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"Towards Global Environmental Values: Lessons from Western and Eastern Experience"

Sarre, Philip

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The paper argues that new environmental values are needed as the advanced industrial economy becomes global. Reviewing a range of values from hunter-gatherer, agricultural and industrial societies, the paper suggests that environmental value systems should ideally satisfy three criteria. They should be consistent with scientific understanding of natural systems, they should lead to practical ethical and political proposals and, crucially, they should inspire aesthetic responses of pleasure and awe.

Current global value systems fall short of this ideal: Gaia has the potential to combine science and awe, but lacks humane decision criteria, while sustainable development is pragmatic but environmentally minimalist and lacks aesthetic inspiration. The short term need is to integrate different strands of current positions as Hinduism combined pre-existing views. A sequence of priorities is suggested: eliminating irreversible environmental change; stabilising population change through more equitable trade; and reconsidering the boundaries, practical and aesthetic, between society and nature.

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