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Does viewing Earth as a person and nature as intentionally designed impact beliefs about the immorality of environmentally damaging acts?

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Abstract

This experiment explored how attributions of agency to the Earth (psychological and vitalist) and design-based views of nature impact adults' degree of environmental concern. Undergraduates ($N=133$) were randomly assigned to watch different videos. In the Person condition, the video described the Earth as a person with beliefs and desires. In the Animal condition, the Earth was described as a living being with non-intentional survival goals. The Control condition described the Earth as a physical-mechanical object. No significant differences were found between conditions in psychological attributions to the Earth. However, analyses controlling for condition, gender and design attributions revealed a significant interaction between the Person Condition and psychological attributions to the Earth ($\beta=.29, p<0.01$): Relative to the Animal condition, participants in the Person condition who described the Earth in more psychological ways also had harsher judgements of environmentally damaging acts. Analyses of the biocentric nature of these justifications are still ongoing.