

# Values and Responsibilities towards the Environment: An Ethical Exploration

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## Abstract

Values and responsibilities towards the environment form the foundation of our ethical obligations to the natural world. They guide our attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes, influencing how we interact with and impact the environment. Values and responsibilities towards the Environment involves stewardship, respect for nature, interconnectedness and intergenerational equity, conservation, population reduction, sustainable resource use, advocacy and education. These values and responsibilities emphasizes a sense of guardianship and the belief that we should act as responsible caretakers of the Earth, preserving its resources and biodiversity for present and future generations. It entails treating nature with reverence, acknowledging the beauty and complexity of ecosystems, and recognizing the rights of non-human beings. Our actions have consequences that ripple through the web of life, and that harming one aspect of the environment can have cascading effects on others. This recognizes the rights of future generations to inherit a sustainable and healthy planet and calls for responsible resource management and the avoidance of actions that would burden future generations. In this respect we need a kind of moral revolution to transform human behavior for the welfare of the society. Therefore, the present paper emphasizes on Bio-centric approach through which we can sustain the environment. We can foster a more sustainable and ethically grounded relationship with the environment by embracing these values and fulfilling our responsibilities. Recognizing the intrinsic value of nature, practicing stewardship, and considering the well-being of future generations are essential for promoting environmental sustainability and ensuring a thriving planet for all living beings.

**Keywords:** Biocentrism, Environmental Ethics, Sustainability, Responsibilities, Values

## Introduction

Environmental issues refer to problems or challenges that arise from human activities and their impact on the environment. These issues encompass a wide range of concerns, including climate change, deforestation, pollution, loss of biodiversity, habitat destruction, and resource depletion. These types of ecological disorder are mainly arises due to the profit motive activity of human beings. Human is the most powerful living being on the earth and they have misused their physical and mental power to satisfy their greed rather than need. They have maltreated the nature and exploited it for their economic benefit.

And they forget their responsibility and value towards the nature. Environmental issues have far-reaching consequences for ecosystems, wildlife, human health, and the overall well-being of the planet. Biocentrism is an ethical perspective that recognizes the intrinsic value and rights of all living beings, irrespective of their utility to humans. It emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life forms and challenges the anthropocentric view that humans are the center of moral consideration. Biocentrism encourages respect, compassion, and stewardship towards the natural world, recognizing the inherent worth of non-human entities. Value and responsibility plays a

major role in order to solve the ecological problems.

Biocentrism and sustainability offer perspectives and approaches for addressing environmental issues:

- Biocentrism challenges the underlying anthropocentric mindset that often leads to the exploitation and degradation of the environment. By recognizing the intrinsic value of nature, biocentrism promotes ethical behavior and decision-making that consider the well-being of all living beings, not just humans. It encourages us to re-evaluate our relationship with the natural world and strive for more harmonious coexistence.
- Sustainability provides a framework for addressing environmental issues by emphasizing long-term thinking and responsible resource management. It guides us in making choices that minimize negative impacts on the environment, promote conservation, and support the well-being of both current and future generations. Sustainable practices are essential for mitigating environmental issues and ensuring a thriving planet.

By integrating biocentric principles into sustainable practices, we can work towards resolving environmental issues while fostering a more respectful and balanced relationship with nature. This requires acknowledging the intrinsic value of non-human entities, adopting eco-friendly technologies and practices, and promoting conservation efforts to safeguard the Earth's ecosystems and biodiversity.

### **Relation between Human Being and Environment**

Environment provides all the basic needs required for the sustenance of life on earth. Living beings extract resources from the environment and generate wastes in order to survive. For example, in the process of respiration human beings as well as other living beings use oxygen from the environment and leave generated carbon dioxide into the environment. In fact, every living organism including man influences its environment and by

the process gets influenced by it. Man and nature relationship is very complex and multidimensional. Debate over man-nature relationship has become more intense and focused after the emergence of environment crises. In fact, every living organism including man influences its environment and by the process gets influenced by it. Man and nature relationship is very complex and multidimensional. Debate over man-nature relationship has become more intense and focused after the emergence of environment crises. Environmental ethics gives important to human capacity and choice that man has certain values and duties towards the nature (Taylor, 2011). Environmental virtue ethics reflects the significance of actual values in life Sandler & Cafaro, (2005). For example, it can be demonstrated a virtuous person or ecologically dedicated people always have immense pleasure while performing different works like composting, cleaning green spaces and so on. Natural environment helps one to develop in a moral, spiritual, intellectual, physical way and it too provides health and aesthetic benefits. These natural benefits are more available to some people who love the experience of nature and relate to it. Natural environment is a foundation of happiness, regeneration, knowledge and nurturing for those people. According to the dynamic and evolving understanding of themselves and their environment, humans have made a continual effort to confine themselves within the nature or nature within themselves. Humans have influenced their environment as well as got influenced by it from ancient times. Renaissance scholars have found that deforestation, irrigation, and grazing has altered the land and affected the local habitats and the ecosystem Kopnina (2014). Human impact has never been as far-reaching as in the years since the industrial revolution or the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene encompasses the age of human activities that has significantly presided over and above the ecosystem (Moore, 2016). In the light of these significant scientific developments, it seems quite irrelevant to say that man and nature are two separate and independent entities and man is superior to the rest of nature. In fact, many of our problems especially environmental problems came into

existence as a consequence of the man-centric outlook. The feeling of separateness and superiority of humans from the rest of the nature has developed the feelings that nature can be conquered and subdued without any moral obligation. Consequently, human beings have created the environmental crisis.

### **Environmental Responsibility**

The dictionary meaning of responsibility is the fact of having a duty. Here the duty means duty towards yourself and duty towards the other. To know clearly, what is that makes it so difficult to conceive of responsibility in the perspective of environmental problems, first we have to know a rapid review at what we may call the historical, juridical and modern notion of responsibility. This historical discussion has been seen in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* – and the theological and philosophical debates on determinism and free will by Epicurus, Augustine are leading up to the historical discussions in Hume, Hegel and Kant and others (Grayling, 2019). During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the modern meaning of the term develops in particular way. The term Responsibility is most clearly expressed over its juridical norm and it's also has the ethical overview. The problem regarding the environmental issues is serious and it is difficult to solve. Hence, Responsibility plays a major role to solve the environmental problems.

When responsibility part is increased, environment harming caused by the action of an agent is decreased. To impute responsibility, it requires a strong view of the action and its promising consequences and the agent should be declared, responsible with reference to the harm caused by his action. It is started with the technological innovation. Hence, we are known with possible effects but in larger way the hazards are largely unknown to us. As humans are so addicted to technology they forget about the nature. Through duties and responsibilities we can take care of the nature.

### **Environmental Values**

Values can define as a wide preference. Value etymologically means, something is worth or something is very important. It is normally used in economic conception. In ethics, value denotes the degree of importance so some things or action. For example, home is valuable because it give us shelter. Here Value means satisfaction of desire. In our day to day life there is something which is more valuable for leading a good life. There are two types of value in ethics, like intrinsic and instrumental value. Intrinsic value is that which states a things have its own value or things are valuable in it selves. So we should not identify the value of a things because it is useful, we cannot take it valuable because its usefulness. But instrumental value only focuses on the use of the things. If a thing is useful to us then it is valuable. But it is one type of selfish attitude towards the nature. As in this paper I have focus on environmental sustainability or the ecological problem we should take into account on intrinsic value of the nature. Environment is not valuable because it is useful to human beings rather environment has its own value. It has a value by itself. This intrinsically value of nature which is also found in biocentrism which is precisely discussed.

### **Biocentric Approach towards the Environment**

There are two types of theories which are used in western tradition, like anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism is a theory which considered humans to be the most important factor and value in the universe. And the other elements like nature which is exists in this world are only for the enjoyment of human beings. These types of attitude are the main cause of the ecological crises. Starting from Greek tradition there was also these types of attitude for the nature. Like starting from Plato to Aristotle, they are only focus on human beings and the benefit of the human beings. According to Aristotle, there is a hierarchy or a pyramid in which man is the first priority and the other things are under the human beings (Pabst, 2012). There is also human centric attitude in

Christianity view. Greek philosopher Protagoras also states that “man is the measure of all things” (Schiappa, 2013). According to them everything in this world are created for the sake of human beings. God created human beings as his image. The trees, fishes, birds, animals etc. are only for the use of human beings. So, man has the power for the use of the nature, and that power is given by the God.

So, in this human centric attitude is the main cause of the ecological degradation. Anthropocentric attitude towards the nature mainly states there is no value of other things except human beings. By criticizing the anthropocentrism there is other attitude which focuses on value of nature that non anthropocentrism attitude towards the nature. Bio-centric and ecocentric comes under non-anthropocentric attitude, which are focus on value of nature. In this paper I am going to discuss bio centrist attitude and how it focuses on value of nature.

Bio centric promises to wider the scope of moral concern to include not only human beings but all living entities including non-human animals, plants, etc. Paul Taylor is the champion of this biocentric thought. Bio-centrism states that all life from that exists in this world are equally important. This world view considers human to be more important than any other species of organism that occur on earth. So here this approach is also called as life centric, that all life is equally important and they have equally value. So, bio-centric approach gives prior importance to both the human beings and the non-human entities. The biocentric philosophers have broken the boundary of traditional ethical position. The traditional ethical theories talks about the non-human value and the non-human morality. This is the most valuable and important transformation in environmental philosophy. The concept of animal rights is very much important in the respect of biocentric world view. Biocentric world view is the first those who emphasis on human rights including animals rights.

## Conclusion

From the above discussion of biocentrism approach, it is comprehended that this theory motivates the value, responsibility and duty towards yourself and the other. It also involved the love towards the living and nonliving beings, which leads to solve the environmental problems and maintain the environmental sustainability. In every situation the practice of character building should be implemented as a means of a particular attribute because in present time it is necessary to give attention on environmental problems and to save nature from disaster. Moreover, the environmental issues also demands proper and optimum use of the natural resources to balance the eco-system. That is why we have to use the resources of nature in such a way so that it can fulfill the needs of our present generation without comprising the needs of the future generation. Therefore, we need to create awareness about the serious environmental concerns among people and have to unite and work together across the world in order to save our mother earth.

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