CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

There is only one Earth, the only planet that we know of that supports the mechanism of life. Through countless eons, the planet has evolved and life within its envelope of breathable air has diversified immensely. Life's unique ability to adapt to almost any circumstance of location and ambient conditions has ensured its resilience and survival.

The Earth is also fragile. Because life is so specialized and intricate, it is very easy to disrupt a species' environment and its way of life. Unfortunately, the actions, which allow man to live the way he does today, are the largest forces, which upset the equilibrium, and damage (and in some cases destroy) other lives. There is, without doubt, much damage which man has inflicted on his environment (often, quite needlessly). It requires no genius of mind to recognize the fact that deforestation, poaching of animals, indiscriminate usage of insecticides which are often carcinogenic and otherwise damaging, uncontrolled fishing, pollution in the seas, air pollution from factories and proliferating usage of motor transport are greatly responsible for the Environmental Crisis today. There are some destructive acts which man has caused unintentionally. Unfortunately, accidents are a part :
equilibrium. E.g. Oil spills in the oceans as a result of careless shipping practices as we can see from the instance of the Super tanker Exxon-Valdez along the coast of Alaska, offshore drilling and other accidents. Parallel with the ominous entrance of nuclear technology into warfare, came the somewhat oxymoronic declaration—“Peaceful nuclear applications” which has no doubt added a new dimension of lethality to life and environment with the danger of nuclear reactor breakdowns and the component fallout, which can cause death, radiation sickness, fatal cancers, and more frighteningly, the prospect of genetic abnormality for generations to come. Incidents like those at Three Mile Island in USA and Chernobyl in the erstwhile USSR offer us a terrifying glimpse into the damage potential of Nuclear power.

Man is responsible for this environmental destruction. When one looks logically at this problem, one may find it hard to comprehend. Man is slowly killing that which gives him life: Earth. We need the Earth to feed us, shelter us, and delight us. Without it, we cannot survive. Every day, industry is taking more and more of this fragile planet away from its rightful place, and perverting it into a solution for our short-term needs. The tragedy of human development and upkeep at such a disproportionate cost merits the need for serious introspection on our part.
This thesis is an attempt to analyze the views of John Passmore as stated in his book *Man's Responsibility for Nature*. In addition to the chapters giving an historical treatment of some traditional western attitudes to nature, there are chapters on pollution, the conservation of natural resources and preservation of natural areas, and the need to limit human numbers, which Passmore categorizes as problems. My aim, however, is not to explore in detail the ecological problems as such but rather to study the philosophical and ethical issues generated by them. As the book makes abundantly clear, many of these environmental problems raise issues of considerable philosophical relevance and importance. Despite the urgency and importance of solving many of these problems, and the fact that many philosophers in the past have discussed man's relation to nature, Passmore's is one of the very few recent attempts by a philosopher to deal with this issue. The book *Man's Responsibility for Nature* is an important contemporary statement of a particular view of man's relations to nature, and is in many ways a pioneering attempt to discuss 'the fundamental moral, metaphysical and political assumptions' which so often underlie arguments on the subject. Passmore's book, as some see it as initiating the revival of 'applied philosophy', is similar in its attempt at once to defend a rational environmentalism and to free it from mystical and deontological entanglements. The emphasis is that
other people, as well as plants and animals form a part of our environment.

The thesis consists of the following chapters:

Chapter I- Introduction
Chapter II-Man’s Responsibility for Nature: A Summary
Chapter III- The Ethical Question
Chapter IV- The Religious Approach
Chapter V- Passmore On Animal Rights
Chapter VI- Conclusion

In the second chapter, I give a brief summary of Passmore’s book which begins with two chapters that are essentially historical- ‘Man as a Despot’ and ‘Stewardship and Cooperation’, where he sets out to describe (a) those western traditions that tend to encourage and (b) those that might serve to curb man’s destructiveness. He gives two possible interpretations of the Old Testament view about man’s dominion: the first, that he is an absolute despot or ruler who takes care of the living beings God made subject to him only in so far as he profits from doing so, and the second that like the Platonist shepherd who takes care of the living things over which he rules for their own sake. Passmore then turns to four
major ecological problems - Pollution, Conservation, Preservation and Multiplication.

To him, pollution is simply the process of putting matter in wrong places in quantities that are too large and solving them means reducing the flow of substances or processes into places, which are ‘wrong’. A successful attack on pollution involves the solution of a great variety of problems not only scientific and technological but moral, political, economic and administrative.

As regards the problem of conservation, the fundamental moral issue that arises is whether or not we ought to pay any attention to the needs of posterity. Questions like, should there be any agreement that it is wrong to destroy wilderness or undomesticated species? is often considered in the discussion of Preservation. We can think of wilderness and of species as having instrumental or an intrinsic value. On the first view, wilderness and species ought to be preserved only if, and in so far as they are useful to man. On the second view, they ought to be preserved even if their continued existence were demonstrably harmful to human interest.

Multiplication, as an ecological problem discusses as to how we can determine whether our population growth is too rapid and what moral objections there are to the attempts made to control it. The precise
importance of population growth as a source of ecological destructiveness is highly debatable. According to him the limits we ought to attempt, as a generation is not with the number of posterity as such but with their sensibility, their civilization and their happiness. For him to surrender our freedom, to abandon all respect for persons in the name of control over population growth is to make sacrifices, which our proper concern for posterity cannot justify.

Passmore finally sets in confrontation Western traditions and ecological problems and asks what the west has to reject and what to retain, if it is to have any prospect of solving the problems, which confront it. If Western civilization is to survive it should change its ways in important respects but the only point of issue, he says, is just how fundamental the changes need to be. To solve ecological problems, Passmore says we should get rid of those rubbish that come in our way. He rejects the view that mysticism can save us while science and technology cannot. Another view he rejects is the view that nature is sacred. Ignorance as an obstacle to the solution of ecological problems, Passmore feels, can only be dispelled by science. Hence he suggested that there should be minor revolution within science.
The third chapter is an account of the change brought about in the scope and application of ethics. The focus here is on the classical understanding of ethics followed by the development of extension ethics. I then present the counter argument thereof, with special reference to John Passmore's understanding of a 'new ethic'. The term "ethics", derived from the Greek word *ethos* (character), refers to the philosophical science that deals with the rightness and wrongness of human actions. Going by the etymological meaning of ethics as habit, conduct, customs and usages, ethics has been understood as that branch of philosophy that deals with the moral dimension of human life. Thus over the years ethics has been understood in terms of what we are or what we do or what we are disposed to be or do in the relation to other people, to ourselves or to God. Environmental philosophers are now proposing a critique of traditional Western moral thought, which it is alleged, is deficient for providing a satisfactory ethic of obligation and concern for the nonhuman world. They claim that this concern needs to be extended, in particular, toward 'nonhuman individuals, wilderness areas, and across time and species'.

Dissatisfied that the traditional ethical system is in no way good to look into the environmental crisis, Aldo Leopold went out of line and proposed a new ethic (his land ethic). This new ethic, he felt, would recognize an enlarged moral community extending to the entire biosphere
and all the creatures interacting therein. The need for a wider perspective prompted Arnae Naess to advocate the platform of Deep ecology. He insisted on a proper appreciation of nature that will lead to the recognition that 'equal right to live and blossom is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom'. The need to avoid environmental myopia also prompted Richard Routley to present to the World Congress the case for a new, environmental ethic, in which values in nature and the case for their preservation would be recognized. He argues that "the dominant Western ethical tradition" excludes an environmental ethic in principle-thereby, requiring us to develop one on a non-traditional basis. These theories aim primarily at extending ethical concerns beyond traditional limits- human life, health, and welfare- to include a large number of entities and collections of entities- for example, species and ecosystems that have not been given moral consideration previously.

Bryan G. Norton assumed a less reactionary posture and argued for "weak anthropocentrism", an attitude towards nature that would enhance and ennable human life and character as well as protect the environment. All these literatures gave birth to environmental ethics as a distinct discipline with environmental philosophers drafting and vigorously defending a variety of revolutionary theories to bring nature within the purview of ethics. These theories aim primarily at extending ethical
concern beyond traditional limits—human life, health, and welfare—to include a large number of entities and collections of entities—for example, species and ecosystems that haven’t been given previous moral consideration. J. Baird Callicott says that an environmental ethic is supposed to govern human relations with non-human natural entities. It would, for example, prohibit or censure as wrong, certain modes of conduct affecting animals and plants. According to an environmental ethic, he adds, it may be wrong to mutilate a tree, or pollute a river or develop a wilderness.

However, Passmore, arguing that normal western ethics is entirely adequate, mounted an anthropocentric counterattack to address the contemporary environmental malaise—since human actions that directly degrade the environment, indirectly harm human beings. He accepts that there are serious ecological problems—problems of pollution, conservation, preservation and multiplication and that changes are required but there is no need for entirely rejecting the basic ethical value systems of western civilization.

Ecological problems, we are told, are basically due to greed and shortsightedness, and what is needed, he says, is a more steadfast commitment to a ‘perfectly familiar ethic’. He argues that ethics have
always taught us that greed is evil and there is no need of a new ethic to teach us so. That would be re-inventing the wheel. He says that the alternative proposed by some of the proponents of 'new ethic' is not only not needed- it is essentially irrational, intellectually incoherent, mystical and even dangerous. It involves abandoning the hard won western tradition of critical investigation, a rejection of science, and civilization and a reversion to 'attitudes and modes of thought the west painfully shook off'. In short, it involves a return to the intellectual and cultural Dark Ages.

A morality, a new religion, Passmore continues, is not the sort of thing one can simply conjure up. It can grow out of existing attitudes of mind, as an extension or development of them. Passmore’s larger purpose is to argue, in opposition to writers such as Lynn White, that our present ecological crisis does not require radical changes in our way of thinking about the natural world. Skeptical of the prospects for any radically new ethic, Passmore cautioned that the traditions of thought could not be abruptly overhauled. Any change in attitudes to our natural surroundings, which stood the chance of widespread acceptance, he argued, would have to resonate and have some continuity with the very tradition, which had legitimized our destructive practices. In Passmore’s words:
“It is one thing to suggest that Western societies must learn to be more prudent in their attitude to technological innovation, less wasteful of natural resources, more conscious of their dependence on the biosphere. It is quite another thing to suggest that they can solve their ecological problems only if they abandon the analytical, critical approach which has been their peculiar glory and go in search of a new ethics, a new metaphysics, a new religion”

The fourth chapter contains a discussion on the religious understanding of nature and involves a survey of a few major religions. It looks into the origin of western traditions as proposed by Passmore. Here ‘religion’ is understood as those systems of belief, ritual, institutional life, spiritual aspiration, and ethical orientation. Teachings can be marked as ‘religious’ in the way they assert that people are essentially connected to a Supreme Being whose authority is distinct from worldly powers. Some religions, for example, Buddhism spell it as an achievement of a state of consciousness that transcends the attachments and passions of our ordinary social egos. Religious attitudes thus turn on a sense of what Paul Tillich calls ‘ultimate concern’.

Here I wish to argue that religion has a part to play too in tackling the environmental crisis. The threat of global ecological collapse need not lead us to abandon our religions or our religious traditions. Rather it could be a major stimulus to their revitalization. For many, an important component of the current environmental crisis is spiritual and ethical. It is
here that the religions of the world may have a role to play in cooperation
with other individuals, institutions, and initiatives that have been engaged
with environmental issues for a considerable period of time. Religions are
beginning to respond in remarkably creative ways. They are not only
rethinking their theologies but are also reorienting their sustainable
practices and long-term environmental commitments. In so doing, the very
nature of religion and of ethics is being challenged and changed.

The main argument for Passmore’s thesis having stemmed up from
accusations on Christianity as the root of all ecological problems, he tries
to justify the Christian attitude, which Lynn White had blatantly accused.
He starts from the creation history and tries to clear up misconceptions
and misinterpretations of passages on creation in the book of Genesis. He
gives a detailed explanation on the Hebraic and Greek influences on the
Western attitudes to nature. Thus this chapter dwells on this justification
at length.

The fifth chapter centres on origin and the development of the
animal rights debate and Passmore’s stand on man’s treatment of animals.
Traditional discussions on rights have usually been confined to the rights
of humans but an area that has gained considerable momentum in the
recent years in the field of ethics is the ‘animal rights’ debate or simply
the debate about human beings’ treatment of animals. Most of the
participants in the animal rights debate agree that it is wrong to treat animals cruelly, to inflict needless pain and suffering, and to kill for no good reason.

Tom Regan explicitly rejects rationality as the basis for the right to life and argues that the right to life is based upon inherent value. For Regan, only beings with inherent values have rights. In order to possess moral rights, he argues, an individual must not be merely sentient but also a "subject-of-a-life". Gary Francione advocated the extension of moral consideration beyond the human community. He argues that we have a moral intuition that "it is wrong to inflict unnecessary suffering on animals", yet our actions fall well short of our moral wisdom. The routine suffering we inflict on animals is unnecessary in every sense of the word. He believes that the only requirement for entry into the moral community is sentience. Peter Singer challenged the attitude that animals are ours to use in whatever way we see fit and offered a 'new ethic' for our treatment of animals. He provided the moral foundation for animal liberation movement, and at the same time paved a way for philosophers to begin addressing the moral status of animals.

Passmore holds that only the beings capable of having interests can have rights. But I am convinced, he says, that it is appropriate to speak of animals as having 'interests' unless 'interests' are identified with needs-
and to have needs, as a plant, too, has needs, is by no means the same thing as to have rights. It is one thing to say that it is wrong to treat plants and animals in a certain manner, quite another thing to say that they have a right to be treated differently. For him, "the idea of 'rights' is simply not applicable to what is non-human". For Passmore, the core concept of morality, such as the concept of rights, do not apply to something called nature. Animals and plants either individually or collectively, do not recognize mutual obligation, do not participate in moral community. Nature should be respected not because it has rights, or has inherent worth, interests or a good of its own, but because such an attitude of respect is consistent with living a rational, moral, and humane life. By destroying aspects of nature we risk our health and the health of our future generations, and also debase ourselves by being destructive, cruel or simply insensitive. He argues at length the attitudes that have influenced man's relationship with nature, to be concluded with the same and simple view that 'animals do not have rights'.

Passmore's view that rights cannot be applied to what is not human speaks for itself that it makes sense to speak of rights only on the context of human beings or human society. This argument that the concept of rights derive exclusively from human society presumably rests on a social contract account of rights. Here I show that Passmore's account of animal
rights fits well into the Social contract theory or contractualism, a theory, which has been ‘unfriendly towards animals’.

Passmore provides a well researched and eye opening study of the historical ideas about the moral status of animals in western thought, which no doubt, is an unfriendly one. Passmore however admits a change of attitude over the last century and a half, where men has begun to recognize that they ought not unnecessarily to inflict pain on animals. This means that they recognize at least one point at which the relationships with nature are governed by moral principles. But he insists that ‘what has happened over the last century and a half in the West is not that animals have been given more power, more freedom, or anything else which might be accounted as a right’. Rather what has happened, in his opinion, is that men have lost rights: they no longer have the same power over animals; they no longer treat them as they choose.

Passmore has made an observation in regard to the change of attitude in man’s treatment of animals. These observations, he says, were ‘in passing’, ‘straws in the wind’, ‘personal reactions of unusual sensibility.’ Yet it would not be appropriate to interpret them as mere expressions of individual over-sensibility.
In the last chapter, I have summarized the findings of the study. Passmore does not seem to have done justice to the title itself. He started with the title "Man's Responsibility for Nature" but his whole discussion does not take into account what responsibility for nature is all about. He has only given primacy to the responsibility of man towards humanity.