

The Future of Business in a Technological Age
Session 3: Moving Beyond Zero Impact
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Briefly: In reaction against the negative impact of consumerism, conservationism aims to have zero impact: zero emissions, circular economies, leave no trace. How can we go beyond this to realise the richness of the positive impact implicit in a biblical view of humanity's role in cultivating the world?

Less briefly: "Zero impact" frames the situation as saying that any impact humans have is bad. In such a case, we might as well not be here. Indeed, if we just wanted to ensure humans had zero impact on the environment, the easiest and fastest solution is to kill and bury 7 billion people. That conclusion should raise a red flag. At very least, a biblical perspective requires that we view a world with humans as better than a world without them. Given humanity's biblical mandate to tend, curate, and cultivate the world, we should be aiming to have an impact on the world, and making sure it is a good one. As such, while it is good that the mindset of "zero impact" questions consumerism, it replaces it with a view of humanity and our role on earth that is deeply at odds with a Christian view of man, and which needs to be rethought.

Nuance: To be clear, having people aiming for zero impact is a better problem to have than having people aim at endless consumption. We are just saying it does not go far enough. By way of connections to Talk 1, the aim of Zero Impact addresses the first problem of consumerism, namely that we consume too much stuff. A significant obstacle that prevents it from going further is that it fails to challenge the second problem, namely that we view ourselves, at root, as being consumptive beings.

Once our view of humanity is corrected, we can ask questions like "How do we repair?", "How do we clean up after ourselves?", "How do we purify water; regenerate the land?", "How do we embrace the nature of our humanity as creating beings?"

Readings:

Readings will be taken from the standard course texts.



Ho Kin-Chung started his working life in the Environmental Protection Department of the Hong Kong Government in the Water Policy Group, during which time he studied for his PhD with the University of Hong Kong, researching the significance of red tides in subtropical waters, and in Hong Kong specifically. He subsequently joined the Open Learning Institute as Program Leader in Environmental Studies, and was involved in the process of re-accrediting the institution as The Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK). He was promoted to professor in Environmental Studies in 2002, and appointed Dean of the School of Science and Technology at OUHK in 2008. His academic interests include marine ecology, water quality, environmental policies, environmental ethics, and environmental education, including school and public engagement. He is a Council Member of the Hong Kong Climate Change Forum and the Hong Kong Green Council, Honorary President of Green Power, and President of the Macau Green Environmental Protection Association.



Mak Chen Wen Ning started her career as a teacher at Queen Elizabeth School. She went on to lecture at Grantham College of Education, ultimately becoming Vice Principle of Northcote College of Education until its amalgamation to form the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd, now EdUHK), a process which she helped oversee. Since 2000 she has taken numerous roles relating to environmental care of Hong Kong, including being part of the Monitoring Group on Trials and Studies for the Harbour Area Treatment Scheme, a member of the Wetland Advisory Committee, and panel member of the Environmental Impact Assessment Appeal Board. She is now Chair of HomelandGreen, a non-profit organisation which aims to improve soil quality and reverse desertification and soil degradation. Their activities include raising awareness of the importance of soil, supporting local farmers to regenerate soil in Hong Kong, and supporting tree-planting projects in Mainland China to combat desertification.