In other countries, unfortunately, the rights of native people are ignored. Indonesia, for instance, claims ownership of nearly three-quarters of its forest lands and all waters and offshore fishing rights, ignoring the interests of indigenous people who have lived in these areas for millennia. Similarly, the Philippine government claims possession of all uncultivated land in its territory, while Cameroon and Tanzania recognize no rights at all for forest-dwelling pygmies who represent one of the world's oldest cultures.

1.6 Environmental Ethics

The ways we interpret environmental issues, or our decisions about what we should or should not do with natural resources, depend partly on our basic worldviews. Perhaps you have a basic ethical assumption that you should be kind to your neighbors, or that you should try to contribute in positive ways to your community. Do you have similar responsibilities to take care of your environment? To conserve energy? To prevent the extinction of rare species? Why? Or why not?

Your position on these questions is partly a matter of ethics, or your sense of what is right and wrong. Some of these ideas you learn early in life; some might change over time. Ethical views in society also change over time. In ancient Greece, many philosophers who were concerned with ethics and morality owned slaves; today few societies condone slavery. Most societies now believe it is wrong, or unethical, to treat other humans as property. Often our core beliefs are so deeply held that we have difficulty even identifying them. But they can influence how you act, how you spend money, or how you vote. Try to identify some of your core beliefs. What is a basic thing you simply should or should not do? Where does your understanding come from about those actions?

Ethics also constrain what kinds of questions we are able to ask. Ancient Greeks could not question whether slaves had rights; modern Americans have difficulty asking if it is wrong to consume vastly more energy and goods than other countries do. Many devout religious people find it unconscionable to question basic tenets of their faith. But one of the assumptions of science, including environmental science, is that we should allow ourselves to ask any question, because it is by asking questions that we discover new insights about ourselves and about our world.

We can extend moral value to people and things

One of the reasons we don't accept slavery now, as the ancient Greeks did, is because most societies believe that all humans have basic rights. The Greeks granted moral value, or worth, only to adult male citizens within their own community. Women, slaves, and children had few rights and were essentially treated as property. Over time we have gradually extended our sense of moral value to a wider and wider circle, an idea known as moral extensionism (fig. 1.21). In most countries, women and minorities have basic civil rights, children cannot be treated as property, even domestic pets have some legal protections against cruel treatment. For many people, moral value also extends to domestic livestock (cattle, hogs, poultry), which makes eating meat a fundamentally wrong thing to do. For others, this moral extension ends with pets, or with humans. Some people extend moral value to include forests, biodiversity, inanimate objects, or the earth as a whole.

These philosophical questions aren't simply academic or historical. In 2004, the journal Science caused public uproar by publishing a study demonstrating that fish feel pain. Many recreational anglers had long managed to suppress worries that they were causing pain to fish, and the story was so unsettling that it made national headlines and provoked fresh public debates on the ethics of fishing.

How we treat other people, animals, or things, can also depend on whether we believe they have inherent value—an intrinsic right to exist, or instrumental value (they have value because they are useful to someone who matters). If I hurt you, I owe you an apology. If I borrow your car and smash it into a tree, I don't owe the car an apology, I owe you an apology—or reimbursement.

How does this apply to nonhumans? Domestic animals clearly have an instrumental value because they are useful to their owners. But some philosophers would say they also have inherent values and interests. By living, breathing, struggling to stay alive, the animal carries on its own life independent of its usefulness to someone else.

Some people believe that even nonliving things also have inherent worth. Rocks, rivers, mountains, landscapes, and certainly the earth itself, have value. These things were in existence before we

FIGURE 1.21 Moral extensionism describes an increasing consideration of moral value in other living things—or even nonliving things.

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1.7 Faith, Conservation, and Justice

Ethical and moral values are often rooted in religious traditions, which try to guide us in what is right and wrong to do. With growing public awareness of environmental problems, religious organizations have begun to take stands on environmental concerns. They recognize that some of our most pressing environmental problems don’t need technological or scientific solutions; they’re not so much a question of what we’re able to do, but what we’re willing to do. Are we willing to take the steps necessary to stop global climate change? Do our values and ethics require us to do so? In this section, we’ll look at some religious perspectives and how they influence our attitudes toward nature.

Environmental scientists have long been concerned about religious perspectives. In 1967, historian Lynn White, Jr., published a widely influential paper, “The Historic Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.” He argued that Christian societies have often exploited natural resources carelessly because the Bible says that God commanded Adam and Eve to dominate nature: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28). Since then, many religious scholars have pointed out that God also commanded Adam and Eve to care for the garden they were given, “to till it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). Furthermore, Noah was commanded to preserve individuals of all living species, so that they would not perish in the great Flood. Passages such as these inspire many Christians to insist that it is our responsibility to act as stewards of nature, and to care for God’s creations.

Calls for both environmental stewardship and anthropocentric domination over nature can be found in the writings of most major faiths. The Koran teaches that “each being exists by virtue of the truth and is also owed its due according to nature,” a view that extends moral rights and value to all other creatures. Hinduism and Buddhism teach ahimsa, or the practice of not harming other living creatures, because all living beings are divinely connected (fig. 1.23).

Many faiths support environmental conservation

The idea of stewardship, or taking care of the resources we are given, inspires many religious leaders to promote conservation. “Creation care” is a term that has become prominent among evangelical Christians in the United States. In 1995, representatives of nine major religions met in Ohito, Japan, to discuss views of environmental stewardship in their various traditions. The resulting document, the Ohito Declaration, outlined common beliefs and responsibilities of these different faiths toward protecting the earth and its life (table 1.2). In recent years, religious organizations have played important roles in nature protection. A coalition of evangelical Christians has been instrumental in promoting stewardship of many aspects of our environment, from rare plants and animals to our global climate.