduction/.

- ***Sustainable management of resources:*** Governmental authorities can implement policies that preserve, conserve, and protect natural resources (like forests or fisheries) by demanding that they are managed in a manner that guarantees their renewable and indefinite availability. This implies the rejection of short-term, unsustainable activities like over-logging (or clear cutting) in favour of sustainable actions that offer jobs and resources for the local community without destroying the ecosystem.

- ***Demanding for fair trade and compensation:*** Attfield's ethics advocates for remedying global injustices. Developing countries can leverage on this and demand that their trading allies in the developed world pay fair prices for goods. This will ensure that developing countries are not compelled to environmentally destructive practices in order to meet low pricing. This might also include looking for financial and technological assistance from developed nations which would be deployed into adaptation projects that mitigate climate change and or help in transitioning to eco-friendly technologies. The justification for these demands could come from the fact that these rich nations, comprising at least "23 rich, developed countries" are historically responsible for the bulk of greenhouse gas emissions —and the widespread opinion is that they "should compensate poorer nations"— what most of them appear quite reluctant to do.[41]

41. Nadja Popovich and Brad Plumer, "Who Has He Most Historical Responsibility for Climate Change?," *The New York Times*, November 12, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/11/12/climate/cop26-emissions-compensation.html.

- ***Ecotourism and conservation incentives:*** Both governmental and nongovernmental organisations can design development modes that are based on conservation rather than exploitation. This can promote community-nurtured ecotourism projects where the locals act as stewards of their environment from where they earn a living from protecting forests, wildlife, and marine life. This would be a viable and direct economic incentive for conservation —and a practical way of living out Attfield's conservation thought.

- ***Ethical Use of Land:*** Land-use practices can be realigned to prioritize the preservation of critical habitats and migratory corridors over space for large-scale farming or urbanization projects. This would be a bold acknowledgement of (a)the 'good' of putting in place a diverse ecosystem which has value that should not be automatically sacrificed for human development, and (b) the fact that the long-term welfare of a society is connected to the vigor of its environment. Finally, ethical use of land will foster an attitude of looking at land as a moral community by which the flourishingof the entire biotic community will be guaranteed. This in turn, will engender environmental practices that will "regenerate soil health instead of depleting it. It demands an economic model that accounts for the value of natural services like pollination and water purification, which are typically treated as free and limitless."[42]

42. Sustainability Directory, "Land Stewardship Ethics," July 29, 2025, https://lifestyle.sustainability-directory.com/term/land-stewardship-ethics/

Conclusion

Attfield advocates for the intrinsic value of all living beings, arguing that every form of life has inherent worth. Despite being an inegalitarian view of nonhuman life, his form of biocentrismstill underscores the moral obligation to protect and preserve biodiversity, recognizing the intrinsic worth, independence, and interconnectedness of all species within ecosystems. Fundamentally, he emphasizes the need for practices that ensure the wellbeing of current and future generations. He promotes the idea that environmental conservation should balance ecological health with human development, fostering a harmonious relationship between nature and society. Going further, Attfield's approach integrates ethical considerations of global justice, highlighting the disparities in environmental impacts and resource distribution between developed and developing countries. He calls for equitable solutions that address these imbalances, ensuring that all people have access to a healthy environment and sustainable resources. This study was set to answer a simple question, 'Is this practicable in everyday situations?' Flowing on that aim, the study exposed the everyday tenability of Attfield's conservation theoryby presenting cogent examples of its applicability in specific situations. In the light of the above, it is safe to conclude that Attfield thought on conservation offersa plausible solution to the environmentalcrises plaguing us. All that is left for now, isfor humankind, the foremost destroyer of nature, to follow Attfield's generous advice.

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