



JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

Volume 1, Number 3 (December 2025)

ISSN: 1595-9457 (online); 3093-060X (print)

Website: <https://jppssuniuyo.com/jpci> Email: jppssuniuyo@gmail.com

Received: December 20, 2025 Accepted: December 30, 2025 Published: December 31, 2025

Citation: Ushie, Thomas E. & Agabi, Gabriel A. (2025). "Anthropocentric Antagonism and the Rationality of Humans in Environmental Ethics: A Discourse on Sustainable Human Future." *Journal of Philosophy and Contemporary Issues*, 1 (3): 67-78.

Article

Open Access

ANTHROPOCENTRIC ANTAGONISM AND THE RATIONALITY OF HUMANS IN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS: A DISCOURSE ON SUSTAINABLE HUMAN FUTURE

Thomas Egaga Ushie¹ & Gabriel Akwaji Agabi²

Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Nigeria^{1&2}

Corresponding Email: thomasushie@gmail.com¹

Abstract

In this article, we argue that values in nature are human-centered (anthropocentric) rather than nature or nonhuman-centered (ecocentric); that humans superintend over their relative environment; that nevertheless, humans need nature to survive rather than vice versa. Consequent upon the foregoing, the centeredness of human in the universe is to care for the human and nonhuman entities by ensuring balance and ontological harmony in the ecosystem. In this context, humans are endowed with higher rational faculty to make reasonable decisions and since humans depend on the ecosystem for survival, they are duty-bound, as a matter of obligation, to use their rational power to protect the nonhumans while exploring the natural resources for their needs. Whereas we agree, to a reasonable extent, that value is human-centered, and that other nonhumans serves to a reasonable extent, the needs of humans, we reject the extreme instrumental value ascribed to anthropocentric axiology. We therefore submit with a call for rational anthropocentrism in environmental ethics. Rational anthropocentrism emphasizes the dictates of reason in human interactions with nonhumans in the ecosystem and asserts that man ought to deploy his faculty of reasoning to avoid, prevent and/or address any environmental disequilibrium, disharmony or disaster that might arise in the course of humans' use of nature for their good or from natural disasters. This article uses textual and critical analysis to achieve its aims while reflecting on the way nature and humans have manifested themselves in the universe.

Keywords: Anthropocentrism, Eco-ethics, Rationality, Nature, Environmental Sustainability.

Introduction

The debate over morality, rationality, spirituality, or not, of environmental anthropocentrism seems to have been laid to rest, with the enunciation of several environmental ethical

Copyright © 2025 By JPCI. Publishers: Omega Books

This is an open access article which permits unrestricted use provided the work is properly cited.

theories such as ecocentrism, ecofeminism, deep ecology and environmental justice, tailored to banish and bid it farewell. This did not come to pass without the diverse connotation and construal of the term “anthropocentrism”, across related, interrelated and unrelated disciplines, especially the view that the concept negates intrinsic value in nonhuman, thereby construing them from instrumental perspective – as only useful for humans. As Gardiner (398) observes, human actions ought to be opened to ethical evaluation and assessment. Accordingly, the debate on the morality of anthropocentrism was resuscitated in 1997 with an article by Tim Hayward titled “Anthropocentrism: A Misunderstood Problem” where he partly defended the morality of the term from ethical perspective while condemning same as ontological error. The partial defense of the term did not go down well with some environmental ethicists such as Helen Kopina, Haydn Washington, Bron Taylor and John J. Piccolo, who wrote a counter argument in 2018 in an article titled “Anthropocentrism: More than Just a Misunderstood Problem” positing that the term is totally immoral as it promotes ecocide and as such, it should not be adored. Our work is a further contribution to the debate, as we rejig the term from a human rational viewpoint.

The way and manner humans interact with nature ought to be directed by ethical philosophies that are tailored towards the preservation of not just human but also, nonhuman beings in the universe, within the context of the existence of rational human beings. Therefore, in analyzing anthropocentric environmental ethics and charting a rational course towards sustainable human future, several questions agitate philosophers of nature such as: Does nature need human to survive? And can human survive without nature? Both puzzles cannot be solved without recourse to speculation, intuition and presupposition, no matter how scientific the investigation and subsequent solutions might seem. This is so because neither man nor nature have been validly accounted to have existed without each other. Hence, a complementary harmonious rational relationship is inevitably required by both, particularly the sentient humans, to ensure existential eco-ethics and enhancement of the essences of each other. Other moral ecological questions that agitate our minds include: Is it in doubt that humans are at the center of all beings? Is it still debatable that human beings, as the most advanced rational beings, have and/or are conquering other beings and are exercising dominion over every other beings? And is it unethical or existentially evil for humans to negate the intrinsic value of nonhuman to their own advantage? Whereas we do not see anything fundamentally wrong with humans’ place and position in the ecosystem, as the most advanced rational being, it is morally binding on humans to exercise their dominion within the ambit of rationality, taking cognizance of the fact that it is human beings who need nature to survive and not necessarily vice versa. Hence, we recommend rational anthropocentrism as the way of interacting and complementarily using the abundant species in nature for the good of humans. To address the foregoing, this article is divided into five sections: critical analysis and hermeneutics of the term “anthropocentrism”, critique of anthropocentrism, explication of the rationality of humans and towards a rational anthropocentric ethics for sustainable human future. This is followed by the conclusion.

Anthropocentrism

Advancing a clear and acceptable definition of the term “anthropocentrism” in environmental philosophy, is bugged with epistemological and axiological ambiguities and polemics. Nevertheless, we shall attempt explication of the term through its etymology, lexis, and expositions by different scholars and literatures. Etymologically, anthropocentrism is derived from the Greek words “Anthropos” (man), and “kentron” (center), translated as

“human centeredness”. The etymological construal of anthropocentrism connotes different and differing ethico-epistemic understanding of the planet: that humans are at the driver’s seat of socio-ecological care and concern; that humans rule, lead, control or superintend over the universe and everything therein; and at the extreme, that only human matters in the socio-existential ecosystem and everything else that exists should be evaluated in terms of their utility or value to humans; that humans possess intrinsic value while nonhumans like plants and animals, possess instrumental value. Lexically, *Macquarie Dictionary* construes anthropocentrism as the view “regarding [hu]man[s] as the central fact of the universe;” the assumption that humans are the “final end and aim of the universe”; and the viewing and interpretation of “everything in terms of human experiences and values” (Grey, 100). Anthropocentrism is defined by *Webster Dictionary*, as the consideration of man “to be the most significant entity of the universe” or the interpretation or “regarding the world in terms of human values and experiences”. The *Shorter Oxford* dictionary however excludes the concept of “values” from its definition, positing that anthropocentrism is a concept which centres on man, “regarding man as the central fact of the universe, to which all surrounding facts have reference” (Grey, 102).

The foregoing lexical definitions sees anthropocentrism from the Protagoraean perspective where [hu]mans are to a certain extent, the measure of all things: what is valuable in the universe, nature or the ecosystem, what to preserve or destroy, what to exploit and plunder, what to spare, what to remediate, regenerate and conserve. These interpretations, notwithstanding, does not strip the human being of its rationality, in controlling their robust appetite for the exploration and exploitation of the natural resources in the ecosystem. The human beings being the “most significant entity of the universe”, or the “central fact of the universe”, confer more responsibility on them, with regards to ensuring ecological harmony and sustenance in order to ensure a sustainable future for the ecosystem and/or the universe rather than endangerment and ecocide. Vardy and Grosch, advanced two theses from which anthropocentrism could be understood – the strong and weak theses. The “strong thesis” view, they hold, is “predicated on the belief that not only are humans at the center of reality but that they ought to be so”. On the other hand, the “weak thesis” version is predicated on the “simple understanding that reality can only be interpreted from a human point of view, and that, therefore, humans have to be at the center of reality as they see it”. While the weak thesis does not presuppose the incapacitation of humans imaginative power in probing into the possibility or likeness of reality from the “perspective of a non-human or even non-living entity, but it is perhaps beyond the realm of human ingenuity to discover what the internal consciousness of cats, dogs, sand-fleas and others may be like”. The dog, Vardy and Gosch aver, does not moralize about how it should be treated neither does the trees reason about their own existence (224). Nevertheless, rational anthropocentrism which emphasis the dictates of reason, asserts that man ought to deploy his faculty of reasoning to address any environmental disequilibrium, disharmony or disaster that might arise in the course of human’s interaction with nature.

Environmental ethicists, like Helen Kopina, Haydn Washington, Bron Taylor and John J. Piccolo, hold the view that anthropocentrism, in its original connotation in environmental ethics, is the belief that “value is human-centered and that all other beings are means to human ends.” They contend that environmentally-concerned scholars have argued that anthropocentrism is “ethically wrong and at the root of ecological crises” (Kopnina, Washington et al, 119). Whereas we agree, to a reasonable extent, that value is human-

centered, and that other nonhumans serves to a reasonable extent, the needs of humans, we reject the extreme instrumental value ascribed to anthropocentric axiology. Corroborating Kopina, Washington, Taylor, Piccolo and others, and following from the etymological and lexical construal, Solon saw anthropocentrism as the viewpoint which holds that “human beings are the central and most important entity in the world; that humans are superior to non-human life because they are the only ones that have consciousness, values and moral status.” He explains further that this perspective sees nature as “something separate from humans; it exists for the survival and development of human societies; it is the ‘environment’ of humans and a set of resources that can be exploited for their benefit” (107). The assertion of Kopina and others that anthropocentrists see nature as separate from humans is far from reality as humans, irrespective of their socio-environmental persuasion, are enchanted by nature’s splendor.

In another article, while explicating anthropocentrism, Crist and Kopina construe the earth in its natural state as “inexhaustible, largely unknown, enchanted, mysterious, and more encompassing”, as the “original ontology” which they sadly note has been “supervened, while the man-made ontology of the civilized human has become physically entrenched and certainly conceptually reified”. And this, they aver, is “ontological inversion of a part (anthropos) claiming the whole (the biosphere)”, which has emerged through historical course, to the present (389). And the inverted ontology, they believe gave birth to anthropocentric conception of the universe with humans exercising unrestrained dominance and plunder of the earth in adoration of civilization. Explicating anthropocentrism from “inside out”, they contend, from a relativist perspective, that humans have arrogated to themselves the vantage position of being at the center of the earth, dictating what is and what is not, what should be and what should not be. This viewpoint has its ontology in the Judeo-Christian religion where [hu]man is seen to have been given the command by God to “increase, multiply, subdue and dominate” the universe and everything therein (Genesis 1:26-28). Contrary to Kopina and others, philosophers such as Vardy and Grosch posit that since “philosophy in general and moral reasoning in particular are straightforward human activities”, discourses on environmental ethics is “bound, to a greater or lesser extent, to be anthropocentric” (224). Nevertheless, they did not take any explicit stand on the proprietary of the universe, being owned, conquered and dominated by humans to the exclusion of nonhumans, although anthropocentrism in environmental ethics suggests that existing nonhumans should be evaluated in terms of their utility or value to humans, that is, that humans possess intrinsic value while nonhumans like plants, possess instrumental or extrinsic value.

For Hayward, whereas anthropocentrism can “intelligibly be criticized as an ontological error,” any attempts to “conceive of it as an ethical error are liable to conceptual and practical confusion.” This is so because there is an “ineliminable element of anthropocentrism in any ethic at all;” hence, the “rhetoric of anti-anthropocentrism is counterproductive in practice”. He aver further that the widely use of the term “anthropocentrism” for “criticism in environmental ethics and politics, is something of a misnomer”. Nevertheless, while the term can be “intelligibly be criticized as an ontological error, attempt to conceive of it as an ethical error often involve conceptual confusion.” He noted that a wholesale condemnation of anthropocentrism not only “condemn some legitimate human concerns, they also allow ideological retorts to the effect that criticism of anthropocentrism amount to misanthropy” (49). Whereas Hayward, Vardy and Grosch’s position cohere with ours, we cannot make pretention of the culpability of some human

beings in the reckless plundering of nonhumans in the ecosystem. This necessitates our call for a rational anthropocentrism.

Critique of Anthropocentrism

Crist and Kopina, like some other critics, blame the futile attempt to halt human's expansionism in the face of environmental threat, on anthropocentric conception. And this futility, they note, has resulted in the extinction of some species and near extinction of others, because of human's insatiable desire for splendid existence with little or no recourse to "Moral consideration for nonhumans (as well as for devalued humans), and respect for their intrinsic being". They further blame civilization without moral responsibility for the ecological problems bestriding the "forests, rivers, mountains, wild animals, and indigenous people" who have been "quite unable to halt the advent of the civilized conqueror", fuming that "External resistance has been nonexistent or futile" (390). They further rued the negligence of the rational beings taking responsibilities for their irrational actions on the environment as leading to diverse environmental disasters:

As long as no adverse repercussions arose to discomfit civilized humanity's march, the consequences of no limitations have been either unproblematic or unperceived. Auks, passenger pigeons, thylacines, and baiji, to mention a handful among countless unknown and known beings, have been extinguished. Animal populations and especially carnivores like wolves, cougars, bears, sharks, lions, tigers, and many others have declined precipitously. The numbers of fish, sea turtles, whales, and other sea mammals have taken a nosedive, while forests have receded, deserts expanded, topsoil evanesced, and rivers and lakes been thinned of life" (Crist & Kopina 2014: 390).

Also, Solon solicits for a paradigm shift from anthropocentric conception of the ecosystem to a "new eco-society that is not ruled by capital", which projects and protects the "rights of nature", driven by the instrumentality of jurisprudential restraint on property rights and legislative leverage for the restoration of the "balance in our Earth system". The aim of the "Rights of the Mother Earth" project, Solon says, is to "build an Earth society and this requires much more than a change in legal structures," but further entails the creation of "Earth governance systems at all levels – an Earth democracy that takes into account not only humans but also nature and that connects the particular to the universal, the diverse to the common, and the local to the global; a living democracy that grows like a tree, from the bottom up" (127). Solon's submission is in concord with Vandana Shiva's explication of the concept of "Earth Democracy", as being "guided by the principle of subsidiarity, calling for decisions to be made at the lowest appropriate level of governance" (Koons, 53). On his part, Michael Zimmerman notes that deep ecologists loathe anthropocentric environmental perspective. He states that deep ecology is founded on two basic principles, one of which is a "scientific insight into the interrelatedness of all systems of life on Earth, together with the idea that anthropocentrism – human-centeredness – is a misguided way of seeing things". Zimmerman therefore avers that deep ecologists see "eco-centric attitude" as "more consistent with the truth about the nature of life on Earth" than anthropocentric conception (Solon, 115). This argument was later adopted by Kopina, Washington and others to counter Hayward's position.

Anthropocentrism is sometimes identified as a major source of "alienating and destructive attitudes towards the nonhuman world which are a principal target of a number

of salient ecophilosophies” (Grey, 97). Nevertheless, humans cannot make pretension of the fact that they are at the driver’s seat of the universe and its natural ecology. But in acknowledging this fact, they must also see the inevitable needs for a sustainability approach towards the environment, in a complementary socio-ecologically existential ideality. Further, Val Plumwood’s critique of anthropocentrism recommends the articulation of ethic of respect for nature which rejects instrumentalism, or extrinsic conception of value (Okaneme and Ushie, 74) and acknowledges that “nonhumans are intrinsically valuable” and as such, “include them in the universe of moral discourse”. She therefore advocates the need for the reformulation of “a notion of human virtue and human identity, and a reconnection of nature in non-mechanistic” fashion (Grey, 98). Contrary to the foregoing, Hayward posits that anthropocentrism is criticized from a dualistic perspectives: ontological and ethical. The ontological critics hold that anthropocentrism is the “mistake of seeing humans as the center of the world in the sense of failing to see that ‘the way things are in the world takes no particular account of how human beings are, or how they choose to represent them’” (50-51). On the other hand, the ethical critics of anthropocentrism aver that the term is the “mistake of giving exclusive or arbitrarily preferential consideration to human interests as opposed to the interests of other beings”. And for Hayward, whereas the ontological supposition is “consistent with, and might even seem to support, the ethical view that only humans are of ethical value, it does not strictly entail it; conversely, one could hold that ethical view without subscribing to an anthropocentric ontology” (51).

Practically, the tirade launched against anthropocentrism is basically ambiguous and ambivalent in nature, representing both the negative and the positive at the same time. The critics of the term have yet to demonstrate objectively and factually, the exact meaning of being “human-centered: where or what is the ‘center’”, as the thought of anthropocentrism is typically construed as akin to egocentrism (Hayward, 59). Consequently, Frederick Ferre in his “perspectival anthropocentrism” holds that humans “have no choice but to think as humans” (Hayward, 51). This egocentric consideration, to some extent, is consistent with human nature as the first law of nature is self defence and preservation. Hayward submits with a note of caution that the need for restraint is “all the clearer when it comes to attempting to gain a non-anthropocentric perspectives in ethics” because really, it could be that anthropocentrism in ethics, “when properly understood, is actually less harmful than harboring the aim of overcoming it”. This aim of overcoming anthropocentric environmental ethics has led to the espousal of several theories such as ecocentrism, ecofeminism and deep ecology, with some element of defects. Accordingly, Hayward postulates that the ethical instinct which is articulated as the aim of overcoming anthropocentrism is

“Very imperfectly expressed in such terms; that there are some things about ‘anthropocentrism’ which are avoidable, and others even to be applauded; furthermore, the things which are to be condemned are not appropriately called ‘anthropocentrism’ at all; that the mistaken rejection of anthropocentrism misrepresents the fact that harms to nonhumans, as well as harm to some group of humans, are caused not by humanity in general but by specific humans with their own vested interests” (Hayward, 61).

However, in a counter argument, some scholars like Helen Kopina, Haydn Washington, Bron Taylor, John J. Piccolo, reject Hayward’s position, arguing, among others, that a redefinition of the term anthropocentrism, could discount humans’ egocentric behaviours, thereby putting the universe in jeopardy; that anthropocentric “motivations can only make a positive contribution to the environment in situations where humans are conscious of a direct

benefit to themselves”; and that “‘self-love’ alone is an inadequate basis for environmental concern and action” (Kopina, Washington, *et al*, 110). The seeming plausibility of these arguments does not negate the place of humans at the centeredness of values in the socio-existential ecosystem. Our position, still, does not refute the inherent values in nonhumans. And that is the reason for our call for rational anthropocentrism, where humans, at the center of beings, reasonably explore the ecosystems for the mutual benefits of themselves as well as the nonhumans, without triggering the extinction of species or causing of disharmony in the socio-ecosystem.

Nevertheless, for Kopina, Washington, and others, the term “anthropocentrism”, must be used in a pejorative sense, as an antonym to ecocentrism. They argue that whereas the former as an ideology, is “egotistical and solipsistic, obsessed only with humans”, even though the same humans, ironically, do love other nonhumans like “animals, trees, rivers and landscapes, and many indigenous cultures attributed value and respect to them”, the latter promotes the view that “value and ethics lie in the rest of life on Earth”. They insist that although it is not all humans that hold and practice anthropocentric view, comparatively, any attempt to project the term in a good light is like promoting sexism or racism in the pretense that not all humans are sexist or racist (123). Again, while these counter arguments seem plausible, it is counter-productive, degrading the higher rational faculty of humans who have loved and continued to love the planet, legislating and enforcing norms that promote environmental balance and harmony. Humans cannot pretend to love nonhumans when they do not love themselves. Hence, for humans to love themselves is to love the nonhumans, taking cognizance of the fact that humans need nonhumans for their sane survival. For the anti-anthropocentrists, the rebelling of nature against the planet through natural disasters like tsunami, volcanic eruption and asteroid strikes, should be blamed on anthropocentric view of the universe.

The Rationality of Humans

Rationality is an inherent essence of humans. It is the ability of humans to make informed decisions and choices, based on the greatest common good, not only to oneself but also to others; form beliefs based on the moral ontology within time and space, rather than being superstitious or emotional. It was Aristotle who averred that all humans are rational. The contending issues in the declaration of all humans as rational stem from the mistakes human make in the process of taking decisions and making choices. Does these infractions render humans irrational? Whereas humans are intrinsically rational, it does not presuppose perfection, inabilities to make mistakes. However, the ability to recognize that one made mistakes in deciding, choosing, and make amends, gives humans the vantage position of possessing higher rational faculty. Nevertheless, Sosa contends that a “stream of experimental results has put in doubt the traditional conception of man as the rational animal. The mistakes people make are said to be more than just occasional and superficial. They are said to be systematic, ...” (Sosa, 2) Irrespective of the nomenclatural qualifications of human errors, it does not negate the rationality of humans.

From the Platonic perspective, the rational part of humans is the “faculty that calculates and decides”. This faculty “includes not only the ability to understand and to think before we act, the faculty of calculation and foresight, but also the ability to make up one’s mind, the faculty of decision” (Plato, 1987: 147-148). In the same vein, Samuel Enoch Stumpf avers that “the peculiar function of the rational part of the soul is to seek the true goal of human life, and it does this by evaluating things according to their true nature (Ushie, 2018: 49). This article therefore implore humans to use their faculty of reason to calculate

the general risk factors that could be triggered by the negation of nonhuman and its reckless plunder and decide for a rational human centeredness. Corroborating Plato's position, Thomas Aquinas posits that "reason is the rule and measure of acts because it directs man towards the fulfillment of his ends" (Uduigwomen 2006: 22). Rational Anthropocentrism in environmental ethics is pertinently paramount for the harmonious interaction of humans with nonhumans, for the exploration of natural resources, for the general use of nonhuman resources in the planet without negating them, and ultimately, the enhancement of a sustainable future for humans as well as nonhumans. John Marshal, quoted by Iwe, advanced a broader explication of humans' rational faculty. According to him, rationality is:

...Man's ability to think, to reason, to understand situations and the logical link between a cause and its effect, the mental capacity to visualize a situation, to envisage a situation, to foresee the likely consequences of a given course of action, to draw the necessary conclusions and inferences from a line of argument or a statement, to deliberate over issues and situations. By this rational ability, man thinks, deliberates, reflects, visualizes and envisages, understands and judges and learns. All these mental activities are the results of man's reasoning power – a power which is one of the faculties of the spiritual soul of man (Iwe, 2000: 29)

Marshal's explication of the rationality of human summarized the power of reason which can sieve and winnow thoughts, carry out mental experiments on intending actions, the action of using nonhuman resources in nature reasonably, without causing ontological disharmony and disequilibrium in the ecosystem. The ability of human, through the instrumentality of reasoning, will enable them to foresee the likely consequences of instrumental construal of nonhuman resources leading to reckless plunder of the ecosystem, and nip in the bud impending environmental disasters.

Interestingly, rationality is a common factor in all humans. The idea of reason being natural to every human and its fundamental role in human's relationship with one another and the nonhuman entities, is as old as beings in the universe. Writing on the power of reason as the ontology of the natural laws and rights, Fitzgerald avers that "There exist objective moral principles which depend on the essential nature of the universe and which can be discovered by natural reason" He posited further that the positive law is only truly law when it conforms to the rational principles. And "These principles of justice and morality constitute the natural law, which is valid of necessity, because the rules for human conduct are logically connected with truths concerning human life" (15). In Nigeria, the Niger-Delta region is an epicenter of environmental disasters – oil spillages due to irrational drilling, illegal refining of crude oil. This single irrationality has resulted to several other secondary disasters of dire socio-existential consequences to the host communities and the people thereof – the destruction of the mangrove, the pollution of the underground water, the contamination of rivers as well as the water resources such as fishes, prawns, crabs and lobsters. The health implication of this disaster is not only adverse to nonhumans but seriously on humans within the socio-existential ecosystem who are dying by instalment.

The rational question that may crop up at this juncture is: Can humans' rationality alone solve the environmental problems bestriding humans and nonhumans? In responding to this poser, some scholars have advocated for the rule of law – enactment of laws to punish environmental offenders, to preserve endangered species, to secure areas as reserve for nonhumans. Nevertheless, there is another poser for the advocates of the rule of law, particularly, in Nigeria: Has legislations solved or minimized the plundering of the ecosystem?

Has the formulation of new environmental ethical theories, nay, ecocentrism (Kopnina, Washington, et al, 2018: 123), halt the irrational plundering of the natural resources and the destruction of the ecosystem? Evidences abound of illegal mining in the Nigerian forest reserves and parks, illegal logging of trees in the national parks and forest reserves, illegal refining of crude oil resulting in dire environmental disasters, even though there are legislations in place to stem these environmentally unfriendly attitudes. Writing on the environmental disaster in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, with particular reference to the “back barrier”, Bamidele decries that the barrier with its rich resources such as plants, fishes and other natural resources, are experiencing degradation due to the activities of oil exploration in the region, despite its importance to humans as well as nonhumans:

Until recently, these ecosystems and their natural resources have been utilized on a sustainable basis. Some of the plants recorded within the ecosystems have multi-purpose values, while others serve as important sources of medicine, food and construction material. They also provide environmental services such as carbon sequestration, erosion control, nutrient cycling and wind break. The back barrier island act as ‘oasis’ in the mangroves being the main source of potable freshwater for the local population living within the estuarine environment. There is a gradual degradation of these important ecosystems due to non-sustainable use. These forested islands are being flooded and salt intrusion is becoming a common phenomenon. The greatest loss is attributable to the construction of canals/slots which have been built for access and transport of oil and gas, which have been extracted from the Niger Delta since the late 1950s (33).

The foregoing are the few examples of continuous environmental violation by humans and corporate entities irrespective of the existence of legislation aimed at fostering harmonious exploration of natural resources without causing damages to the ecosystem, hence, our resort to rational anthropocentrism to complement the existing advocacies and laws.

Towards a Rational Anthropocentric Ethics for Sustainable Human Future

The human and nonhuman future is ecologically sustainable when it meets “real human needs with only minimal impact on the earth and its other life forms” (Pulido, 123-124). The human centeredness of the universe should not be mistaken, and that humans are the most important beings in the universe should not be in doubt. However, the question is: Humans are most important for what purpose? The centeredness of humans in the universe serves what purpose? It is not for the reckless plunder of nonhuman in the ecosystem but to care for it. Caring for the universe requires rational use of other nonhuman entities for the benefit of not just the humans but for all. As rational beings, humans, playing central role in the universe, should see the universe and nature as a communion of subjects rather than the “collection of objects” (Solon, 107). Humans depend largely on the “natural environment for livelihoods – on farmland or forests, wetlands or coastal areas. For these people, the environment is much more than a source of recreation – it is the basis of the economy”, their being and existence (Glover, vii). Therefore, the objectification of the universe and its natural resources evokes feelings and practices of biting the nose to spite the face – spiting the ecosystem by the human-subjects who see nature as object of exploitation. Nevertheless, humans ought to commune with the universe and its natural endowment, at common and complementary beneficial level. This does not suppose that humans should not deploy the richness of the resources in nature for their benefits but that it should be

done within the ambit of rationality taking into consideration, proper remediation, conservation and restoration of those that are endangered.

Anthropocentric environmental philosophy should not be bedeviled by misanthrope who loathe the inviolable natures of humankind, negating the spatio-temporality and/or relativist implication of anthropocentric construal and applicability in the socio-ethical ecosystem (Ushie, 2015: 172). For a rational anthropocentric environmentalism in Africa, there is the need for “synergy between African culture and education” to promote advocacies for the protection of the planet and rational use in order to achieve desirable balance and harmony in the ecosystem without negating the nonhuman beings (Ushie & Okpe, 221). Following from the foregoing, advocacy for the stoppage of indiscriminate use of environmental resources, rational and/or legislative and normative controls in the areas of pollution – land and air – by carbon dioxide, toxic emissions from mining, scientific and technological industries, indiscriminate dumping of toxic wastes, ought to be discouraged for a sustainable human future. Further, in places that have witnessed environmental disaster, orchestrated by human or nature, environmental remediation such as restoration of degraded habitats, reforestation, recycling, protection of endangered species and environmental advocacy, ought to be encouraged and enforced (Ekwealo, 15). Humans, at the centeredness of beings, with higher rational faculty, ought to act as rational eco-ethical caretakers.

Conclusion

The critics of anthropocentrism have blamed humans to the exclusion of natural disaster, for causing eco-ontological imbalances. What would they say of volcanic eruptions, tsunami, draught, that have spanned pre-civilization era, swallowing some ancient cities without sparing any lives – human and nonhuman? Whereas, as aforesaid, rational beings have the moral responsibilities to do what is eco-ethically right for the survival of all beings in the ecosystem, some of the attack on anthropocentrism is too wholesale and in the extreme. Although the concept of anthropocentrism is not intrinsically anti-nonhumans in the socio-ethical ecosystem, we call for a rational anthropocentric environmental philosophy, an ideology which recognizes the diversity of the humankind and the relative epistemic eco-ethical reality, where humans, at the center of beings, reasonably explore the ecosystems for the mutual benefits of themselves as well as the nonhumans, without triggering the extinction of species or causing of disharmony in the socio-ecosystem. Rational anthropocentrism promotes the use of the natural resources based on the greatest common good, not only to humans but also the nonhumans. From the rational anthropocentric point of view, it is the duty of humans, at the centeredness of values, to care and protect the ecosystem. This obligation is not merely for moral exigencies but for sustainable human presence and future. Within the natural universe, humans need the non-humans to survive and not necessarily the other way. Consequently, humans must deemphasize the wholesale instrumental construal of nonhuman entities to ensure complementary existence and harmony in the ecosystem. If anthropocentrism is construed as humans caring for themselves, as Kopina and others have posited, it shows that for humans to care for themselves is to care for other nonhumans in the ecosystem. We cannot pretend to care for others if we do not care for ourselves.

Works Cited

- Bamidele, J.F. "Minimization of Geo-Environmental Barrier Islands Impacts Related to Petroleum Extraction in the Niger Delta" in Folarin, B.A., Ogundele, O.J.K., and Alaka, N.S. (eds) *Environment, Values and Policies in Nigeria*. EBAN, 2007, 33-51.
- Callicott, J. Baird. "The Search for an Environmental Ethic." *Matters of Life and Death*, edited by Tom Regan, Second Edition, Random House, 1986, pp 381-423.
- Crist, Eileen, and Kopnina, Helen. "Unsettling Anthropocentrism." *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 38, no. 4, Springer, 2014, pp. 387–96, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43895114>.
- Ekwealo, Chigbo Joseph. *Western Philosophical and Historical Attitudes to Environmental Concern: A Critical Exposition*. African Environmental Ethics and Values Research Group, 2012.
- Fitzgerald, P.J. *Salmond on Jurisprudence*. 12th Edition, Sweet and Maxwell, 1966.
- Frodeman, Robert and Callicott, Baird J. "Introduction". *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, edited by J. Baird Callicott and Robert Frodeman, Vol 1, Macmillan, 2009, pp xv-xxv
- Gardiner, Stephen M. "A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption". *Environmental Values*, vol. 15, no. 3, White Horse Press, 2006, pp. 397–413, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30302196>.
- Glover, David. *Valuing the Environment: Economics for a Sustainable Future*. International Development Research Centre, 2010.
- Grey, William. "Environmental Value and Anthropocentrism". In *Ethics and the Environment*. vol. 3, no. 1, Indiana University Press, 1998. pp. 97-10
- Hayward, Tim. "Anthropocentrism: A Misunderstood Problem." *Environmental Values* 6, no. 1, 1997, 49–63. <http://www.environmentalsociety.org/node/5714>.
- Iwe, N.S.S. *The Inseparable Social Trinity: Religion, Morality and Law*. Saesprint Publishers, 2003.
- Koons, Judith E. "Key Principles to Transform Law for the Health of the Planet". *Exploring Wild Law: The Philosophy of Earth Jurisprudence*, edited by Peter Burdon. Wakefield Press, 2011, pp. 45-58
- Kopnina, H., Washington, H., Taylor, B. et al. Anthropocentrism: More than Just a Misunderstood Problem. *J Agric Environ Ethics* 31, 109–127 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-018-9711-1>
- Okaneme, Godwin and Ushie, Thomas Egaga. "Extrinsic Materialist Conception of Value and the Burgeoning Banditry in Nigeria". *Nasara Journal of Philosophy*. 6 (2) 2021. 73-93.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Translated with introduction by Desmond Lee. Penguin Group, 1987.
- Popkin, R.H. and Stroll, A. *Philosophy Made Simple*. W. H. Allen, 1969.
- Pulido, Laura. "Sustainable Development at Ganado del Valle" in Robert D. Bullard (ed.), *Confronting Environmental Racism*. End Press, 1993. 123-139
- Solon, Pablo. "The Rights of Mother Earth". *The Climate Crisis*, edited by Vishwas Satgar, Wits University Press, 2012. 107-130.
- Sosa, Ernest. "Are Humans Rational?". In: Korta, K., Sosa, E., Arrazola, X. (eds) *Cognition, Agency and Rationality. Philosophical Studies Series*, vol 79. Springer, Dordrecht, 1999. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-1070-1_1
- Uduigwomen, Andrew F. *Introducing Ethics: Trends, Problems and Perspectives*. Campus Life Arts, 2006.
- Ushie, Thomas Egaga. "Ethical Relativism and Same-Sex Marriage". *Sophia: An African Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs*. 16 (1) September 2015. 171 – 182.

- ___ “The Implication of Reason in Natural Law on Students’ Unionism in Nigeria”. *International Journal of Integrative Humanism*. 10 (1) 2018. 47-57.
- Ushie, Thomas Egaga and Okpe, Timothy Adie. “A Critical Look at Blyden’s Educational Philosophy and its Contemporary Relevance”. *International Journal of Humanitatis Theoriticus*. 6 (1) 2022. 219-231.
- Vardy, Peter & Grosch, Paul. *The Puzzle of Ethics*. Routledge, 2015.
- Varner, Gary E. *In Nature’s Interests? Interests, Animal Rights and Environmental Ethics*. First Edition, Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Warren, J. Karen. “Ecological Feminism”. *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, edited by J. Baird Callicott and Robert Frodeman, Vol 1, Macmillan, 2009, pp 228-236.