

## **Exploring Environmental Responsibility and Justice in *Don't Look Up* Movie: A Kerafian Ethical Analysis**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Amid escalating global environmental crises, environmental images in movies play an indispensable role in shaping public consciousness and attitudes toward ecological challenges. This study investigates the portrayal of environmental ethics in the film *Don't Look Up* (2021) through Kerafian ethical analysis. As environmental degradation intensifies, cinematic media emerges as a pivotal force in fostering awareness and influencing public perceptions. A qualitative content analysis was conducted, analyzing key scenes and dialogues to identify and interpret ethical themes in the film, guided by the theoretical constructs from Keraf (2010) to extract and categorize ethical themes. Through the analysis of key scenes and dialogues, the study elucidates how these principles manifest, offering a critique of humanity's inadequate response to ecological threats. Data were collected through a systematic examination of the film's narrative, focusing on the integration of core ethical principles, including responsibility, cosmic solidarity, compassion for nature, justice, and democracy (Keraf, 2010). The findings reveal that the film emphasizes collective action, moral accountability, and the urgency of environmental preservation, while simultaneously critiquing political inertia and self-interest. The study underscores the potential of cinematic media to enhance environmental awareness and mobilize public attitudes, positioning *Don't Look Up* as a compelling narrative that critiques humanity's inadequate response to ecological threats.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The intensification of global environmental crises, driven by industrial expansion and population growth, presents a profound challenge to ecological stability, with developing nations experiencing the most severe impacts. Unregulated and excessive exploitation of natural resources often results in irreversible environmental degradation, threatening Earth's delicate equilibrium (Said & Nurhayati, 2020). As ecosystems continue to deteriorate, fostering environmental awareness emerges as a critical global priority. This awareness underscores humanity's intrinsic connection to nature and the profound influence of human activities on ecological balance (Keraf, 2010). Without heightened environmental consciousness, unsustainable practices are likely to persist, further exacerbating the ecological crisis.

To address these challenges, environmental ethics provides a philosophical and moral

framework designed to regulate human interactions with the natural environment. As articulated by (Keraf, 2010), this ethical paradigm emerged in response to humanity's consumptive tendencies and the overexploitation of natural resources. Central to this framework is the imperative to uphold ecological equilibrium, demonstrate reverence for all life forms, and assume accountability for environmental degradation. Environmental ethics shifts the focus from immediate material gains to the consideration of long-term environmental consequences and the welfare of future generations (Hadi et al., 2024). Integrating environmental ethics with public awareness is essential for mitigating ecological disasters and ensuring the planet's sustainability.

Media, particularly film, plays a pivotal role in disseminating moral narratives and cultivating public consciousness about environmental concerns (Lolang et al., 2023). Films serve as potent instruments for visualizing ecological challenges, making abstract issues more tangible and accessible to audiences. For example, *Don't Look Up* (2021) intertwines satirical humor with social critique to depict humanity's apathy toward existential environmental threats. Through its narrative, the film underscores how self-interest and societal distrust obstruct collective initiatives aimed at addressing ecological crises. By engaging viewers with pressing environmental issues, *Don't Look Up* emphasizes the necessity of environmental ethics as a foundational element in confronting global challenges (Halim et al., 2024).

Although environmental issues are increasingly addressed in academic and media discourse, research examining the portrayal of environmental ethics in popular films remains limited. A notable study by Aziz et al. (2023), titled *Folktale of Sewawar Karanganyar Waterfall in Literary Ecological Perspective*, investigates environmental ethics through local folklore. This research identifies deeply embedded ethical principles such as reverence for nature, accountability, cosmic solidarity, empathy toward the environment, and ecological harmony within the oral traditions surrounding the Sewawar Waterfall.

While both the *Sewawar Folktale* and *Don't Look Up* studies explore themes of environmental ethics, they diverge in their mediums and cultural frameworks. The analysis of *Don't Look Up* leverages contemporary cinematic media to critique global indifference toward environmental crises, whereas the *Sewawar Folktale* study relies on oral traditions to illustrate the interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world. This contrast highlights the diverse narrative approaches to environmental ethics and underscores opportunities for future comparative research across varying cultural and media landscapes.

This study investigates the portrayal of environmental ethics in *Don't Look Up* (2021) through the lens of Keraf's (2010) theoretical framework. It examines how the film represents the environmental crisis and critiques anthropocentric negligence and irresponsibility toward nature. The significance of this analysis lies in its potential to enhance understanding of media's role in fostering environmental awareness while advancing the application of ethical theories within popular culture.

By addressing this gap in the literature, the study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it expands the scope of Keraf's environmental ethics by applying it to cinematic narratives, bridging media studies and environmental philosophy. Practically, the findings provide valuable perspectives for media practitioners, encouraging the creation of content that conveys compelling environmental messages. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the necessity of embedding ethical frameworks in media narratives to cultivate greater public consciousness regarding humanity's responsibility to safeguard the environment.

## METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative methodology, prioritizing in-depth exploration over quantitative measurement (Sugiyono, 2013). The primary material, *Don't Look Up*, was meticulously analyzed through repeated viewings. Comprehensive notes were taken to capture scenes and dialogues pertinent to environmental themes, ensuring a detailed understanding of the film's narrative elements

## Coding Framework and Thematic Categorization

To ensure systematic analysis, a coding framework was developed based on Keraf's (2010) ethical principles. This framework provided a structured approach for identifying and categorizing data into meaningful themes. Nine core principles of Keraf's environmental ethics served as the foundation for this analysis, as detailed in Table 1:

**Table 1. Principles of Environmental Ethics by Keraf (2010)**

No	Code	Keraf's Principles of Environmental Ethics
1.	RN	The Principle of Respect for Nature
2.	RS	The Principle of Responsibility
3.	CS	The Principle of Cosmic Solidarity
4.	CC	The Principle of Compassion and Care for Nature
5.	NH	The Principle of Not Harming Nature
6.	LS	The Principles of living simply and in harmony with Nature
7.	JS	The Principle of Justice
8.	DC	The Principle of Democracy
9.	MI	The Principle of Moral Integrity

## Coding Mechanism

A systematic coding mechanism was employed to categorize and organize data efficiently. This mechanism enabled precise identification and classification of relevant film segments, aligning them with Keraf's ethical principles. Codes included specific identifiers for data points, as illustrated below:

### Example of Coding Structure:

**Code:** 1/RN/00:02:13/DLU

**1:** Data number

**RN:** The Principle of Respect for Nature

**00:02:13:** Time stamp in the movie

**DLU:** *Don't Look Up*

This coding framework streamlined the process of correlating pivotal scenes with theoretical constructs, ensuring consistency and accuracy in analysis.

After coding the data, patterns and themes were identified within each category, facilitating a comprehensive examination of the movie's environmental message. The analysis involved interpreting how the film portrays characters' actions and attitudes toward the environment, guided by Keraf's principles. This approach highlighted key elements, such as collective action, moral accountability, and critiques of societal indifference to ecological crises.

To further illustrate the coding process and thematic categorization, the following diagram outlines the workflow:

### **Figure 1. Coding Framework and Thematic Categorization Workflow**

*Film Viewing -> Scene Identification -> Coding (e.g., 1/RN/00:02:13/DLU) -> Thematic Categorization -> Analysis Based on Keraf's Principles*

This structured methodology ensured a rigorous and systematic exploration of *Don't Look Up*, aligning cinematic elements with ethical constructs to deepen understanding of its environmental narrative

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results section explores how *Don't Look Up* embodies Keraf's ethical principles through critical analysis of key dialogues and scenes. The characters' actions and decisions illustrate the principles of responsibility, compassion, cosmic solidarity, justice, and democratic participation. This analysis reveals the film's underlying critique of humanity's failure to adequately confront environmental challenges.

## **The Principles of Responsibility**

Responsibility reflects the ethical obligation to safeguard the environment, ensuring the sustainability of ecosystems for present and future generations. For instance, when Kate and Dr. Mindy confront those in power regarding the impending crisis, their advocacy embodies moral accountability, challenging complacency and denial. Below is an example of how the principle of responsibility is portrayed in the movie:

*1/RS/00:10:58/DLU*

*Kate : Are we really about to tell the president of the US that we have just over six months until humankind, basically every species is completely extinct?*

*Dr. Mindy : Yeah. That's exactly what we're about to do. Yeah*

The principle of responsibility underscores the obligation of humanity to safeguard the environment for both present and future generations. In the discourse between Kate and Dr. Mindy, they acknowledge the grave threats confronting humanity and opt for proactive engagement rather than silence. By alerting those in positions of authority to the looming crisis, they exemplify a profound moral obligation toward environmental stewardship.

Their choice to vocalize their concerns illustrates their awareness that neglecting the issue would exacerbate the situation. This perspective resonates with Keraf's conceptualization of responsibility, which posits that individuals must undertake measures to avert environmental degradation. Furthermore, this exchange critiques the prevalent tendency among many individuals to evade confronting environmental challenges, thereby underscoring the notion that substantive change necessitates the acknowledgment of issues and the willingness to act, even in the face of adversity.

The depiction of responsibility in *Don't Look Up* reflects values that may resonate more strongly with Western cultural norms, particularly the emphasis on individual advocacy and confronting authority. Kate and Dr. Mindy's proactive stance aligns with a tradition of outspoken environmental activism commonly associated with Western societies, where public discourse often encourages individuals to hold leaders accountable. However, this portrayal may not universally translate to other cultural contexts, where societal norms might prioritize collective harmony or deference to authority over direct confrontation. For instance, in cultures with a stronger emphasis on collectivism, addressing environmental issues might manifest through community-driven efforts rather than individual advocacy. This divergence highlights the importance of cultural specificity in interpreting the film's environmental messages, suggesting that while the principle of responsibility is universally significant, its application and resonance may vary based on cultural and societal frameworks.

## **The Principle of Cosmic Solidarity**

Cosmic solidarity emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms, fostering collective responsibility for environmental stewardship. This principle is evident in scenes where characters advocate for immediate action, rejecting passive political responses in favor of proactive engagement. The following data illustrates the principle of cosmic solidarity as depicted in the movie:

*2/CS/00:28:03/DLU*

*Woman 1 : And the president really said to sit tight?*

*Dr. Mindy : Yes, that's correct*

*Kate : Sit tight and assess*

*Woman 2 : She's probably worried about the midterms*

*Woman 1 : We need to move fast*

The principle of cosmic solidarity emphasizes the intrinsic interconnectedness of all living entities and the collective obligation to preserve the environment. Within the dialogue, the characters recognize that the president's counsel to "sit tight and assess" is insufficient in the face of a significant threat to the planet. This passive stance stands in stark contrast to the tenets of cosmic solidarity, which advocate for immediate and decisive action to protect the natural world.

The urgency articulated by Woman 1, who asserts, "we need to move fast," underscores the critical understanding that inaction may precipitate catastrophic consequences. Additionally, Woman 2's observation regarding the president's preoccupation with midterm elections illustrates how political considerations can detract from the pressing imperative of environmental conservation. This exchange highlights the necessity for collective unity and prompt action to confront environmental challenges, rather than allowing political dynamics to impede essential initiatives.

*3/SC/00:31:08/DLU*

*Kate : Okay, so, how are we gonna do this? I talk about the discovery and you talk about how urgent it is that we take action*

*Dr. Mindy : How do we say it? I mean shouldn't we practice it or write it out?*

In the exchange between Kate and Dr. Mindy, Kate underscores the critical importance of collaboration in effectively communicating their significant discovery. She recognizes the necessity of conveying their message with clarity, thereby emphasizing the urgency of the situation. Dr. Mindy's response reflects his apprehension regarding the presentation of their findings, as he seeks to ensure that their message is articulated with both clarity and impact. This interaction illustrates that both characters are acutely aware of the seriousness of their predicament and are resolutely committed to taking action.

Their dialogue embodies their adherence to the principle of cosmic solidarity, which underscores the collective responsibility we share for the environment. By acknowledging that their actions have far-reaching implications for the global ecosystem, they exhibit a profound moral commitment to environmental protection. This sense of solidarity drives them to meticulously prepare for their presentation, with the aim of inspiring others to take action. Collectively, they exemplify the essential role of collaboration and effective communication in addressing environmental challenges and fostering transformative change.

The portrayal of cosmic solidarity in *Don't Look Up* aligns closely with globalist ideals that emphasize international collaboration and shared accountability. However, the narrative also reflects cultural values prevalent in Western contexts, particularly the emphasis on individual agency and direct confrontation with authority. For instance, Kate and Dr. Mindy's proactive approach in addressing environmental crises mirrors the advocacy-driven ethos of many Western societies. Yet, in collectivist cultures, the concept of solidarity may be interpreted differently, often focusing on communal harmony and locally driven initiatives rather than global-scale interventions.

This cultural distinction suggests that while the principle of cosmic solidarity is universally significant, its application is influenced by societal norms and priorities. In some contexts, environmental action might manifest as grassroots efforts to preserve local ecosystems, rather than the large-scale global collaboration depicted in the film. The narrative of *Don't Look Up* invites reflection on how diverse cultural frameworks shape perceptions of ecological responsibility, underscoring the importance of adapting global environmental messages to resonate effectively with varied audiences.

### **The Principle of Compassion and Care for Nature**

This principle underscores the positive emotions, including sympathy and empathy, that humans possess toward nature, the environment, and other living organisms. As integral members of the ecological community, humans are urged to cultivate love, care, and concern for nature and

all its constituents, free from discrimination or domination. A growing awareness and appreciation for the natural world enhances human identity on both mental and spiritual levels, as nature is fundamental to the sustenance of life. The Principle of Compassion and Care for Nature, as portrayed in the film, is exemplified in the following manner:

4/CC/00:49:42/DLU

*Kate : Okay, God, I'm so relieved that you guys are doing something. This has been really, really hard*

*Dr. Mindy : Hey come here. This has been really, really, really stressful on all of us.*

In the exchange between Kate and Dr. Mindy, Kate expresses her relief that proactive measures are finally being implemented. This relief reflects her profound concern for both the environment and the individuals impacted by the crisis. It is evident that the emotional burden of the situation weighs heavily on both characters, as they grapple not only with the physical degradation of the Earth but also with the implications of the crisis on their mental well-being and that of those around them.

Dr. Mindy's response further underscores the importance of emotional support in this context. By recognizing that the situation has been a source of stress for all parties involved, he demonstrates an understanding of the emotional challenges associated with confronting such a significant threat. This interaction exemplifies the critical role of compassion in addressing environmental issues. Their dialogue highlights the necessity of mutual support during difficult times, emphasizing that empathy can serve as a powerful motivator for individuals to engage in actions that benefit the planet.

While the Principle of Compassion and Care for Nature is universally relevant, its portrayal in *Don't Look Up* reflects cultural norms often associated with Western societies, where emotional expression and individual acknowledgment of stress are commonly emphasized. This focus on personal well-being and emotional support aligns with Western values of open communication and psychological care. However, in some cultures, the concept of compassion may be interpreted differently, with a stronger emphasis on collective resilience and less overt expression of individual emotions. For instance, in collectivist societies, emotional care might manifest as community-driven support systems rather than personal exchanges.

This distinction highlights how cultural contexts shape the interpretation and application of environmental ethics. While the film's emphasis on emotional empathy resonates universally, its specific depiction may be more aligned with cultural frameworks that prioritize individual acknowledgment of stress. Exploring how different audiences perceive and internalize such portrayals can provide valuable insights into the cultural adaptability of environmental narratives, underscoring the importance of tailoring messages to diverse societal values.

### **The Principle of Justice**

This principle underscores the necessity of equitable access for all societal groups and individuals to engage in decision-making processes related to the management, conservation, and utilization of natural resources. The principle of justice is exemplified in the film, as evidenced by the data presented below:

5/JS/01:02:41/DLU

*Peter : Hey, everyone, mind if I join? Hello.*

*President Orlean : Hello, Peter. Hi.*

*Peter : Oh, Brie, you look fabulous. As always*

*Kate : Is he allowed to be in here?*

*Jason : Yeah, he's a Platinum Eagle level donor to the campaign. He has full clearance*

In the aforementioned dialogue, Jason discloses that Peter is permitted entry into the room

due to his status as a Platinum Eagle-level donor, which affords him "full clearance." This situation underscores how Peter's financial contributions to the campaign facilitate his access to a venue where critical decisions are made. His elevated status is both recognized and respected as a result of his substantial donation, illustrating the manner in which individual contributions are acknowledged within this context.

This exchange exemplifies the principle of justice, wherein rights and privileges are allocated based on an individual's contributions. Peter's access, obtained through his financial support, adheres to a procedural framework that values the role of donors. The dialogue illustrates how the system acknowledges and rewards individuals according to their contributions, thereby aligning with the broader concept of fairness in the distribution of rights and recognition.

The portrayal of justice in *Don't Look Up* reflects a critique of systemic inequities often associated with Western capitalist societies, where access to decision-making spaces is frequently influenced by financial or social capital. The dialogue highlights the disproportionate power afforded to wealthy individuals, suggesting a system that equates financial contributions with influence and privilege. This depiction may resonate strongly in societies where economic disparities play a central role in governance and policy-making.

However, the principle of justice as depicted in the film may not universally align with cultural contexts where communal decision-making and egalitarian principles are emphasized. In collectivist societies, justice might be interpreted as ensuring equal participation for all members of the community, regardless of socioeconomic status. This cultural divergence underscores the importance of examining how systemic power dynamics shape interpretations of justice and equity across different societal frameworks. By critiquing a system that privileges wealth over collective well-being, *Don't Look Up* invites audiences to reflect on the universality of justice and its applicability in addressing global environmental challenges.

### **The Principle of Democracy**

The principle of democracy in the context of environmental issues entails the inclusion of all relevant authorities in the decision-making processes pertaining to environmental matters. This principle is crucial for the formulation of environmental policies, as it influences the assessment of whether such policies are advantageous or detrimental, as well as their potential to contribute to pollution. The representation of this principle is illustrated in the data presented below:

6/DC/00:05:30/DLU

*Dr. Calder* : *This is Dr. Calder. You pulled me out of a meeting where I had to tell my team w lost eight billion in funding*

*Dr. Mindy* : *I am so sorry Dr. Calder, but we are seeing some awfully strange orbital number on this comet we just found. They should be in your inbox, right?*

In the dialogue, Dr. Mindy and Kate reached out to Dr. Calder to communicate their findings regarding the anomalous orbital parameters of the comet they had discovered. Despite Dr. Calder's preoccupation with pressing issues, such as the loss of eight billion dollars in funding, they provided him with the pertinent information, thereby demonstrating their commitment to fostering collaborative discourse. This action exemplifies a cooperative approach, as they actively sought the insights of another expert, acknowledging that complex issues necessitate diverse perspectives.

By engaging Dr. Calder, Dr. Mindy and Kate illustrated their receptiveness to contributions from various authorities in addressing their discovery. This reflects their recognition that scientific findings and subsequent decisions, particularly those related to potential threats such as the comet, are enhanced by the inclusion of multiple experts to ensure that all relevant knowledge and viewpoints are taken into account. Such engagement is vital for making well-informed decisions in critical situations.

The portrayal of democracy in *Don't Look Up* reflects ideals of open discourse and collaborative decision-making, which are often associated with Western democratic norms. The

emphasis on engaging multiple stakeholders and experts aligns with values of inclusivity and transparency prevalent in many Western societies. However, in cultural contexts where hierarchical decision-making or centralized authority is the norm, the representation of democratic principles may resonate differently. For instance, in societies with a top-down governance model, the prioritization of expert consultation might be seen as secondary to the directives of central authorities.

This cultural variance suggests that while the principle of democracy is globally significant, its application and interpretation can be influenced by societal norms and governance structures. The film's emphasis on collaborative decision-making serves as a critique of authoritarian tendencies, but it also invites reflection on how diverse cultural frameworks can integrate democratic principles to address environmental challenges effectively. By exploring these distinctions, *Don't Look Up* highlights the importance of adapting environmental narratives to resonate with varying cultural and political contexts, ensuring broader relevance and impact.

## DISCUSSION

Utilizing Keraf's (2010) framework, this study critically examines the portrayal of environmental ethics in the film *Don't Look Up*. The analysis reveals how ethical principles, including responsibility, cosmic solidarity, compassion for nature, justice, and democracy, are intricately woven into the film's narrative to critique humanity's response to environmental crises. By emphasizing moral responsibility and collective action, the film underscores the urgency of addressing ecological challenges. It critiques indifference, self-interest, and political apathy, aligning with established theoretical concepts in environmental ethics.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by demonstrating the applicability of Keraf's ethical principles in analyzing contemporary cinematic narratives. It expands the understanding of how popular culture, particularly satire, can serve as a medium for embedding and communicating ethical values. By situating environmental ethics within the framework of media studies, this research provides a novel interdisciplinary lens for examining the intersection of philosophy and cultural narratives.

Practically, this study highlights the significant role films play in shaping public perceptions and enhancing environmental awareness. Media creators can leverage these findings to craft narratives that not only resonate with audiences but also inspire action. The insights gained from this research underscore the potential of cinematic storytelling to motivate collective efforts toward environmental sustainability. Previous studies have emphasized the role of oral traditions in fostering environmental awareness (Aziz et al., 2023). This study complements those findings by showcasing how films can act as powerful tools for critiquing societal and political indifference, thereby advancing public discourse on ecological issues.

It is important to note that this study focuses on the analysis of a single film, which limits the ability to generalize its conclusions. Future research should broaden the scope to include a diverse range of media formats and evaluate their impact on viewers' emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. Additionally, exploring audience reception across different cultural contexts could provide valuable insights into how environmental ethics are perceived globally.

By integrating ethical principles into media narratives, *Don't Look Up* not only raises awareness but also fosters a sense of urgency to take action. This research highlights the dual role of films as both mirrors and critiques of societal values, offering a foundation for future studies to further explore the dynamic interplay between media and environmental ethics.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, an analysis of the film *Don't Look Up* through the framework of environmental ethics elucidates fundamental principles such as responsibility, cosmic solidarity, justice, and democracy in the context of the ecological crisis. The film exemplifies these principles by emphasizing the characters' moral duty to protect the planet, their acknowledgment of the



interconnectedness between humanity and nature, and the necessity of equitable and inclusive decision-making processes. The findings underscore the imperative for a collective and responsible approach to environmental challenges, calling upon individuals and authorities to undertake meaningful actions to ensure the sustainability of the Earth's future.

The significance of this research lies in its capacity to connect environmental ethics with popular media, demonstrating how films like *Don't Look Up* can enhance awareness of urgent ecological issues. By examining the portrayal of ethical principles within the film, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how media can shape public attitudes toward environmental responsibility and inspire transformative change in both individual behaviors and policy-making.

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