

# ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



**ISRG PUBLISHERS**

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – II Issue-IV (July – August) 2024

Frequency: Bimonthly



## The Nature of (Human) Life and the Life of Nature: Advancing Environmental Sustainability

**Nicholas Onyemechi Alumona PhD**

Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Delta State University, Abraka

| **Received:** 02.06.2024 | **Accepted:** 08.06.2024 | **Published:** 03.08.2024

\***Corresponding author:** Nicholas Onyemechi Alumona

PhD Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Delta State University, Abraka

### Abstract

*The willful and wanton destruction of the ecosystem has been extremely alarming. Farmlands are brazenly destroyed through lumbering, oil exploration and exploitation, bush burning and other economic activities. In fact, the entire ecosystem is continuously under threat by human activities. The simple explanation is anthropocentric ethics of the environment; man being the only privileged specie in the ecosystem with his exclusive moral status. Man is therefore on a rampaging mission to consciously exterminate nature and by extension unconsciously exterminate himself. The major aim of this work is how to advance explanations that clearly interpret man's nature and nature's life such that man does not see himself as significantly different from nature. To achieve this aim effectively, this research adopted methods of analysis and hermeneutics. With analysis, this work simplifies and connects related concepts that indicate the connectedness of man and the ecosystem. The types of analysis relevant to the breaking down of ambiguous and complex concepts and ideas are conceptual and linguistics analyses. Hermeneutical analysis as a type of analysis and hermeneutics as a second major method adopted in this research engage the interpretation of the concepts and carry out the analysis of the interpretations. All of these approaches are intended to show the implications of the narrowed views of anthropocentric and biocentric perspectives of nature. This research finds out that the anthropocentric and biocentric attitudes have found roots in every of man's destructive activities on the ecosystem. It therefore concludes that a proper interpretation of the nature of both human and non-human parts of the ecosystem exposes the similarities between the two aspects of nature. With this consciousness of oneness with nature, human beings are more likely to halt the damages on the environment.*

**Keywords:** Biocentrism, Ecocentrism, Ecospiritism, Ecosystem, Nature

### Introduction

The environment is important to us (humans) because our whole life depends on it; it is where we live, 'move and have our being'.

This dependence on the environment comes from amongst others some most common basic necessities of life: food, shelter, health

and clothing. There are human activities that ensure that these needs are achieved in our existence. Such activities include farming, hunting, bush burning, tree felling and industrialization amongst others. All these activities are carried out by man for the summative purpose of providing a good life. This good life consideration is most often not outside the matrices of human beings; air, water, animals, earth and every other existent in the entire ecosystem is given very insignificant or no considerations when the activities for the good life are executed. This is why human beings who carry out the activities aforementioned and other related activities are only interested in the relationships that exist among humans such that how not to infringe on the rights of others while becomes paramount. Any willful and indiscriminate destruction of human lives by other humans is susceptible to both legal and moral condemnations and sanctions. Morally and legally therefore, we have no much difficulty in assessing man's actions against his fellow man when performing activities that concern the environment. This is why we are more concerned with man's relationship with nature. But it is trite to submit that the perspective that considers only humans in relating with the environment is bound to ignore activities that promote environmental sustainability and respect for nature. The features and factors that influence us here put man at the centre of questions that revolve around nature. Hence, the ethics of the environment that is human-centred is referred to as anthropocentrism; an environmental ethics that has received a lot of criticisms as an exploitative ethics of the environment. Philomena Ojomo captures this criticism when she avows that "from an anthropocentric point of view, humans have a moral duty only to one another; any duty they seem to have towards any species or entities is really only an indirect duty towards other beings" (Ojomo, 2010, p. 48). More unequivocally, anthropocentrism as a "conception of humans as the center of existence empowers human minds to explore the nonhuman world and this accounts for the degradation of the natural world" (Monday, 2022, p. 25).

When human activities affect human beings, they receive condemnation but their injury to the environment seems to be ignored by humans. In fact, human beings do not think that moral questions should be raised on obvious harms done to the environment because there is clearly nothing like rights of the environment as we talk about human rights. Hence, defining characteristics of human beings such as rationality, sentience, human dignity, capability for moral judgment and social interaction etcetera cannot be attributed to nature. Again, nature does not have the kind of life that human beings have and as such, activities that constitute injury and injustice on human beings do not constitute the same to the environment.

It is the position of this research that such lack of moral judgments on the activities inimical to nature amounts to human self-centredness and selfishness which ultimately leads to self-destruction of humans themselves. We therefore show to what extent the so-called attributes exclusive to humans interlace with nature and which should be the basis for the defence of the environment for its sustainability and by extension the sustainability of humans as well.

## Article

### A. Defining Attributes of Human Nature

In this section, the various attributes that give human beings their defining nature are discussed. These characteristics which include but not limited to action, sentience, rationality, human dignity and

consciousness are the bases for ascribing morality to human beings alone. According to Barcalow,

Moral issues arise most fundamentally when the choices people face will affect the well-being of others by either increasing or decreasing it, causing either harm or benefit. ...The well-being involved can be physical or psychological. Forms of physical harm that behavior can cause include death, injury, disease, disability, and physical pain. Behavior can also cause psychological harm (1) by creating or intensifying such painful psychological states as loneliness, fear, depression, hopelessness, despair, unhappiness, anxiety and sadness and (2) by eroding such positive psychological states as self-confidence, self-esteem, self-respect, happiness and feelings of self-worth (Barcalow, 2006, p. 4).

As said in the introductory section, Barcalow only buttressed the limit of moral accretion as exclusive of human beings. This is in tandem with the view of anthropocentrism, which justifies the disregard for nature and the entire ecosystem. There is therefore this general position that since nature is not capable of receiving physical and/or psychological harm(s), it is not appropriate to ask moral questions about it. Again, if morality cannot be demanded of nature, why should humans be held responsible for injustice in the form of injury or harm done to it? These and many other scenarios justify the peculiarities of human nature and its moral exclusivity while giving an implicit approval to human's destruction of nature. In what follows, these attributes are examined in detail.

#### i. Action:

This special attribute of human beings is technically called human action and it is a willful, conscious and purposeful activity carried out by human beings. An action is both what a human does and allows to be done to him. When a human being does something, he mainly carries out his decision(s) but when he allows something to be done to him, he simply grants his permission for such a thing to be allowed to happen to him. Beyond this relationship that exists between a man and his fellow human being, there is also the relationship between man and his environment. A human being therefore can do something to the environment or can watch his environment affect him. In all of these cases, human actions raise moral questions and issues not because such actions are deleterious to the environment but because they have direct or indirect consequences on other human beings or even on the perpetrators of those actions themselves. In the words of Christian Erk, "A human action—or as it is also called, directly voluntary action—is an action that proceeds from a human being's deliberate and free will, that is, is freely willed on the basis and in the light of rational deliberation." (Erk, 2022, p. 14). In view of the above, it is clear that other objects of the ecosystem lacking the qualities of freedom of choice and intentions cannot be said to carry out morally reprehensible or permissible acts. To further explicate the exclusivity of actions to humans, Tavory equates actions with moral actions and defines it as "an action that defines the actor as a kind of socially recognized person, both within and across fields" (2011, p. 277). This is also the perspective of Ana Martha Gonzalez when she avows that an action is "...at its very heart, a reference to reason as a norm, which is present even in cases in which this reference is dismissed" (Gonzalez, 2016, p. 89). Social recognition applies to only human beings whose actions have social implications among other implications by virtue of the fact that he is a 'being-with-others'. His actions are evaluated on the basis of rules and norms that are also recognized socially.

## ii. Sentience:

This is another moral criterion which seems to be attributed to humans alone. This is due to the fact of it being simply defined by the minimalist to be any entity that has feelings, and such feelings have been outlined by Donald Broom as having the capacity to (i) to examine other beings' actions as they affect it and others; (ii) to have a recollection of certain of its actions, with their attendant implications; (iii) to examine disadvantages and benefits; (iv) to be a possessor of some feelings; and (v) to possess certain level of awareness and consciousness (Broom, 2023). Capacities (i), (ii), (iii) and (v) are the bases for an easy declaration of human beings as the only sentient beings in the ecosystem. Controversy, however, sets in when the question of what it means to have feeling is raised. For instance, Yeates says experiencing feelings that could be positive and/or negative defines the idea of sentience (2023) while Pereira is of the view that it is the minimal ability to have a feeling of sensations, which could be internal or external which include the sensations of pains and pleasure (2017).

## iii. Rationality:

It would not be wrong to assert that rationality as a concept does not have a universally agreed upon definition. Nickerson corroborates this lack of consensus in the definition of rationality alluding to Goldman's position that it is so unclear that both philosophers and social scientists use it indiscriminately (2008). However, there are key concepts that are common to the various views of the concept of rationality. Among them are thinking, acting, logicity, imagination and deduction among others. For the anthropocentric ethicists, it is only human beings that have both the potentials and capabilities for performing all of the activities entailed in such constitutive concepts in rationality. Aristotle was a major foundational proponent in the exclusivity of rationality as a property of human beings, hence his common maxim of 'man is a rational animal'. Of the three parts of the soul (nutritive, perceptual and imaginative/rational) which he discussed in the *De Anima*, Aristotle singled out human beings as the only specie capable of possessing all three features while plants and other animals can only possess some but not all the three features of the soul. Kern succinctly captures this Aristotle's view when he avows that rationality is the character possessed by human species which makes it distinct from other species (2020). Moshman clearly posits that rationality distinguishes human beings from other creatures because humans are 'creatures of reason'. In his words, he ponders over what creatures of reason means and postulates thus: "what does it mean to be a creature of reason? At the very least, it means that one's thoughts and actions are not entirely random, arbitrary, reflexive, or conditioned" (Moshman, 1994, p. 245). The act of choice is very fundamental to reason and rationality; but other creatures do not possess it. This quality is also necessary in the discourse of an agent being described as a moral being; hence only humans are seen as givers and recipients of moral actions.

## iv. Human Dignity:

The word dignity signifies a property attributed to an entity by virtue of which respect is accorded it, either for what it is in itself (that is, what it possesses) or what it is capable of doing, or again both. This presupposes that every entity should have its own dignity of some sort. Surprisingly however, it appears absurd to talk of animal dignity, earth dignity, plant dignity water dignity and the dignity of every other existent in our environment apart from that of man. In this respect, Lee and George opine that man's

dignity supersedes every other existent, such as animals; hence he deserves respect from other human beings (Lee & George, 2008).

From Kant's categorical imperative, the dignity of man does not rely on the empirical features of human nature but by our reasoning, we intuitively acknowledge the universality and exclusivity of man's nature to be so specially designated. This special dignity therefore provides man with inviolable rights to life, such that his life cannot be taken indiscriminately; whether by individuals or government, any action that would affect man must be judged morally at the least before it is performed. Scheinin caps this Kant's perspective by saying that the dignity of man is very fundamental to the justification of why certain rights are defended as peculiar to human beings (2020). Hence by virtue of human dignity, human life is sacred and must be protected.

## v. Self-Consciousness:

This is another exclusive attribute of man that defines him as a moral being to which moral duties should be performed by others, as different from other non-human creatures. There are two types of self-consciousness; one is called direct/immediate/concomitant self-consciousness while the other refers to reflexive self-consciousness. Both man and animals possess the former while the latter is the attribute only of man. The concomitant self-consciousness can be simply referred to as consciousness and it is what Husserl calls the intentionality of consciousness. This is due to the fact that the conscious act of every entity is towards objects. Mondin thus says: "...man normally has an explicit cognizance of the object but not of himself: his attention is totally captured by the object. Thus, when I look at a house, my attention is turned towards the house and not towards my seeing of the house itself" (1985, pp. 87-88). A defining feature of this consciousness is spontaneity; an impulsive reaction to the environment and which is devoid of ratiocination. It is for this reason that animals are said not to be moral beings. On the other hand, reflexive consciousness is that in "... which man concentrates his attention on himself, on his own operations, his own acts, his own being, diverting his attention from the world, from things, from objects" (p. 92). Human beings are also conscious of objects but their focus is not those objects but themselves. There is both a rational concentration on oneself and a conscious withdrawal of attention from objects. This act cannot be executed by other non-human beings in the environment; hence there is the exclusion of such other beings from morality.

## B. Life of Nature: Its Utility and Instrumental Values

By the utility value, we refer to the common lexical understanding in which the idea of how useful a thing is determines the value that should be placed on it. Therefore, nature's life is not only its usefulness to human life but also to nature itself. Again, a thing has an instrumental value because it serves as a vehicle towards achieving a certain desired purpose for human beings and non-human beings in the ecosystem. In what follows, specific discussions on these values of nature and environment are presented.

### (i) Utility and Instrumental Values of Plants and Animals to Non-Human Members of the Ecosystem

What have been described as utility and instrumental values are what scholars have called the ecosystem services and they include supporting services, provisioning services, regulating services and cultural services. Of the four types of services, supporting services, provision services and regulating services take place among

humans and non-humans in the ecosystem while cultural services exclusively provide usefulness for human beings who benefit from nature and with their anthropocentric view of the ecosystem; they (humans) unilaterally take decisions on how nature should serve them. The focus of the essay is the discussion of the first three kinds of services. Ecosystem services from certain members of nature are meant for similar species of nature as well as other species in nature. In this activity, the following situations may occur: (i) the younger ones of a species may need the assistance of the mature ones for their own development (ii) another kind in the ecosystem may simply be there to help other members of nature thrive, and (iii) while helping others thrive, members of ecosystem also improve themselves. An example of situation (i) is reproduction and nurturing where non-humans also reproduce their kinds and unconsciously tend them until they develop certain characteristics that the reproducers possess. Illustrations concerning animals and plants would suffice here. Plants reproduce by their seeds, suckers, stumps and stems while animals either give birth to their young ones alive or lay and hatch eggs. In plants, this attention the younger ones receive from the older ones is called offspring care. Although, there is no nervous system in plants to found such a willful relationship, there are a few cases of plants protecting their young ones from hazards occasioned by climate, environment, organisms, animals and other predators. The protection can either occur before the reproduction of the young ones or after their reproduction, or again both stages. The nurturing of the young ones before their reproduction is attributed to genetics or the nature of the plants themselves. An example is the cactus whose botanical name is called *Mammillaria hernandezii* which have some of its seeds retained while others are released to germinate (Santini & Martorelli, 2013). Before releasing them to grow, it does an internal nurturing by delaying the seeds in its stem so that they can develop certain properties that can protect them from some hazards mentioned above by the time they are finally released. The other genetic nurturing mechanism which also involves delaying the release of the seeds is the recognition of the role water plays for the growth and supply of nutrients to younger plants. The *Mammillaria Hernandezii* waits for a time there is enough water in the soil and releases its seeds in order to aid their germinations. For (ii), whether of its kind or another kind, a particular plant can play a regulatory role in ensuring that excess of what is needed for the survival of the younger ones are not taken in by them (the younger plants). For instance, bigger plants provide some kind of shades to the younger ones such that both rains and sunlight are not received in excess of what is needed for survival. Excess of these raw materials needed for the processing of their foods can lead to leaf yellowing, withering and eventual death of the plants but all of these can be prevented by the shades provided by the bigger ones playing 'parental' roles. In plants, there is also the process of transportation by which xylem tissues aid in taking water from the roots to other parts of the plants, some of which are used by the leaves in the process of photosynthesis. This is a process that a plant goes through for maintaining self-survival but the concern here is how one plant transports this raw material for food production to others in order to aid them. This can only take place in some exceptional situations in which different plants share roots together. The parent plant which possesses more water supplies same (through the shared roots) to the younger one to aid it in the process of photosynthesis. Through this process of sharing water, the benefactor plants also sheds excess water from itself, thus saving itself of the potential danger of leaf yellowing,

withering and death; an ecosystem service that is visible in (iii) above.

Such ecosystem services are more visibly prevalent in animals than they are in plants. For instance, it is not a contestable issue that parent animals make provision for their young ones. For instance, a lioness would not watch the cub face danger; it would rather carry it in her mouth and escape from such danger. The cub is born blind and wholly depends on its mother through suckling. Birds play support and provision services for their young ones as they pick foods and send to them (their young ones), up to the point of putting the foods in the mouths of the young ones. These are just a brief of what non-humans involve themselves in as ecosystem services within themselves.

#### (ii) **Utility and Instrumental Values of Plants and Animals to the Human Component of the Ecosystem**

Plants and animals play certain roles that are useful and beneficial to human existence. For instance, plants have medicinal values. They are also useful to man in the provision of shelter, food and certain aids to make for improvements in human health. Animals like plants also have medicinal values. In addition, they serve as means of transportation, agricultural services, sources of food and drugs, etc. All of these roles also belong to ecosystem services which include supporting, provision, regulating and cultural services.

There are certain health roles plants play in humans which include provision of oxygen, cleaning the air of pollutants and regulation of water in the atmosphere among others. The process of plant's absorption of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and releasing oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>) into the atmosphere for human consumption is what is commonly known as photosynthesis. In this process, humans breathe in oxygen to stay alive. This air that human beings breathe in are also not entirely clean; they are oftentimes dirty and dusty and not suitable for human consumption. Some activities of plants also clean up the air and make them naturally safe for consumption.

Nowak gave a more detailed account of how plants help in cleaning the air when he affirms that trees help in removing air that are polluted by gases, although he acknowledged the fact that it is the plant surface that removes some of these gaseous pollutions. But most of these gaseous pollutions are removed by stomata (2018).

These natural processes through which organic substances are removed from the air are very vital in addressing health hazards that could have been contracted with ease where plants do not exist. Such hazards include but not limited to nasal infections, respiratory disorder/dysfunction and cardiovascular related diseases.

In terms of temperature regulation in the atmosphere, plants are also very relevant in the natural process of balancing the ecosystem, all for the good of human beings among other occupants of the entire ecosystem. Hence, plants release certain percentage of moisture in the atmosphere through transpiration (Soken-Huberty, 2023). This activity is beneficial to human beings because the vapour in the atmosphere contributes to its cooling, even in the ongoing debates on climate change and global warming.

Humans again benefit from plants as they are both sources of medicines to them and their animals. Rural people depend on

plants for medicines and ethnoveterinary healthcares that are not both accessible and affordable in the Western healthcare system (Kalpna et al, 2021, p. 197). The nutritional and medicinal values of plants cannot be overemphasized in human lives. Plants have been very helpful in addressing some ailments, especially in the rural areas where people cannot readily access and/or afford orthodox medicines. Herbs have often times played first aid roles on certain health issues prior to the availability of more comprehensive medical solutions. In almost all parts of the world, most especially where economic indices have continued to show how poverty ravages citizens; medicinal plants and herbs have been heavily relied upon in addressing health issues. Siddique et al support this position when they avow that plants and their attendant resources are very useful in the healthcare sectors in villages and towns in developing countries, specifically to human beings and animals (2021). They further posit that indigent farmers in Pakistan make traditional medicine their greatest option in healthcare because of the inaccessibility to modern healthcare facilities in their localities (Siddique, 2021). Undermining the relevance of plants in the healthcare systems of any group of people is tantamount to promoting backwardness in their health and physical well-being.

Animals on their own also provide significant services to human beings. Such services include but not limited to emotional support, tourism/entertainment/sports, transportation, provision of food and drugs, and defence or guard services. As part of the support services in the ecosystem, animals are key companions to human beings. Researches have shown that animals help in addressing psychological problems such as loneliness, isolation and depression among others. Constant human-animal interaction can lead to the psychological well being of human beings which would consequently translate to human physical well being. There is also a sense of satisfaction when a child under one's tutelage grows in learning what he/she is being taught. That psychological feeling also obtains when one's trainee animal matures in certain attributes in the process of training. Identifying with man's psychological benefits of human-animal bonds, it has been opined that "the research conducted within institutionalized settings, including schools, hospitals, elderly care centers, and prisons, demonstrates that animals can help individuals overcome learning difficulties, psychiatric disorders, and trauma..." (Wunderlich et al, 2021, p. 653).

Another relevance that animals have to man is that they are sources of foods and drugs for human well-being. Animal-source foods (ASF) are rich in micro-and macronutrients for healthy living and they (ASF) include but not limited to meat, fish, egg and milk and other dairy products which contain nutrients such as vitamins, iron, calcium, zinc, protein and fatty acids among others. These nutrients provide different kinds of health benefits to children, women and adults generally. According to Adesogan et al, ASFs are among the greatest suppliers of proteins whose qualities are high in addition to bioavailable vitamins and a host of other nutritional substances like folic and fatty acids (2020). All of these nutrients are for human healthy living and whose functions include: immune-system functioning, memory and cognitive preservation and maintenance, bone and muscle health among many other health benefits. On the drug arm relevance of animals to man, there are medical and pharmaceutical products from animals that are important for the prevention and treatment of diseases and ailments. The table below explains the importance of animal-source drugs for man's healthy living:

**Table 1: Extracted and compiled from medical/pharmaceuticals of animal origin published by the State of Queensland, November, 2020.**

S/ N	Medical/Pharmaceutical product	Animal Source	Function/Use
1	Curosurf	Pig	Treatment of respiratory problems
2	ProQuad	Cow	Treatment of measles
3	Havrix 1440	Cow	Vaccine for Hepatitis A
4	M-M-R 11	Pig	Treatment of measles
5	Praxbind	Mouse	For detoxification (either of consumed alcohol and/or drugs)
6	Herceptin	Mouse	Treatment of cancer (antineoplastic agent)
7	Black snake antivenom	Horse	Treatment of snake bites
8	Brown snake antivenom	Horse	Treatment of snake bites
9	Rixadone	Chick	For the treatment of psychotic situations like schizophrenia, hallucinations, delusions, etc
10	Stamaril	Egg	For loss of sensation and keeping away from pains, especially during surgery

In terms of transportation services to man, animals such as horse, oxen, camel and donkeys are of very notable helps to man. A summary of the view of Talla and Song says it all on the relevance of animals to man as means of transportation (2014). Among other benefits, horses for instance have high sense of visibility; even in darkness while camels are very useful means of transportation in the deserts and Sahel regions due to the fact that they can go without water for up to ten (10) days. Donkeys' legs are somewhat short and have minimal size; two physical qualities that make them very energetic in their engagements in transport services to man.

There are other support and provision services that animals offer to man such as entertainment and sports but so far, the utility and instrumental values of animals to man discussed in this subsection are adequate enough for the goal of the section.

### C. Is Man Justified to Exploit Nature by His Nature?

The claim of man in the exploitation of the ecosystem is principally based on the supposed differences in the nature of the environment and the nature of humanity itself. Two of those differences have been discussed in details in the preceding sections and they include: (1) the claim that man alone is the only moral being and he is consequently the only being that is rational, self-conscious, to be accorded dignity, carry out actions reflectively and capable of analyzing feelings (sentient). As a result of these qualities, man is the only being that can be owed moral responsibilities and rights, especially the rights to life, and (2) Man's livelihood depends largely on the utility and instrumental values of nature consisting of plants and animals. This claim presupposes that human life is not livable without the utility and instrumental values of the ecosystem. By his nature therefore, he is

entitled to make use of nature (ecosystem) as he desires, without any form of restriction.

The first claim of not according morality to the environment by man stands very debatable in view of the components that serve as the foundations for such moral exclusiveness. These components include those so explained in the section dealing with the attributes of human nature and their exclusivity. But the question we grapple with in this section is whether such special place which man claims to have over nature accords him the limitless and extreme rights to make use of the environment at his whims and caprices, without moral considerations towards nature itself.

There are two broad reactions to man's justification of the exploitation of the entire ecosystem which are seen by environmental ethicists to include: (i) those who acknowledge the structural distinctions between humans and the non-human components of the ecosystem but disagree with the special moral status accorded the former. They opine that the notion of life should be the basis for assessing the moral status of the components of the ecosystem. These scholars we refer to as biocentrists; and (ii) those who hold the opinion that the whole of nature is one complete whole system that knits together all its components. There should be no distinction whatsoever between humans and the non-human components of the ecosystem. The advocates of this position we call ecocentrists. Both the biocentrists and ecocentrists are against the anthropocentrists whose ethics of utilitarianism of the ecosystem has immensely contributed to the environment by human beings. Ecocentrism seems to have extended its gains of preserving and protecting the environment more than biocentrism. This is due to the fact that it (ecocentrism) extended moral considerations beyond human beings to non-humans in the ecosystem. However, it is imperative to point out that in spite of this improvement on the relationship between humans and the entire ecosystem, the identified wanton destruction of the environment has continued unabated. It is this realization that prompted this research to search more on the nature of life and the life of nature. The outcome of the further search shows that the ecosystem is guided by what is referred to as ecological monism. This means that the whole of existence is guided by one nature; life and it is not human beings that allocate life to other components of the universe nor determine whether such other non-human components of the universe come into life or not. This is the bane of ecocentrism in its goal to transcend the principles of biocentrism in environmental preservation. The principle of ecological monism which is made possible due to the presence of life in every existent in the ecosystem originates from what we refer to in this work as ecospiritism, which in approach to environmental preservation fares better than both biocentrism and ecocentrism. By

ecospiritism, it is absurd to accord moral nature to human beings and an amoral kind of nature to non-humans. Every existent has life due to the presence of spirits in all beings, whether animate or inanimate. All beings in the ecosystem may not express life in the same manner but the common index to both animate and inanimate existents is life. Human beings should show utmost respect, care and responsibility to nature and the entire ecosystem rather than determining its moral status. This is the advocacy from ecospiritism which emphasizes the reality of spirits in both the spiritual and physical realms of existence. Ecospiritism understands the opposition from the positivist world of observation and experimentation but it adopts a phenomenological perspective to existence and acknowledges both worlds and opines that even in

the physical world, existents also are occupied by spirits. The bodies that are present in physical existence are like the containers of the spirits which give them life. When humans build into their consciousness the fact that part of the ecosystem they destroy willfully have the same nature with them, and some of those non-human components of the ecosystem can affect them (humans), especially when they harm them, then the less difficulty they (humans) would at all times maintain the sanctity of the ecosystem. Gray, et al recognize this potency of the non-human part of the ecosystem when they said that the inorganic parts of the ecosystem are the sources of the existence of the organic parts, which include human beings. Rather than giving priority to a human-centred ecological ethics, human beings ought to place emphasis on these pillars of life on earth in addition to their own claim of human dignity (2018).

Ecospiritism is therefore the environmental ethical doctrine which recognizes that all objects in the universe are living things of some sort since they all house spirits, which are their life given forces. It encourages human beings not to see other aspects of the ecosystem as ontologically inferior because of the interconnectedness of all entities. As an ethical doctrine of the environment, it observes that man's distinction between the human and non-human components of the universe is based on pride and egoism rooted in the psychological, metaphysical and moral claim of superiority by human beings. It also teaches individuals to take personal responsibility in his relationship with the whole of nature. This responsibility provides grounds for environmental activism which culminates in the propagation of policies and activities that sustains the ecosystem. Finally, ecospiritism makes use of indigenous knowledge and traditional practices on spirits to foster harmonious relationships with nature. This harmony with nature is founded on the interconnectedness of all existents in the ecosystem. A discussion on Igbo ontology by Mbaegbu explicates more on the interconnectedness and harmony of the human and non-human parts of the ecosystem in his exposition of the hierarchy of beings. According to him, "at the base of this hierarchy are the *Ihe* (things) namely, minerals, plants and animals. After things, come *Madu* (Human Beings), *Ndi Muo* (Human Spirits), *Muo* (Disembodied or pure spirits), and at the apex is *Chi-ukwu* (The Greatest spirit)" (p. 1210). The notion of the 'greatest spirit' and the other classifications of spirits by Mbaegbu shows how much ubiquitous spirits are in the entire ecosystem. In spite of the differences and grades in the categories of spirits, the fact remains that interconnectedness also entails communication and that makes room for ecological harmony among the beings in the entire ecosystem.

In everything said in this section, this essay rejects the willful maltreatment of the ecosystem by human beings and therefore opines that human beings are not and would never be justified by assuming that nature should be treated ignominiously simply because of human rationality and moral status which breeds pride and selfishness.

## Conclusion

This study was motivated by human justificatory positions on the destructions of the ecosystem simply on the basis of being the only members qualified to do so because of their special moral distinction. Non-human species in the ecosystem are seen only as valuable in their instrumental and utilitarian status. What such components possess for the anthropocentric ethicists are instrumental values and not intrinsic values which are uniquely for

human beings. In our examination of such claims, we have shown that the nature of human life is not significantly different from the life of nature. Every activity carried out by human beings, indirectly or directly, has its concomitant version in other non-human members of the ecosystem. This brought us to reinterpreting human being's selfish understanding of the seeming distinction between intrinsic and instrumental values, thereby refocusing the human mind in its relationship with the environment. The moment humans acknowledge the indispensable interdependence between them and the entire ecosystem, such inhuman acts of man in indiscriminately destroying the entire ecosystem would be addressed. In all of our positions in this work, we hold that the clear understanding of the nature of human life and the life of nature ultimately culminates in environmental sustainability.

## References

- Adesogan, A. et al. (2020). 'Animal Source Foods: Sustainability Problem or Malnutrition and Sustainability Solution? Perspective Matters' in *Global Food Security*. Vol. 25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2019.100325>
- Barcalow, E. (2006). *Moral Philosophy: Theory and Issues* (Belmont CA: Wadsworth Thomson Learning).
- Brennan, A. & Lo, Y.S. (2010). *Understanding Environmental Philosophy* (Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited).
- Broom, D. M. (2023). 'Limits of Sentience' in *Animal Sentience*. Vol.33, No. 26, pp.1-3.
- Bujo, B. (2009). 'Ecology and Ethical Responsibility from an African Perspective' in M.F. Murove (ed.), *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics* (South Africa: University of Kwazulu-Natal), pp.281-97.
- Erk, C. (2022). *The Ethics of Killing: Life, Death and Human Nature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Gocke, B. P. (2020). 'Pansychism and Panentheism' in G. Bruntrup et al (eds.). *Panentheism and Pansychism: Philosophy of Religion meets Philosophy of Mind* (Boston MA: Brill USA Inc.), pp.37-63.
- Gonzalez, A. M. (2016). 'The Recovery of Action in Social Theory: Acting out of Sentiment, Acting out of Character, Acting out of Interest, Acting out of Will' in Mark Alznauer and José M. Torralba (eds.) *Theories of Action and Morality: Perspectives from Philosophy and Social Theory* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag), pp.79-111.
- Gray, J. et al. (2018). 'Ecocentrism: What it Means and what it Implies' in *The Ecological Citizen*. Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 130-1.
- Hall, M. (2011). *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany* (Albany: State University of New York Press).
- Kalpna et al. (2021). 'Ethnoveterinary Plants used by Rural People of Dagashai Region in District Solan of Himachal Pradesh, India" in *Biological Forum- An International Journal*. Vol.13, No. 3a, pp. 189-209.
- Kern, A. (2020). 'Human Life, Rationality and Education' in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*. Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 268-289. Lee, P. & George, R.P. (2008). 'The Nature and Basis of Human Dignity' in *Ratio Juris*. Vol. 21, No.3, pp.173-93.
- Monday, J. C. (2022). 'Anthropocentrism, Nature, and Environmental Ethic in Daniel Woodrell's Winter's Bone' in *International Journal for the Study of Intercultural Values and Indigenous Ecoethics (Ijivie)*. Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 25-38.
- Mondin, B. (1985). *Philosophical Anthropology* (Rome: Urbaniana University Press).
- Moshman, D. (1994). 'Reason, Reasons, and Reasoning: A Constructive Account of Human Rationality' in *Theory and Psychology*. Vol. 4, No.2, pp. 245-60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354394042005>.
- Nickerson, R. S. (2008). *Aspects of Rationality: Reflections on what it means to be Rational and Whether We are* (New York: Psychological Press).
- Nnamani, A. G. (2005). 'Ethics of the Environment' in Pantaleon O. Iroegbu & Anthony O. Echekwube (eds.). *Kpim of Morality: Ethics: General, Special and Professional* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books), pp.391-400.
- Ojomo, P. A. (2010). 'An African Understanding of Environmental Ethics' in *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK), New Series*. Vol.2, No.2, pp.49-63.
- Pereira, A. (Jr.). (2017). 'Sentience in Living Tissue' in *Animal Sentience*. Vol. 13, No.5, pp. 1-5.
- Santini, B. A. & Martorell, C. (2013). 'Does Retained-Seed Priming Drive the Evolution of Serotiny in Drylands? An Assessment Using the Cactus *Mammillaria Hernandezii*' in *American Journal of Botany*. Vol. 100, No. 2, pp. 365-73.
- Scheinin, M. (2020). 'Human Dignity, Human Security, Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism' in Christophe Paulussen and Martin Scheinin (eds.), *Human Dignity and Human Security in Times of Terrorism* (The Hague: Asser Press), pp.13-26.
- Siddique, Z. et al. (2021). 'Exploration of Ethnomedicinal Plants and their Practices in Human and Livestock Healthcare in Haripur Distrcit, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa' in *Pakistan Journal of Ethnomedicine*. Vol. 17, No.55. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13002-021-00480-x>.
- Soken-Hubert, E. (2023). *10 Reasons Plants are Important*. Accessed at <https://www.theimportantsite.com>.
- State of Queensland. (2020). *Medical/Pharmaceuticals of Animal Origin*, Vol.3.
- Talla, R. T. & Song, I. W. (2014). 'Animal Transport in the Early Indigenous Market Economy of Northern Nigeria' in *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*. Vol. 1, No. 7, pp. 148-56.
- Tavory, I. (2011). 'The Question of Moral Action: A Formalist Position' in *Sociological Theory*. Vol. 29, Issue 4, pp. 272-93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2011.01400.x>.
- Wunderlich, N. et al. (2021). 'Animals in our Lives: An Interactive Well-Being Perspective' in *Journal of Macromarketing*. Vol.44, No.4, pp.646- 62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146720984815>.
- Yeates, J.W. (2023). 'Sentience, Harmony and the Value of Nature' in *Animals*. Vol. 13, No. 38, pp. 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani/3010038>.