1. **What does ecological consciousness involve or require?**

The Australian philosopher Val Plumwood, who died in 2008, was an important innovator in our thinking about the environment and our place in it. A recent episode of ABC Radio National’s *The Philosopher’s Zone* showcased Plumwood’s thinking. You can listen to the episode, featuring Lara Stevens and audio clips from Plumwood, [here](https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/philosophy-and-ecology/13302258).

Plumwood argued for many years that a true ecological consciousness involved seeing ourselves as integrated into our environments, as parts of a habitable world that we have a responsibility to cultivate. She also thought that this view challenged dominant, masculine, anthropocentric ways of thinking about our place in the world and developed her critique as part of an eco-feminist worldview. Her ideas have taken a long time to gain more widespread support within philosophy and they met with much resistance for many years. This raises some interesting questions about how (and by whom) novel ideas are generated, discussed, and accepted.

Rob Wilson

**2. Is the main value of sports to entertain spectators and participants?**

Sports occupy a prominent place in Australian society, as they do in many societies. They are a key part of school education as well as of our broader recreational culture. There are many types of sports. Some involve individuals competing directly against each other (e.g., a singles table tennis match); others involve teams of people working together to achieve a goal (e.g., the team swim to Rottnest Island).

Sports events also draw some of the largest live and television audiences. Those that are thought of as most successful typically embed the sport activity itself in a much larger entertainment event. It is easy to see the main value of sports to spectators to be entertainment.

But could we think that this is the main value of sports to participants as well? Basically, sports simply give us something to keep us entertained, to keep our minds and bodies occupied, to keep us busy. How would you argue against someone who held this view of either the main value of sports for spectators or participants?

Rob Wilson

**3. Could our computer be our friend?**

Machines, robots, or computational systems that display sophisticated behaviours are sometimes said to have *artificial intelligence*. Some famous examples include chess-playing computers, such as Deep Blue, which can beat (nearly?) all human experts, and Siri, the personal assistant offered by Apple, which assists users to find information, get directions, and send messages.

As this second example indicates, AIs play an increasing role in our day-to-day lives. But could they come to replace other humans in more personal ways? Could AIs become more than useful to us, but part of our *social networks*? Could we be friends with our computers?

Here you might think about what friendship involves, the role of emotions in human relationships, and whether there is any limit to or danger in these expanded roles for machines, robots, or computational systems in our social lives.

Rob Wilson

**4. In what ways should ‘sacred spaces’ be respected?**

In 2000 the government of the northeastern Indian state of Sikkim banned mountain climbers from attempting to summit Mount Kanchenjunga – the world’s third tallest mountain, straddling Indian and Nepal. The ban followed a protest by local Buddhists who were incensed as to the desecration of the mountain by so-called god-less foreigners. "It is a gesture of respect for the religious sensitivities of the people who regard the mountain as a deity," Sikkim's former chief minister, BB Goorong, said. Mountaineers can, however, approach the mountain from Nepal, a different jurisdiction. Kunzang Gyatso, the president of the Sikkim Mountaineering Association (SMA), said that those who wish to climb Kanchenjunga can do it from the Nepal side without hurting religious sentiments of the locals in Sikkim.

A similar ban has been enacted in Australia as people have been prohibited from climbing Uluru, which holds special spiritual significance for the local Anangu people. One Anangu man said that Uluru was a “very sacred space. It is “like our Church”.

This leads to general questions about how places seen as sacred to one culture or religion should be respected by those from other cultures or religions. Are there places of similar importance that should also be revered by others? We might also consider how such places should be respected – both by those they are special to and those who do not share these views.

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