



**From Environmental Ethics to Social Contracts: Unraveling the
Philosophical Intersections of the COVID-19 Pandemic and
Environmental Pollution**

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ABSTRACT

One can critically evaluate the effects of the pandemic and environmental pollution on our daily lives and the community at large by looking at various perspectives on philosophy, such as ethical practices and social contract theory. The paper highlights the significance of adopting environment-friendly practices and making moral decisions to effectively handle these issues. Woven throughout the entire discussion is the emphasis on making responsible choices and adopting environmentally friendly practices to combat both the COVID-19 epidemic and pollution. In the field of environmental ethics, the study examines the connections between moral obligations and contemporary environmental problems. Further, the paper investigates various schools of thought which include ecofeminism, which looks at the connections between the exploitation of women and the destruction of nature, and deep ecology, which acknowledges the intrinsic value of every living thing and the environment. This paper analyses the connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and environmental pollution from a philosophical angle. It attempts to provide readers with a broader comprehension of the moral, social, and environmental ramifications of these universal issues.

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1. Introduction

In the past few years, the COVID-19 pandemic and environmental pollution have emerged as two of the most critical challenges facing humanity. This study explores the philosophical underpinnings of these crises, with a particular focus on the ethical, social, and ecological ramifications that arise from them. By examining these philosophical foundations, one may gain a deeper understanding of these interconnected issues and propose potential solutions for a more environmentally friendly future. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted societies worldwide, resulting in significant loss of life, economic downturns, and widespread social unrest. Simultaneously, various forms of pollution—air, water, and soil—pose a serious threat to our planet, destroying ecosystems, harming human health, and accelerating climate change. The pandemic's primary impact on human health and pollution's detrimental effects on the ecosystem may initially appear to be separate issues. On closer inspection, though, it becomes clear that they are intricately linked. This paper delves into the philosophical foundations to fully comprehend the ethical, social, and ecological repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and pollutants. Through analyzing the theoretical underpinnings that influence our comprehension of these circumstances, one can cultivate a broader viewpoint that facilitates precise assessment and the creation of workable solutions. An essential starting point for comprehending the impact of pollution on our world is environmental ethics. For instance, deep ecology challenges us to acknowledge the inherent worth of all living things and the interdependence of ecosystems. This perspective highlights the far-reaching effects of pollution and the pressing need for its reduction (Naess, 1973, pp- 95-100). Ecofeminism offers insights into the intersections between the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature. This viewpoint clarifies how environmental injustices and social inequities are sustained

by pollution, which disproportionately impacts marginalized populations. The incorporation of ecofeminist ideals into this research facilitates a more comprehensive comprehension of the complex effects of pollution. Social contract theory also plays a significant role in examining the COVID-19 pandemic. This ethical framework examines how people interact with society, with a focus on striking a balance between people's liberty and the welfare of the group as a whole. One can negotiate the difficult conflicts that exist between individual liberties, public safety, and governmental obligations by examining the state's role in maintaining public health.

Furthermore, existentialism offers profound insights into human responses during crises. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened existential angst, prompting individuals to confront the fragility of existence and seek meaning amidst adversity. This study explores existentialist concepts such as authenticity and ethical responsibility to illuminate diverse responses to pandemic challenges. The philosophical ramifications of environmental contamination and the COVID-19 pandemic are also explored in this paper. These issues can be carefully examined from a range of philosophical perspectives to determine their consequences and workable solutions. Fostering a more just and sustainable world requires addressing the intersection of these two main concerns.

1.1 Environmental Ethics and Pollution

Deep Ecology, a foundational ecological philosophy, posits that all living beings and their environment are interconnected and possess intrinsic worth independent of human utility. It stands in stark contrast to anthropocentric views that prioritize human interests above all else. According to Arne Naess, a pioneering figure in Deep Ecology, "The diversity of life forms, so numerous that we have yet to identify most of them, is the greatest wonder of this planet and one of the greatest challenges facing mankind" (Naess,

1973, p. 5). Central to Deep Ecology is the recognition that pollution, particularly in the forms of air and water pollution, constitutes a severe threat to the integrity and well-being of ecosystems and species. Pollution is viewed not merely as a physical or chemical disturbance but as a moral and ethical issue, reflecting a disregard for the inherent value of nature (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p. 23). Arne Naess further emphasizes that "Every organism and ecosystem has a right to exist and flourish within the web of life, irrespective of its utility to humans" (Naess, 1973, p. 45). This philosophical stance demands a transformative shift in human attitudes and behaviors toward environmental conservation. Pollution disrupts delicate ecological balances, harming both human and non-human inhabitants and necessitating ethical responsibility and stewardship of the natural world. Naess argues that "preserving the diversity and richness of ecosystems is not only a scientific imperative but also a moral obligation" (Naess, 1973, p. 12). This perspective urges individuals and societies to adopt practices that respect and safeguard the intrinsic value of all life forms and natural systems, recognizing their interconnectedness and interdependence. By embracing this eco-centric worldview, Deep Ecology advocates for a harmonious co-existence where the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants are prioritized over short-term human gains. The 1970s saw the emergence of ecofeminism, a movement that sought to tackle the interconnected issues of women's oppression and environmental destruction. Ecofeminism underscores the need for a holistic approach to environmental issues, recognizing the interconnectedness of social, political, and ecological systems. As Merchant (1980) argues, "Patriarchal ideology underlies both the exploitation of women and the degradation of nature" (p. 15). This perspective integrates feminist and ecological perspectives to explore how patriarchal structures have historically marginalized and exploited both women and

the natural world. According to Warren (1990), ecofeminism "sees the domination of women and the domination of nature as interdependent" (p. 75), highlighting the intertwined nature of gender oppression and environmental exploitation. Environmental justice, on the other hand, is a societal movement that seeks to fairly and equally distribute environmental benefits and liabilities, particularly highlighting the disproportionate harm caused to marginalized communities by environmental deterioration, pollution, and hazardous waste. Pollution, including environmental toxins and their impact on human health, is examined through an intersectional lens, demonstrating how certain communities, often marginalized, bear the brunt of environmental injustices. To remedy the social inequities brought on by environmental deterioration, environmental justice works to uphold everyone's entitlement to a clean and healthy environment.

1. Ecofeminism and Justice: Ecofeminism connects patriarchal control to the exploitation of the environment and the oppression of women. Environmental justice emphasizes the disproportionate suffering caused by race, class, and gender in marginalized groups. Both urge the destruction of oppressive structures in the interest of social and environmental justice.
2. Valuing Care and Connection: Ecofeminism values care, empathy, and interconnectedness, aligning with environmental justice. It highlights the nurturing roles of women and draws parallels between the exploitation of women and nature. Community, solidarity, and collective action are essential in addressing environmental injustices.
3. Challenging Dominant Paradigms: Ecofeminism and environmental justice challenge prevailing paradigms prioritizing economic growth over well-being. They critique ideologies

perpetuating environmental degradation and inequality, advocating sustainability, equity, and justice for people and the planet.

4. **Intersectionality:** Ecofeminism and environmental justice embrace intersectionality, acknowledging the compounding impacts of environmental degradation on individuals and communities with multiple forms of oppression. Inclusive, intersectional approaches are emphasized to effectively tackle environmental issues.

Ecofeminism and environmental justice unite in recognizing the linkages between social, ecological, and gender-based injustices. They advocate a holistic approach to address environmental challenges by challenging patriarchy, fostering care and connection, and pursuing justice for all. These frameworks guide equitable and sustainable societal progress. The anthropocentric worldview, which places humans at the center of existence and prioritizes human interests, has long influenced our perception of nature, often resulting in environmental exploitation and a disregard for non-human entities. This human-centered perspective, while dominant, has contributed significantly to global environmental degradation and the acceleration of climate change. As ecological crises become more severe, the limitations of anthropocentrism have become increasingly apparent. Scholars like Val Plumwood have critiqued this worldview, noting that “the rationalist culture of the West has tended to construct human identity by excluding and devaluing nature” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 4). In response, alternative ethical frameworks such as biocentrism and ecocentrism have gained prominence. Biocentrism, as advocated by Paul Taylor, emphasizes the inherent worth of all living beings, while ecocentrism, supported by Aldo Leopold and others, promotes a broader ecological awareness that underscores the interconnectedness of ecosystems and the imperative to preserve biodiversity. These perspectives challenge the notion of human

superiority and advocate for a more inclusive and holistic approach to environmental ethics, recognizing our interdependence with the natural world. Moving beyond anthropocentrism involves embracing sustainability, stewardship, and environmental justice. It requires adopting sustainable practices, supporting conservation efforts, and promoting environmental education. Addressing root causes like pollution and overconsumption necessitates the development and enforcement of improved environmental laws and regulations. By actively engaging in these efforts, humans can foster an ecologically conscious society that harmoniously co-exists with nature. While anthropocentrism has historically influenced human attitudes toward the environment, the recognition of our interconnectedness calls for a re-evaluation. Embracing holistic values and sustainable practices can pave the way towards a fairer and more harmonious co-existence with the natural world, honoring the inherent worth of all beings.

1.2 Social Contract Theory and the Pandemic

Social contract theory provides a valuable lens through which to examine the role of the state and the responsibilities of individuals during a pandemic. This theory, which explores the relationship between individuals and society, underscores the mutual obligations and responsibilities that bind them. In the context of a pandemic, the state assumes a crucial role as the guardian of public health, tasked with safeguarding the well-being of its citizens. As Hobbes explains, individuals “enter into a collective agreement with the state, recognizing that unity enhances their ability to address common challenges” (1651, p. 102). This agreement entails individuals willingly granting the state authority, understanding that this delegation is essential for ensuring the collective good. However, the pandemic also highlights a profound conflict within social contract theory: the tension between individual

liberties and the broader welfare of society. Locke in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), emphasizes that while 'individual rights and freedoms' are recognized; they are not absolute and must be balanced against the greater good. This delicate balance between personal rights and collective well-being is central to the social contract, especially in times of crisis.

In the context of pandemic, where society faces a common adversary, the state assumes the crucial role of safeguarding the health and safety of its citizens. This responsibility may lead to implementing measures that temporarily restrict certain individual freedoms, such as the right to free movement or assembly. These restrictions aim to curtail the spread of the contagion and protect vulnerable populations, underscoring the idea that with freedom also comes the responsibilities to ensure the welfare of others, both human and non-human alike. However, these restrictions are temporary and must be assessed for their substantive ethical value in protecting human welfare. The ethical considerations that arise when navigating this difficult terrain must be carefully considered. Finding balance between individual liberty and the pursuit of the common good becomes an ethical challenge. Proportionate and nondiscriminatory actions are required to protect the public. In this difficult time, upholding the concept of solidarity and respect for human dignity serve as guiding principles.

Moreover, transparent communication and citizen involvement in decision-making processes are crucial, especially in addressing environmental challenges. Transparency builds trust and engaging the public bridges the gap between policymakers and communities, fostering a shared responsibility for environmental stewardship. While the pandemic may require temporary restrictions on individual liberties to manage environmental health risks, it is essential to uphold democratic

values. By integrating principles of justice, compassion, and equity into our environmental policies, we can navigate crises like pandemic and ecological degradation, emerging as a stronger and more unified society. This approach reaffirms the importance of balancing individual rights with collective environmental well-being for a sustainable future. In times of crisis such as a pandemic, fostering trust and cooperation becomes essential for societal resilience. This cooperative attitude encompasses not just our relationships with one another but also our care for the environment. As we unite to combat global challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss, we witness the strength of collective action in preserving our planet's health. Trust in scientific expertise guides effective environmental policies, ensuring that decisions are rooted in evidence and aimed at safeguarding our natural ecosystems. The harmony between personal liberties and the greater good becomes even more important in this situation. Protecting the environment for present and future generations is a common obligation that we uphold, analogous to a social compact. Everyone's actions contribute to the collective effort of environmental conservation, fostering a sense of solidarity and stewardship. This inclusive approach is reflected in community efforts to promote sustainability, from local conservation initiatives to global agreements on climate action. Through open communication and inclusive decision-making processes, every voice is heard in shaping a sustainable path forward. Acts of environmental stewardship, from reducing carbon footprints to advocating for biodiversity protection, demonstrate the power of collective responsibility. Amidst challenges, hope remains a guiding force, inspiring moral decisions grounded in compassion and empathy towards both human and ecological communities. By embracing the principles of trust, cooperation, and collective action, we pave the way for a resilient and equitable

future, where harmony between people and nature thrives.

1.3 Existentialism and Human Responses to Crises

Existentialism, a profound philosophical perspective, centers on the individual, their freedom, and the relentless pursuit of meaning in life (Kierkegaard, 1843, p. 123). When applied to crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, these existentialist insights illuminate human responses to adversity. "The pandemic has evoked a range of emotions, including pandemic anxiety and existential angst," which is described as "an intense sense of fear, dread, and uncertainty when individuals confront life's limitations and unpredictability" (Yalom, 1980, p. 67; van Deurzen, 2002, p. 89). COVID-19 has globally impacted humanity, compelling people to face mortality. The confrontation with existential challenges has intensified feelings of existential angst. The sudden disruption of daily routines, threats to both personal and societal well-being, and the looming uncertainty of the future contribute significantly to this emotional strain. As people face these difficulties, they often find themselves questioning the meaning of life, searching for purpose in their actions, and striving to understand the significance of their existence amidst the inevitability of mortality. This sense of existential angst arises as individuals grapple with their vulnerability and the recognition of their limited control over circumstances. During these turbulent times, existentialism provides a valuable framework for understanding and navigating these complexities. It encourages individuals to delve into their inner selves, confront their fears and uncertainties directly, and seek a deeper comprehension of their personal existence. By embracing the freedom to make choices and find meaning, people navigate pandemic trials with resilience and hope. Existentialist philosophy underscores that, "even in dark moments, humans can create

meaning and chart a path forward" (Frankl, 1946, p. 78).

Existentialism teaches us to embrace our humanity fully – acknowledging the complexities of our existence while finding strength in our ability to find meaning, even amidst the most challenging of circumstances. By recognizing the power of individual agency and the pursuit of meaning, one can navigate the uncertain terrain of the COVID-19 pandemic with a renewed sense of purpose and resilience. Authenticity, a key concept in existentialism, refers to the idea of living by one's values, beliefs, and personal freedom. In the context of the pandemic, authenticity becomes crucial as individuals navigate ethical responsibilities and choices. Authenticity requires individuals to reflect on their actions and make choices that align with their values and beliefs. In the face of a crisis, individuals are confronted with ethical dilemmas, such as balancing personal freedom with the well-being of others, making decisions about vaccination, or adhering to public health guidelines. Existentialism encourages individuals to take responsibility for their choices and act in a way that is authentic to their own ethical standards (Camus, 1942, p. 56; Heidegger, 1927, p. 102). Existentialism provides an understanding of how people react to emergencies like the COVID-19 epidemic. People who struggle with uncertainty and the boundaries of human control may experience existential angst. When people negotiate their ethical responsibilities and make decisions that are consistent with their convictions, authenticity becomes increasingly vital. Additionally, meaning making plays a crucial role in finding purpose and significance in the face of adversity. By understanding and applying existentialist perspectives, individuals can cultivate resilience and forge a sense of meaning during times of crisis.

COVID-19, Pollution, and Inequities: Ethical Solutions

The COVID-19 pandemic has substantial effects on pollution levels and has brought to light inequities in the areas of health and the environment, posing moral conundrums and necessitating the development of governmental solutions. The issues that arise from these intersections are examined in this section.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant shifts in human activities, resulting in both positive and negative impacts on pollution levels. During periods of lockdowns, there has been a temporary decrease in air and water pollution due to reduced industrial activity, transportation, and energy consumption. Satellite data has confirmed substantial declines in nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions in this period (Le Quéré et al., 2020, p. 877). However, uncertainties persist about long-term effects, with some pollution sources like single-use plastics and medical waste increasing due to heightened demand for personal protective equipment (UNEP, 2020).

The pandemic has highlighted existing health and environmental injustices that disproportionately affect marginalized communities. “Vulnerable populations, including low-income communities and people of color, often reside in areas with higher pollution levels and face increased health risks due to pre-existing conditions,” (Bullard et al., 2020, p. 61). Studies have emphasized the correlation between air pollution and elevated COVID-19 mortality rates, exacerbating disparities in resource distribution and healthcare access (Wu et al., 2020, p. 123; UNEP, 2021).

The intersection of the pandemic and pollution presents ethical dilemmas. “Balancing public health measures with environmental sustainability is a significant challenge,” (Prata et al., 2020, p. e14128). The surge in disposable face masks and gloves raises concerns about plastic waste and environmental impact. There is also an

ethical dilemma surrounding the balance between economic recovery and environmental protection, prompting some nations to relax environmental regulations to stimulate their economies.

Policy measures are required to address these moral conundrums and create long-lasting answers. Policies that put public health, environmental sustainability, and social justice first can be adopted by governments and international organizations. For instance, supporting circular economy principles, increasing the use of renewable energy, and tightening pollution regulations can all assist in lessening the pandemic’s detrimental effects on pollution levels (UNEP, 2021). Furthermore, implementing policies to address health and environmental inequalities, such as enhancing healthcare access and minimizing pollution exposure in marginalized communities, is essential for fostering a more equitable and sustainable society.

2. Materials and Methods

This paper adopts a **conceptual and analytical approach** to explore the ethical, social, and ecological dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic alongside issues of environmental pollution. Instead of empirical data collection, the study synthesizes insights from established philosophical frameworks, applying theories from **environmental ethics**, **social contract theory**, and **existentialism** to contextualize and examine these intertwined crises. The methodology is composed of:

Philosophical Literature Review: Foundational texts and interpretations from notable figures like Arne Naess, Carolyn Merchant, and Thomas Hobbes provide the theoretical underpinnings. Key concepts—such as intrinsic value, interconnectedness, and justice—are drawn from these works to inform the analysis.

Thematic Analysis: Core philosophical perspectives, including deep ecology, ecofeminism, and existentialism, are used to interpret the ethical implications of the pandemic and environmental pollution, focusing particularly on how these theories address justice, social obligations, and human-environment relationships.

Cross-Philosophical Synthesis: By interweaving concepts from different schools of thought, the paper builds a cohesive argument that bridges environmental ethics, social contracts, and existential reflections to propose an integrated ethical framework for contemporary crises.

This qualitative method, grounded in philosophical inquiry, offers a comprehensive view on how these perspectives can illuminate complex ethical dilemmas in today's global environmental and health challenges.

3. Results and Discussion

The Results and Discussion section evaluates each philosophical framework's application to the ethical issues stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and environmental pollution, presenting key insights on the subject:

Environmental Ethics: Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism: Within the realm of environmental ethics, deep ecology emphasizes recognizing the intrinsic worth of all natural beings, advocating for an eco-centric rather than anthropocentric worldview. This approach challenges human-centered perspectives, stressing that ecosystems and species possess inherent value beyond human utility. Similarly, ecofeminism exposes how patriarchal systems contribute to the exploitation of both women and nature. This section reveals that marginalized communities disproportionately bear the brunt of

environmental harm, underscoring the interconnected injustices that these frameworks seek to address. Together, they urge a shift towards a more **holistic and just approach** to ecological conservation.

Social Contract Theory and Pandemic Ethics: The paper applies social contract theory to examine the ethical responsibilities of the state and individuals during a crisis. Social contract theory supports the idea that individual freedoms may justifiably be limited to promote the common welfare, particularly in times of public health emergencies. This perspective frames governmental health measures, such as movement restrictions, as necessary for collective well-being, emphasizing the ethical balance between individual liberty and public safety. This discussion highlights the **tensions inherent in balancing personal freedoms with societal health obligations** and the role of the state in protecting its citizens.

Existentialist Perspective on Crisis Response: Existentialism provides valuable insights into individual responses to crises by emphasizing themes such as authenticity, ethical responsibility, and the search for meaning. The pandemic has amplified feelings of existential angst, prompting individuals to confront mortality, vulnerability, and uncertainty. By encouraging people to reflect on their values and live authentically, existentialism supports resilience and offers a framework for **finding purpose amid adversity**. This perspective sheds light on the ethical choices and personal growth that can emerge from crises, even in times of widespread hardship.

Interconnection of COVID-19, Pollution, and Inequities: The paper also addresses the intersection of the pandemic, environmental pollution, and social inequities. These overlapping crises reveal significant ethical challenges, particularly for marginalized communities who face both heightened

health risks and disproportionate environmental burdens. This analysis suggests that addressing these interconnected issues requires **policies that prioritize sustainability and social justice**, thereby promoting equity in both environmental and health-related domains.

The study concludes with an appeal for policies and practices that incorporate philosophical perspectives to cultivate resilience, ethical responsibility, and sustainability in the face of global crises. This integrated ethical framework can guide effective responses to future environmental and health challenges by fostering a balance between ecological conservation and societal well-being.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The philosophical inquiry into the COVID-19 pandemic and environmental pollution reveals profound insights into the ethical, social, and ecological dimensions of these global crises. Throughout this study, I try to examine various philosophical perspectives—ranging from environmental ethics to social contract theory and existentialism—to illuminate the interconnectedness and moral implications inherent in these issues. Environmental ethics, particularly through frameworks like deep ecology and ecofeminism, underscores the intrinsic value of nature and the interconnectedness of ecosystems. Deep ecology challenges anthropocentric views by advocating for a harmonious co-existence where the well-being of all life forms is prioritized over human interests alone. Ecofeminism emphasizes the necessity for comprehensive strategies to solve environmental injustices by highlighting the interconnectedness between the exploitation of women and environmental degradation. Social contract theory offers a lens through which to analyze the societal response to the pandemic. It examines the balance between individual liberties and collective

responsibilities, particularly in times of crisis. The state is essential to protecting the health and welfare of its people since it is the custodian of public health. These necessitating measures may temporarily restrict individual freedoms in favor of the common good. Existentialism provides insights into human responses to crises, revealing how individuals confront existential angst and navigate ethical dilemmas amidst uncertainty. It encourages authenticity and meaning making as pathways to resilience and purposeful action during adversity. The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the intricate relationship between human activities and environmental health. While temporary reductions in pollution were observed during lockdowns, persistent challenges remain, including the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities and ethical dilemmas regarding sustainability in post-pandemic recovery efforts. A comprehensive strategy that incorporates moral considerations, scientific discoveries, and social obligations is needed to solve the connected issues of the COVID-19 epidemic and environmental contamination. Upholding principles of ecological stewardship, social justice, and ethical governance is essential for fostering resilience and sustainability in global crises. One may work towards a future where ecological and human well-being are mutually reinforced by extending international cooperation, supporting environmental justice, and promoting sustainable behaviors.

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