

An Argument Against Apathy

Common Experience: "Greening of Earth: Whose Responsibility?"

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If you take a walk down an average town's litter-strewn sidewalk, it might be possible to convince yourself that trashcans are becoming extinct. It seems that as America has more to throw away, she gets less of it into the trashcans. We either have really bad aim, or we just don't care. When you toss a milk carton, a plastic bag, or a tin can onto the ground, how long does it take to decompose? According to a New York Times article published in 2001, decomposition rates for those products are five years, twelve years, and one hundred years, respectively. Pieces of Styrofoam that are tossed carelessly to the side of the road *never* decompose (Dahlgren 304). The issue of pollution is only one of many environmental problems facing our generation, but it clearly illustrates the role we play in the greening of the earth. Apathy is not an option: we have a responsibility to take action. Our responsibility hinges on three factors: we live on the earth, we contribute to its environmental condition, and we have the potential to make a difference.

All human beings share one thing in common. Regardless of race, gender, physical ability, or mental prowess, we all share at least one common characteristic. This commonality is that we all live in and depend on the earth. The first reason that we are responsible for the earth is simply that we live here. Ownership or occupancy translates into responsibility. For example, when winds from Hurricane Ike swept through the Midwest, they tore down trees and destroyed landscapes and buildings. People immediately dealt with the destruction on their own property, carrying tree limbs and sticks and cleaning up debris. People were ready to deal with this problem because they owned or occupied their houses, and if they didn't deal with it, no one else would. This same logic should be applied to the environment. As inhabitants of the earth, we have a responsibility to deal with its problems. It is inexcusable to simply shrug off the problem of pollution and treat it like it is none of our business. Because we live on the earth, its care and treatment is inherently our business.

Not only do we live on the earth, but we also in some ways contribute to the environmental degradation on the earth. This contribution adds to our responsibility. For example, this morning I used coal-generated electricity to turn on the lights in my house, drove a gasoline-powered car to my college campus, and studied textbooks whose paper originally came from trees. I don't believe there is anything wrong with these activities, but I do believe that since my actions affect the environment, I have a responsibility to try to mitigate those negative effects. The current generation is facing numerous problems today as a result of the apathy of former decades. Prolonged use of pollutants that could possibly hurt the ozone layer, endanger sea life, and reduce the cleanliness of the atmosphere has hurt the quality of human life on the planet. The extent of the damage caused directly by humans is arguable, but it is undeniable that our presence on the earth has affected our ecosystems. Since we are part of the cause, we must attempt to be part of the solution.

As inhabitants of the earth and contributors to its environmental state, we have a responsibility to care for it. A final reason for this responsibility is that our efforts *can* make a difference. We are not individually responsible for eliminating pollution, but we can be responsible for making adjustments in our lives that benefit the environment. In my opinion, science has a long way to go to prove that human actions can totally "fix" the earth's environmental problems, but I do believe we can do small things that will make a difference. The book "Whose Water Is It?" tells the story of a group of 10-year-old girls who formed an environmental club, attended an international Earth Summit, and gave speeches before adults to raise awareness (Suzuki and McConnell 183). These girls weren't trying to solve every problem – they were merely trying to convince people to waste less and turn their eco-friendly words into actions. If pre-teens can make a difference, it stands to reason that college students, university

professors, and community members can also have an impact. It doesn't take a doctorate in climate studies to learn to practice the three R's: reduce, reuse, and recycle (Suzuki and McConnell 182). We have a responsibility to 'green the earth' because we have the inherent potential to produce lasting change in our societies.

As our culture modernizes and industrializes, we see an increase in the amount of litter on the roads and pollution in the air. It is not acceptable to hide behind a wall of apathy and leave the earth's care to future generations. Our responsibility to care for the earth can be traced to the fact that we live on the earth, our lifestyles have an ecological impact, and our actions *can* produce positive results. The goal is clear: educate ourselves, use our example and our words to educate others, and take appropriate actions to protect the natural world and human life. While apathy may seem like the easiest attitude towards the environment, it is certainly not the choice that is in the best interests of society. As a result of our apathy, we have inadvertently contributed to some of the environmental issues facing our generation. It is our responsibility to leave behind a legacy for future generations that encourages concern and care for the planet we call home.

Bibliography:

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