2 Locating Human in Various Schools of Radical Environmental Philosophy: An Evaluation

In the previous chapter, it has been demonstrated that the traditional schools of environmental ethics primarily promote various avenues to make human beings responsible towards the environment. For that matter, a significant amount of scholarly attention has been diverted to know the environment and its functioning, so that it can be well-managed. To make environmental ethics more robust, over time, environmental ethicists began to offer philosophical insights to re-conceptualize the human—environment relationship. Some radical schools have emerged to shift the point of inquiry from the environment to human individuals and societal structure as well. Although most of the time these radical schools subscribe to an ecocentric standpoint, the influence of broader philosophical theories help them to radically revise the role of human beings in their conceptualizations. Deep ecology, ecofeminism, phenomenological experience of nature, and ecophenomenology, these four schools or streams of thoughts, in spite of being grounded on ecocentric approach, are markedly different from holistic ecocentric schools, particularly, in terms of providing due importance to human beings. In this regard, while there is a close resemblance between phenomenological insights in environmental ethics and ecophenomenology, both of them are quite different from each other. The former mostly focuses on the methodological modification and epistemological shifts, whereas, the latter grounds itself on the philosophy of phenomenology and strives for providing insights into the fundamental bedrocks of environmental ethics. In this chapter, these differences will be duly highlighted. With this prelude, here, I will be offering a brief on each of these schools and their attempts to shift the gaze from knowing the environment to understanding human beings, while formulating moral and ethical guidelines. In the course of this review, I will also point out some of the major limitations of these schools, present at the very heart of their formulation.

i. Deep Ecology

Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess is the father of deep ecology. From the life history of Naess, it is evident that he has conceptualized the school of deep ecology within the scaffolding of a socio-political movement. Naess presents his philosophy of deep ecology in contrast to ‘shallow ecology’, as he explicitly denies any kind of quick-fix solutions for the environmental

---

1Alan Drengson, Introduction to The Ecology of Wisdom Writings By Arne Naess, ed. Alan Drengson and Bill Devall (Berkley: Counterpoint, 2008), 25.
problems what shallow ecology generally offers. Indeed, deep ecology perceives environmental problems as an upshot of our way of life that gets shaped by our consciousness.\(^2\) The prominent difference between shallow and deep ecology is that the latter is based on a robust philosophical understanding and directed towards establishing a new form of consciousness that can change the moral landscape of individuals for determining ethical stances. Moreover, shallow ecological thinking considers the human—environment relationship on the basis of the premise that human beings are separate entities from their environment. Shallow ecology also accepts the dominant metaphysics of mechanistic materialism, economic-developmental model, and resources management. In contrast, deep ecology argues for a new cosmology as it challenges the presumptions of shallow ecology, to uphold pluralism that promotes: final outcomes should always be achieved through multiple avenues. On the basis of this concept, it also questions the rationalistic decisions promoted by the shallow ecological approaches and explains relationality with a set of philosophical and religious foundations.\(^3\) Hence, deep ecology emphasizes on building a philosophical ground through which a shift in consciousness can be brought in. In doing so, Naess in the essay ‘the Basics of Deep Ecology Movement’\(^4\) explains eight principles and delineates their import for environmental ethics.

The first principle of deep ecology emphasizes on living beings, but, it does not limit itself to that. Indeed, it extends its purview to ecosphere as well. The term ‘life’ has a greater significance in deep ecology than its common notions. River, land, mountain, and culture everything eventually come under the category of living things. ‘Let the river live’ is one of the famous slogans of the deep ecology movement. The second principle explains that unlike biocentric ethics, deep ecology does not value living organisms according to any hierarchy based on sentience. It believes that each organism is equally valuable in itself. The third principle describes that human beings as just a species does not have any special right except that of fulfilling their vital needs. It clarifies that vital need has been taken as a parameter for judging ethical responsibilities towards the environment. Naess states vital need is “to allow for considerable latitude in judgment”.\(^5\) As deep ecology identifies that the large human population is the primary cause behind the present imbalance in the environment, the fifth principle


\(^5\)Ibid., 112
indicates the need of reducing human population. However, Naess also points out that “stabilization and reduction of population will take time”\textsuperscript{6}, till then, it is imperative to develop interim strategies to manage the present situation. Considering deep ecology conceptualizes itself as an environmental movement, the sixth principle focuses on how to implement these aforementioned principles in reality. For this, Naess sees the extension of wilderness areas as a prudent instrument. Along with that, he also focuses on Self-determination, decentralization, creation of local community, and to think globally and act locally\textsuperscript{7}, for invoking any deep and persisting change in human beings. The seventh principle talks about an ideological change which points to the changes in ‘quality of life’. As it is next to impossible to measure the quality of life through quantitative measures, he negates any attempt to equate this to standard of living. Naess states, quality of life should not be negated just because it is difficult to measure, instead it is necessary to find out alternative means. In the process, it is essential to figure out what is necessary as oppose to desirable; thus deep ecologists should carefully prioritize their decisions to achieve their intended objectives.

Deep ecology is also known as a radical ecological school because of its ‘movement’ based approach. The movement as envisaged, is not only a social-political one, rather it is a movement towards the ontological foundations of the ethical dilemmas, faced due to rising environmental issues. In this regard, Naess’s Ecosophy T demonstrates the ‘unity of the world’ through explicating the process of ‘Self-realization’ and advocates that in this way, it is possible to transcend the environmental crisis. In this context, he has extensively dealt with the difference between appearance and reality. He describes, appearance by definition implies that it appears to a person. Thus, the subject-object distinction is taken for granted in the definition of appearance. In a way, it actually negates the idea of ‘world as concrete contents’\textsuperscript{8}. The reality, on the other hand, is not caught up by this perspectivism. Although Naess is skeptic towards the relativism of perspective, he argues experiences are not similar to perspectives. The careful use of experience enables us to overcome misleading relativism, subject-object duality, and even could reveal the unity of the world. Therefore, here, I think, it is particularly important to elaborate further on the notion of Self as put forth by this school, to grasp the way the role of human beings in the context of the human—environment relationship, is conceptualized in this school.

\textsuperscript{6}Ibid., 113.
\textsuperscript{7}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{8}Ibid., 79
The concept of Self in deep ecology: Naess conceives his Ecosophy T with the ultimate norm of Self-realization. Here, Naess explicitly mentions that the notion of Self that Ecosophy T deals with is not of the individual self or ego, rather it “embraces all the lifeforms on the planet (and elsewhere?) together with their individual selves (Jivas)”.

Maximizing Self-realization is the ultimate objective of the Ecosophy T as it could provide us an all-encompassing manifestation of the presence of all lifeforms. This Self-realization is not only limited to a specific class of human beings; all of us are equally capable of achieving this. Identification with other beings actually helps to flourish one’s self-identity, which in turn aid in Self-realization. Thus, protection of other lifeforms is important for the sake of human Self-realization. Subsequently, sustaining biological diversity becomes another key component as it increases the Self-realizing potential and thereby implies aggregate symbiosis. Therefore, as per Ecosophy T, any complex system is good because it inevitably possesses diversity and symbiosis.

I have already mentioned, Self is not equivalent to individual self or ego, now I will further try to capture how Naess explicitly differentiates Self from ego. He argues, the traditional understanding of maturity of self accommodates only three steps: formation of ego, ego to social self, and social self to metaphysical self. However, this construction of self does not incorporate individuals’ connection with their environment. To bridge this gap, Naess introduces the concept of “ecological self”, which is capable of explaining an individual’s self-relation with other non-human beings. This also helps one to identify herself with other beings and thus, it widens the self and in the process, one’s self becomes mature. This concept enunciates that one’s own self-realization is entirely dependent on others, with whom the individual identifies. Thus, it becomes inevitable that others should also accomplish the self-realization in the same manner. Naess’s concept of ecological self brings forth duty and moral responsibility towards one’s environment.

This self-realization, however, is not altruistic in any manner, rather it is contingent upon a different understanding of self. Naess emphasizes on the role of ‘identification’, and suggests that identifying one’s self with another, often leads one to extend empathy to other selves. His theory of identification contest the Freudian claim that the love of others and the love of your own self are contradictory. Instead, through this identification theory, he proves that if one loves herself, then probably the individual will instantly identify her own self with others’ selves as

---

well. He points out that if one can negate the narrow perception of self then self-love and love to another self is not contradictory rather goes hand in hand as he claims:

Through identification, they may come to see that their own interests are served by conservation, through genuine self-love, the love of a widened and deepened self.\(^{11}\)

Here, Naess also highlights the role of self-interest in this entire context. This self-interest always indicates the presence of self-potentiality,\(^{12}\) and thus, self-interest “furnishes a bridge from self-love to self-realization”.\(^{13}\)

In this context, it is important to remember that at the pragmatic realm, deep ecology is formulated as a political and social movement. The tag of radical ecology is also preferred because Naess was not keen on offering an environmental ethic rather he was more interested in creating a movement which can rightly induce a shift in the political and social realm as highlighted in the sixth principle. For the same, deep ecology subscribes to the wilderness movement. Although Naess describes that the love for the wilderness of a deep ecologist cannot be equated with that of the shallow preservationists, rather, the former should be understood as demonstrating that the current lifestyle of industrial countries is “incompatible with living in wilderness”.\(^{14}\) So if one considers sincerely, protection of wilderness in a way can be seen as a means of retrieving oneself from a high level of consumption and can motivate one to choose a simple lifestyle in the midst of nature. In this context, David M Johns describes that through high level of consumption, elites in the society try to shy away from the feeling of pain and powerlessness by the large segment of the population.\(^{15}\) This profound realization reveals that from the deep ecological perspective, wilderness movement is not only directed to bring change in the outside world, rather, it also focuses on providing a platform to critically examine human beings, human practices, and human desires. However, one has to acknowledge that despite the fact that Naess’s version of wilderness movement is based on a robust philosophical understanding, in the pragmatic realm, these in-depth philosophical insights hardly get translated into action. Ramachandra Guha, in his essay ‘Deep Ecology Revisited’\(^{16}\) comprehensively points out, this theoretical and pragmatic mismatch. Guha\(^{17}\) argues that the

---

\(^{11}\)Ibid., 85.

\(^{12}\)Ibid., 86.

\(^{13}\)Ibid., 85.


\(^{15}\)David M Johns, “The Relevance of Deep Ecology to the Third World,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (See note 14), 256.


\(^{17}\)Ibid., 277.
expansion of the wilderness movement in the third world refutes Naess’s claim that deep ecology movement enables societies to protect the interests of a large number of people from all over the world.

By acknowledging Guha’s critique, it can be said that the problem arises when deep ecology as a pragmatic movement expands without taking account of its core philosophy that has been put forth by its founder. In this regard, I will also like to mention that the strong ontological base of deep ecology seems difficult to incorporate into the process of formulating policies, and that’s why actions on the ground become severely limited. Along with this practical limitation in implementing the principles of deep ecology, there is a philosophical drawback as well. Posing emphasis on human self is also critiqued by quite a few scholars. In the following section, I will delve into a few of these critiques in detail.

_Critique of Deep Ecology:_ Eric Katz\(^1\) points out that the primary reason to differentiate deep ecology from other schools of ecocentric ethics is, its core philosophy of identification, Self-realization, and holistic ontology, as these together put forth a completely new approach to understand the human—environment relationship. The entire value system of deep ecology is completely based on this holistic ontology. As per Katz, nonetheless, these core principles are tilted towards anthropocentrism. For this reason, he refuses to acknowledge deep ecology as a holistic ecocentric ethics. He explains that the principle of identification and the described process of attaining it, are anthropocentric in nature. Identifying one’s self with others actually requires one to connect her interest with the interest of other non-human beings. In the process of identification of the other’s interest, Katz argues, most of the time, human beings are prone to anthropomorphize the interest of other beings. Equating non-human’s interest to human’s interest is denoted as a form of anthropomorphism. In the same manner, this anthropomorphism perpetuates in the process of Self-realization as it is based on the act of identification. Katz, also argues Self-realization promotes “Kant’s notion of ‘beautiful action’, which fuse together ethical obligation and the pursuit of personal interest”.\(^2\) On one hand, this notion of Self-realization talks about the virtue of being ethically obliged, on the other, it provides the necessary rationale for being ethical, which is to fulfill the self-interest. Hence, posing the highest value on the notion of Self and identifying the entire universe as a unitary Self are indeed the “product of

---


\(^2\) Ibid., 33.
anthropocentric thought”.\textsuperscript{20} The concept of Self-realization can also be marked problematic because this is based on inegalitarianism. It poses higher values on to those selves which have the capacity to realize their interconnectedness with the rest of the universe. Thus, Katz concludes, deep ecology falls short in eliminating the anthropocentric perspective from its entire philosophy.

In this regard, the third core principle of deep ecology, the relational holistic ontology is also marked as possessing anthropocentric perspectives. Before going into it, I would like to clarify the principle in brief. The relational holistic ontology claims that the reality is relative. Each and every individual has their own reality about a particular object. This relational reality arises from the interrelated experiences. Therefore, Naess describes the reality can only be revealed by the personal, spontaneous experiences or \textit{gestalt}.\textsuperscript{21} Often times, it is difficult to experience this spontaneous experience.\textsuperscript{22} But, he also points out that in the current era, human beings rarely have this kind of experience, though it is a primordial way to understand the interconnectedness and achieve Self-realization. Now, as mentioned above, this principle is thought to be possessing an anthropocentric bias, as in the process, deep ecology in principle becomes completely dependent on “\textit{gestalt} experience of the human subject”\textsuperscript{23}, and the other two principles, interconnectedness and Self-realization, are seen as the outcomes of this experience, and thereby fall in the trope of anthropocentrism. Following these, Katz (2010) points out that it fails to transcend the anthropocentric bias as “human beings cannot escape the anthropocentric character of their relational experiences”.\textsuperscript{24}

\textit{The necessity of anthropocentrism}: The scholars who critique deep ecology, like Katz, Sylvan, also argue that deep ecology being an ecocentric ethics is unable to accomplish the task, set by ecocentric ethicists. Instead, it gets pre-occupied in building ecosophy, which concentrates more on the philosophy of ecological harmony over building necessary ethical principles. They also argue that environmental philosophy being an applied one should concentrate on building ethics over explicating ontology, to fundamentally address environmental and developmental issues. However, I would like to argue in favor of Naess’s claim that ontological platform is required

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{21}Naess. \textit{The Ecology of Wisdom}.
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 194.
\textsuperscript{23}Eric Katz, “Against the Inevitability of Anthropocentrism,” 36.
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
to establish any form of efficacious ethical principles.\textsuperscript{25} I acknowledge that a robust form of ethic is absolutely necessary for environmental philosophy as well as to resolve pragmatic environmental issues, however, negating the need of an ontological investigation can also be quite detrimental for environmental ethics.

Moreover, despite Katz’s (2000) critique of deep ecology, I see, any environmental philosophy which takes account of the human experiences and the role of the Self has to have an anthropocentric bias as it is the case for deep Ecology. Katz (2000)\textsuperscript{26} aptly mentions that it is implausible to transcend the anthropocentric character of human experience and affirm that to build up a true environmental ethics we must strive to overcome the inevitability of anthropocentrism by an environmental axiology that de-emphasizes human-centered categories of value. However, I have already indicated the debate regarding the possibility of existence of value without the value-giver, human beings. Hence, I see, anthropocentric bias, does not mean that human perspective and experience must not be incorporated in environmental ethics. Indeed, I consider that if we accept that environmental ethics as a discipline is there to guide the human—environment relationship, then the idea of human beings as a stakeholder needs to get its due share of importance, similar to that vested on the environment. At the same time, with the help of a nuanced analysis, I have already explained that the sole purpose, instruments, and implementation strategies of the school of ecocentric ethics are also quite debatable. Taking into account of that susceptibility, it eventually becomes necessary to acknowledge that there could be some school of environmental ethics which is not ecocentric in principle, but still could provide a holistic environmental understanding by giving due importance to human perspective. Therefore, I feel there is no need to problematize the anthropocentric bias (if we consider that taking account of human perspective is anthropocentrism) of environmental philosophy and environmental ethics as such. Instead, I argue, it could be a prudent way forward to build a pragmatic as well as an effective form of environmental ethics.

Transpersonal Ecology: To comprehend the relation between human beings and their environment, now it is possible to claim that one needs to take account of the human self. This leads me to what Warwick Fox\textsuperscript{27} called transpersonal ecology. To extend the above argument, Fox’s transpersonal ecology demonstrates a different way of incorporating the role of human

\textsuperscript{25}Arne Naess. “The World of Concrete Contents,” in The Ecology of Wisdom (See note 4), 77.
\textsuperscript{26}Eric Katz, “Against the Inevitability of Anthropocentrism,” 39.
beings to build ethical guidelines. He establishes a theory of intrinsic value that stresses on the need of formulating a psychological foundation which can transcend the present axiological debate associated with this value. In this regard, Fox presents an in-depth analysis of deep ecology to establish the manner in which the philosophy of deep ecology has the potential to generate a psychological foundation of environmental philosophy or as Fox would say, ecophysics. In this section, I will carry out an in-depth review of his works to firmly establish my claim that it is highly important to incorporate human beings’ behavior towards the environment for creating an effective environmental ethic.

As mentioned, Fox’s primary claim is that the axiological debate on intrinsic value is futile. He argues that for ecocentric ethics, intrinsic value is a tool to denote the moral ought whereas for Naess intrinsic value is a term to denote a phenomenological experience. It means that in the everyday experiences, the concept of intrinsic value can be grasped, as he puts forth:

People will say colloquially (i.e., without any reference to formal philosophical views regarding the nature of intrinsic value) that they experience certain entities as being valuable “for their own sake” or “in and of themselves,” and others understand them when they say this.28

This phenomenological turn in the intrinsic value concept clearly exemplifies that this concept has a potential to go beyond the logic of the ecological sciences and can be explained on the basis of transpersonal ecology. Fox’s transpersonal ecology29 leads to the omission of the moral ought and advocates for “realization-of-as-expansive-a-sense-of-self-as possible”.30 He precisely points out that most of the deep ecologists, like George Sessions, Bill Devall, Andrew McLaughlin, Alan Drengson, and Michael Zimmerman, accept the rejection of moral ought. They agree with Naess’s argument that just imposing intrinsic value to some entity cannot provide the justification for preserving it. The traditional ecocentric schools’ attempt to ground intrinsic value theory in the ecological sciences actually demonstrates that it is conceptualized as providing a robust foundation to justify the preservation of the environment. Perhaps, as Fox indicates that this logical moral ‘ought’ falls short in the realm of practice. To make this explanation more explicit, Fox states that generally there are three kinds of human self that guide human action. This ‘tripartite conception of self’ describes these three kinds of self as: desiring-impulsive self, rationalizing deciding self, and normative-judgmental self. Most of the time normative-judgmental self has to strike a balance between the other two forms of self. Although

28Fox, “Transpersonal Ecology,” 73.
30Fox, “Transpersonal Ecology,” 75.
the moral ought, ideally, should get considered by the normative-judgmental self, often gets compromised due to the demand of the other two.

In this regard, Fox claims that this tripartite conception of self is like a ‘narrow, atomistic, or particle-like volitional self’.

31 In contrast to this narrow atomistic conception of self, Fox presents a concept of transpersonal self which he conceptualizes as a “wide, expansive or field-like conception of self”. 32 He explains that the acceptance of the transpersonal self provides the opportunity to expound on the concept of intrinsic value based on experience, as deep ecology describes it. Transpersonal self enables one to realize the interconnectedness of the entire world, not based on any logical understanding, rather, with the help of the self-identification. He explicitly mentions that this identification does not mean that losing one’s own identity; rather, it is the ability to expand one’s sense of self to include others, while remaining physically separated. This conception of identification reveals a relative autonomy that indicates all entities are interdependent. Fox also strongly refutes the argument that self-realization through identification actually possesses anthropocentric bias. He argues:

…transpersonal ecology is anthropocentric simply because it focuses on the human capacity for identification is as perverse a use of this term as it is to say that a group such of Men Overcoming Violent Emotion (MOVE) is sexist simply because it focuses on men. 33

This claim clearly resembles the point that I posited earlier that taking account of human capacity and human perception cannot be equated to anthropocentrism. Indeed, as I see, there is a need to reconceptualize the very concept of anthropocentrism itself.

Conclusion: By incorporating Fox’s insight, I would like to submit two major limitations of deep ecology and its later development as transpersonal ecology. My approach to deep ecology, as I have mentioned in the introduction of this section, is based on the fact that deep ecology is one of the schools of environmental ethics which provides the due importance to human beings as an active stakeholder in the development of environmental ethics. At this juncture, I acknowledge that deep ecology and transpersonal ecology do provide importance to human perception and uphold a relational holistic ontology as one of its core principles. The question, nevertheless, arises that though deep ecology and transpersonal ecology accept the presence of relativistic reality and its consequences, they do not ask why this relativistic reality occurs in the first place, and what is the fundamental character of human beings that leads towards this

31Ibid., 68.
32Ibid.
33Fox, “Transpersonal Ecology,” 89.
relativistic reality. I think, without exploring the underlying phenomenon in detail, it is difficult to proceed further in the direction of addressing the consequence of this relativistic reality. Secondly, deep ecology and transpersonal ecology strongly emphasize on the importance of identification and self-realization. These core principles explicitly denote an interconnection of self with the entire world. Deep ecology value this interconnection and considers it as an inherently desirable thing as it leads towards self-realization. However, a circularity in argumentation is clearly evident: the Self-realization is good because it helps to realize interconnectedness and in turn, understanding of the interconnectedness is good as it leads to Self-realization.

The question at this juncture arises why is it inherently good to realize the interconnectedness or achieve Self-realization. The answer implicitly advocated by this school is that the interconnectedness helps to maintain the super-order, which again hints towards a teleological explanation. Simultaneously, as deep ecology denies the ecological scientific explanations of interconnectedness, the ground for imposing intrinsic value to an entity become just ‘for their own sake’. To probe further, let me ask, what does this phrase actually mean? From the literature, it is evident that ‘for their own sake’ does not stand for ecological functions; neither it means for aesthetic beauty, nor it is to protect the parts of the whole. Indeed in deep ecology, the need of valuing things for their own sake is explicated phenomenologically. Naess consciously tries to make this term a non-abstract one, therefore, he emphasizes on self-realization which could enable the revelation of the true significance of this phrase. At this juncture, I argue that self-realization in deep ecology is solely directed towards realizing the interconnectedness and thereby, pre-decided. Owing to this, perhaps, it will not be wrong to claim that both intrinsic value and self-realization have only one foundation i.e. the teleological order of the universe. This teleological order does not get a mention in the deep ecology literature explicitly, however, I contend, an in-depth exploration of the principles of deep ecology can clearly denote the foundation is nothing other than the teleological order. I have already negated this teleological explanation through pointing out its ambiguity by taking account of Vogel’s (1998) arguments. Hence, I think in this context, though deep ecology offers a new perspective to comprehend the human—environment relationship, yet it severely fails to transcend the very foundation of ecocentric schools—the teleocentric explanation based on the natural order.
ii. Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism stands out as another prominent school among the radical schools of environmental ethics. Its major claim is that the ecological crisis and the widespread oppression in human society, are interconnected issues—the root cause of both the issues, is domination. Therefore, it is required to address various oppressive traits of society which have become part and parcel of it for a long period of time. This radical perspective—connecting social oppression with ecological problems—is introduced by Rosemary Radford Ruether in her book New Woman/ New Earth, published in 1975. Over time, ecofeminism has demonstrated various instances of domination that exist in the society and the subsequent ecological domination of nature by human beings. Broadly, ecofeminism movement can be divided into cultural and socialist forms. The rationale behind this broad division as Carlassare (2000)\textsuperscript{34} points out is “ecofeminism recognizes the ecological problem in social and cultural problem”.\textsuperscript{35} The socialist ecofeminists argue that social oppression has multiple facets. Ecofeminists like Carolyn Merchant, Mary Mellor, Ariel Salleh, state that the oppression in the society cannot be explained through a single cause like the class oppression inherent in capitalism. Rather, along with capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism, should also be considered as equally liable in instilling oppression in the society, and are destructive to the ecological sustainability. Merchant strongly argues that the concept of nature is socially constructed like knowledge. In her book, The Death of the Nature\textsuperscript{36}, she shows how industrialization and capitalism have radically altered the knowledge about nature. Thus, as per her diagnosis, environmental problems are the upshot of the widening gap between the social and economic productions, and the natural reproduction. Socialist ecofeminism also designates social construction of nature and patriarchal capitalism as the root causes of social oppression and the ecological crisis. Moreover, this group also critiques biological determinism through which women’s abilities are being devalued in comparison to men’s physical and psychological capabilities. Hence, they focus on promoting “material and institutional change”\textsuperscript{37} which can induce changes in the social construction of knowledge and nature.


\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., 90.


\textsuperscript{37}Carlassare, “Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism: Allies in Resistance,” 93.
On the contrary, cultural ecofeminism argues against devaluing certain qualities, which are essentially associated with women, in the patriarchal system. This movement basically attempts to reinforce those qualities like care, empathy, emotion, and the body, which have been systematically underestimated throughout the societal development. Cultural ecofeminism argues that the ecological crisis is an outcome of the domination of those qualities which are associated exclusively with women. Cultural ecofeminists, such as Loria Orenstein, Merlin Stone, Marija Gimbutas, and Riane Eisler, vouch for spiritual restoration, which comprises of “woman-centered and earth-based spiritualities”. Moreover, this school highlights that the written language being a patriarchal language, is a strong carrier of dominating cultures. Hence, it argues to change the very language of patriarchy. It also emphasizes on embodied description rather than traditional academic and scientific descriptions that are mostly third person in nature. These movements advocate the formation of a new cultural paradigm where things will not be judged by the scale set by the patriarchal society. In spite of these differences, however, as I observe, often at the pragmatic level, these theoretical divisions between socialist and cultural ecofeminism, are not strongly maintained. For example, Vandana Shiva’s activism encompasses both these theoretical streams, as she, on one hand, talks about reducing the effect of the industrial revolution and capitalism and promotes local resources and communities’ traditional knowledge. On the other hand, she also focuses on bringing changes in cultures through protecting local languages, and by enhancing the earth-based spirituality. Her book, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, also encompasses both these views.

Having briefly described ecofeminism as being a movement, now, I would like to focus on how this philosophy actually emphasizes on human beings as an active stakeholders of environmental ethics. Here, I will mostly focus on the Karen Warren’s book, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, where she presents a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of ecofeminism. Warren in her book succinctly elaborates that this analysis is necessary to find out the rationale behind the unjustified domination over “human Others” and “earth Others”. This reference to ‘Other’ indicates those groups which are being dominated and subordinated throughout history, and nature is one of them. She explains this unjustified oppression through the concept of ‘logic of domination’. The ‘logic of domination’ states that the oppressor-

---

38Ibid., 94.
oppressed relationship between one class or group of people with another class or group of people, morally justifies the domination of the subjugated groups by the powerful ones. The logic of domination is a process through which society constructs the concept of superiority and inferiority and advances the justification that superiors can dominate the inferiors. Thus “the logic of domination is an explanatory basis to oppression and oppressive conceptual framework”.

Now the question arises, how does this logic of domination work? Firstly, as Warren points out the logic of domination works by constructing inferiority and then by using it to justify domination. This construction of inferiority again depends on social and cultural context, “it is may not be consciously knowing, or even intentionally maintained”. Still, it perpetuates to each and every human beings through habits, customs, and prejudices. Guided by this logic, which accepts “for any X and Y, if X is morally superior to Y, then X is morally justified in subordinating (dominating) Y” each and every individual in the system also accepts that the entities which belong to the up group are better, powerful, and desirable in comparison to entities belonging to other groups. Secondly, this emphasizes on the differences among various groups to morally justify the superior over the inferior, and then continue to suppress the inferior on the same ground.

The logic of domination possesses enough potential to explain why the domination over nature is a common human trait. We as human beings have the capability to radically reshape our social and natural environments for accomplishing our self-determined ends, and it is a special and superior characteristic, exclusive to our species. Thus, human beings are capable of dominating other inferior natural entities. On the same line, Warren also highlights that historically, westernized societies tend to keep those groups which are closer to the culture, rational, and belong to the public realm, to a higher position than the ones, closer to nature, emotions and that prefer to remain in the private realm. Thus, this logic justifies the domination that exists in the society and plays a crucial role in perpetuating various social, and environmental problems in the society.

Having explained this logic of domination and the way ecofeminism has evolved by condemning the same, it would not be wrong to claim that the point of departure of this ethical school is to highlight the dominator-dominated relationship for transcending the deeply

---

41Ibid., 48.
42Ibid.
43Ibid., 49.
44Ibid.
embedded domination in society. It is quite easy to understand that for ecofeminism the pivotal ethical issue is to address the existing domination. In this context, environmental issues are seen as an upshot of this domination as already explicated. Hence, the subsequent actions to resolve environmental issues are arising from an already-decided cause. And I posit, the entire inquiry of the human—environment relationship from the very beginning becomes completely value-laden and guided by an already-specified goal. Having acknowledged the necessity of ecofeminist’s value and the identified cause, I would say that pre-determining the root cause in a way limits the inquiry on an issue, and the already decided aim of Ecofeminism to surpass the dominator-domination relationship and power hierarchy, seizes the scope of a true exploration of the human—environment relationship from a value-neutral point of view. Ecofeminism often emphasizes on capturing embodied experience or phenomenological experience to obtain the voice of those who are not often to be heard. It says, these unheard voices and embodied experiences can provide an in-depth insight to build an ethical relationship with the environment. Here, I appreciate the adaptation of the method of phenomenology and extend my point that not only this method helps to capture some of the experiences of the dominated section of the society or illuminates on some unheard voices, it can also help in to inquire a phenomenon in a value-neutral manner—without any prior problematization.

iii. Phenomenological Experience of Nature

Throughout the development of environmental ethics, phenomenology as a philosophy as well as, as a methodology has been incorporated. Sometimes in literature, it is employed in a very narrow sense just to capture one’s experience of nature, however, with the development of the literature, the philosophy of phenomenology gained prominence and its implication on the human—environment relationship can be fleshed out as:

Phenomenology, as a style of refectation and a practice of life, invites us to drop beneath our accepted abstractions (to suspend our inherited notions and theoretical conceptions) in order to pay close attention to our directly felt experience of things. It asks us to notice the way that the surrounding world and its manifold constituents spontaneously disclose themselves to our most immediate awareness. Phenomenology invites us to trade in our concepts for fresh precepts, to trade theoretical schemata for the difficult articulation of our ongoing experience of the real in its inexhaustible strangeness.45

Phenomenological encountering of environment can offer an ethic which takes account of everyday experience and based on that, it attempts to understand the human—environment relationship. As this school evades inquiries focusing on problems, it starts with everyday affairs, keeping the problem aside, it helps one to move beyond the problem-oriented mode and to be able to tease out the nuances of any issue. Hence, the ethic which comes out of the entire process of phenomenological encountering of everyday affairs are most likely to consider human as an active agent, modifier, as well as the locus where modification needs to be brought in.

Hatley (2004)\textsuperscript{46} captures the phenomenological encountering of wilderness and argues that everyday affairs in the wilderness bluntly negate our presumption that in human-nonhuman relationship, human beings always think they are superior to nonhuman entities. The experience of wilderness enables human beings to understand their vulnerability as a species in front of other species. Hatley by analyzing the word ‘inhuman’ explains that human beings subjugate behaviors of other beings and morally establish that replicating other beings’ behaviors is an immoral act. Morally, we conceptualize goodness with harmony, however, in wild spaces hunting your prey cannot be considered as an immoral or inhuman act. This essay reveals that in wild spaces, humans sense an ‘uncanny gaze’ of other predators. This phenomenological understanding of being edible to other nonhuman, leads to a deeper understanding of wilderness which is to “respect for wilderness necessarily involve a respect for predation”.\textsuperscript{47} This phenomenological experience might have even led one to understand the real aspects of wilderness which are cruelty, survival of the fittest, and relentless struggle for existence. Rather than imagining wilderness in a romantic manner, this account obviously persuades the experiencer to be respectful towards it. It also might induce a shift in the way one comprehends moral goods other than conceptualizing it as non-cruel acts. Hence, this essay shows how a phenomenological experience could provide us a deeper understanding of proximate issues like wilderness as well as distant issues like morality.

On the same line, from the perspective of climate change and the ethics of education, Howard (2013)\textsuperscript{48} shows that everyday phenomenological perception of climate has always been


\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., 26.

\textsuperscript{48}Patrick Howard, “‘Everywhere you go always take the weather with you’: Phenomenology and the pedagogy of climate change education,” Phenomenology and Practice 7 (2013): 3–18.
equated with weather and seasonal changes. These changes are subtle and often are ignored by individuals. At the time of describing the climate, one follows the chronological order and comes up with an in-depth description of seasonal change as it is being sensed through her entire bodily and temporal awareness. Descriptions about weather can be given in three steps as the author describes: the first one is to by the immediacy of the present, the second by capturing changing conditions over the years and seasons, and the third by articulating the observation of the alterations in climate over a generation. However, certain experiences in the climate change era make this entire flow and the regular pattern quite invisible. “Such dis-ordered climatic changes invite us to confront the ‘strange’ or the uncanny” and eventually produces a feeling of ‘not at home’. Thus, the climate narratives can be denoted as ‘effect based narratives’, which captures the effect of climatic change on a narrator’s life and lifeworld. In conclusion, this essay actually attempts to show that “Learning to awaken and interpret our bodily felt experience of the claims of the biotic community is at heart a pedagogical and practical task”. In terms of ethical implications, the objective of this essay is to delineate ways for building a relationship with the environment where human beings are also the part of the ecological world. The climate education is a way to connect the local and global issues along with, a way to reconnect human beings with the larger non-human world by acknowledging that “our relationship with the earth and issues of climate, health, peace, social and environmental justice are interconnected”. This kind of insight can be labeled as a proximate outcome of a phenomenological study, whereas the deeper outcome would be the realization that human beings at this point of time should create a deeper and authentic relationship with the environment. This relationship should not merely focus on solving issues arising from climate change, rather, it should focus on building a relationship with the environment by acknowledging the inexplicable awe of nature and accepting the limitation of our abilities in front of the natural forces.

Having described the above scholarly works, I would like to indicate that there are quite a few studies that end the phenomenological introspection at the proximate level and sometimes even equates phenomenology as a tool for gathering perceptions. For instance, Williams (2000) formulates the study with the objective of exploring the reason behind fewer acknowledgments of the pressing issue of climate change in the media. With the quantitative

49 Ibid., 8.
50 Ibid., 16.
51 Ibid.
analysis of media coverages and theoretical analysis of what constitute an environmental, social problems, the author tries to demonstrate that the solution of climate change often does not follow the general theoretical construction of environmental and social problems. Hence, eventually, it creates a gap between the phenomenological experience of climate change as an environmental, social problem and the solutions generally proposed to address that. Although this study claims itself as a phenomenological study of climate change, it ends its introspection at the proximate level. It takes everyday lifeworld experiences as an example to justify the issue and from those insights, this study does not try to go beyond the proximate realization, to be able to generate insights towards a larger framework like the earlier examples. Similarly, Stefanovic (2004) in the essay *Children and the Ethics of Place* demonstrates children's perception of their environment with the help of phenomenological insights. She argues, children’s perceptions can provide us an in-depth moral understanding and could help adults adopt morally prudent behaviors towards the environment. Thus, children’s knowledge should always be incorporated to build an ethic for any place. Although this essay gives an important insight; it also limits itself on the proximate outcome. Hence, I would like to argue that this kind of phenomenological studies does not explain a phenomenon to its entire possibility, and become again problem-oriented. The proximate outcome becomes so strong and powerful that the distant insights never get acknowledged or explored. Hence, to provide due importance to human beings in the context of the human—environment relationship, it is required to go beyond the shallow usage of human experiences, for example, instead of gathering individuals’ perceptions of the environment or environmental changes, one should attempt to understand the philosophy of phenomenology for deriving both the proximate and the distant insights from human experiences of the environment. It is highly required to appreciate that phenomenology is not only about human perception, rather, it is a description of human experiences as well as it also shows the hermeneutic process beneath human experiences. I will elaborate more on this in the third part of this dissertation.

iv. Ecophenomenology

Ecophenomenology being an emerging interdisciplinary stream in the discipline of environmental philosophy, orients itself “to rediscover the relationship between our sensory awareness of the world and our abstract thought about it, between our pre-reflective experience

---

and reflection on this experience”. It primarily, tries to set up an alternative ground to transcend the modern philosophical presuppositions deeply entrenched in the discipline. Thomson (2004) identifies the principle objective of ecophenomenology is to substitute some of the environmentally harmful ethical and metaphysical presuppositions which are ingrained in modern philosophical tradition. By unveiling these presuppositions, this stream promises to bring a shift in our understanding about ourselves as well as our place in the world. It believes that a more profound understanding can be generated through a non-reductive way of approaching the world with the core idea of ‘back to the thing itself’. To attain this, for ecophenomenology, examination of pre-reflective experiences is the point of departure.

Ecophenomenology, as the name suggests, primarily deals with two disciplines, ecology and phenomenology. To understand the ecological complexity and how human beings play a pivotal role in manipulating ecology, it borrows its methodology from phenomenology. This cross-disciplinary discipline is primarily based on two claims: the non-reductionist way of understanding ecology needs a methodological input from phenomenology, and over time, the development of phenomenology becomes in-tuned with the exploration of the “interrelationship between organism and world in its metaphysical and axiological dimension”. Thus, this discipline can be seen as molded like a ‘philosophical ecology’, to be precise, which explains the interrelationship between philosophy and ecology. To surpass the modern philosophical tradition, on one hand, ecophenomenology attempts to transcend the subject/object duality and the fact/value dualism, on the other, ecophenomenology intends to offer a schema for an ethic which could go beyond the is/ought imposition. So, principally, the first objective of ecophenomenology is to derive a middle ground to transcend these dichotomies without getting trapped in any further dualism. Scholars strongly contend that this stream does not merely provide a theoretical ground, but along with it, this addresses practical issues regarding the human—environment relationship. It critiques the way modernity “distract philosophers, diverting our intellectual efforts away from pressing real-world problems like our mounting

54Ted Toadvine, “Limits of the Flesh: The Role of Reflection in David Abram’s Ecophenomenology,” Environmental Ethics 27 (2005), 156.
56Ibid.
58Ibid.
59Done JR. Marietta, “Back to the Earth with Reflection and Ecology,” in Ecophenomenology (See note 57), 131.
environmental crisis”. For this reason, ecophenomenology emphasizes on real-world phenomenological experiences to capture the pre-theoretical understanding necessary for transcending the aforementioned dualisms. It advocates that the incorporation of phenomenological methodology in environmental ethics could eventually reveal a new way to comprehend our relationship with the world as well as the environment.

To explore a phenomenon under consideration in its true form, ecophenomenology accentuates the need for a deeper inquiry about epistemological and ontological assumptions that frame our relationship with the environment, without any predisposition. In this way, it also critiques the ‘quick-fix’ approaches for solving environmental problems. Two pioneer ecophenomenologists, Brown and Toadvine (2003) precisely point out that ecophenomenology as an environmental philosophy contributes to environmental ethics by “epistemic and ontological revindication of experience” and by offering an “alternative ethos appropriate to our experience of nature”. Therefore, ecophenomenology can also be considered as a radical environmental philosophy. Toadvine (2015) explains the key concepts of ecophenomenology that act as the foundation of this school. According to him, these concepts—lifeworld, the earth and the elements, chiasm, and the poetic dwelling—provide the necessary framework to articulate phenomenological experiences and thus help to proceed towards a genuine alternative ethos based on a post-metaphysical philosophy of the human—environment relationship.

The first well-accepted concept of this school is ‘lifeworld.’ Broadly, lifeworld could be understood as a pre-theoretical worldly space revealed by each individual through one’s way of engaging with the world. In this worldly space whatever appears, one accepts that as given-ness of an object. Each of us appropriates this given-ness according to our practical aim and norms set by the intersubjective community. Hence, there is no ideal universal lifeworld, rather lifeworld is always constituted by the intersubjective community and by its tradition, language, and practices situated in a particular geographical location. It also evolves over time by taking insights from the outside world. Thus, it can be argued that lifeworld is that worldly space where the outer world’s abstract theory and knowledge get appropriated or get their meaning and justification. The transcendental notion of lifeworld refers to “not something experienceable

60Thomson, “Ontology and Ethics,” 382.
62Ibid.
64Ibid.
or given as a totality”. Rather, it refers to a pre-given condition where any worldly experience is at all possible. Thus, lifeworld is the place that ensures the appearance of the observer and the observed. This concept of lifeworld gives some important insights to environmental ethics. First of all, it considers that environment is much more than what we comprehend through scientific endeavor or what we experience aesthetically, ethically, or for that matter, ontologically. Lifeworld actually provides the evidence and background for a scientific explanation of nature. Kohak (2003) accentuates lifeworld as a concept requires to be broached as otherwise, we “treat our theoretical construct as reality.” To avoid this theoretical domination, the experience of the human—environment relationship in the lifeworld discloses the natural world as being constituted by intersubjective community and thereby infused with ethical value. Embree succinctly points out how naturalistic attitude problematizes the value that emerges from lifeworld and also establishes why the cultural studies based on phenomenology is required to incorporate those values to a broader context. The role of the lifeworld in comprehending the environment in a way leads to explore the traditional ecological knowledge and a due acknowledgment of that, provides a basis for extending the ethical value or moral obligation toward the environment.

While, lifeworld refers to a worldly space of experiencing the environment or how the environment could be manifested through experience, the concept of Earth as being the second concept of ecophenomenology, refers to quite the opposite. The concept of Earth is introduced by Heidegger by borrowing it from the Greek concept of Physis. Physis as a term denotes the self-emergence of nature, it is a “more primary sense of nature”. On the contrary, Earth refers to the ‘self-concealing aspect of physis’. Earth is that part of nature which is self-concealing and acts as the source of sheltering and reserve. This acts as the ground from where the world emerges. Earth, on one hand, restraints from disclosing itself, on the other hand, it is the ground which supports, shelters and makes the emergence of meaning in the world possible. Although Earth brings forth the world into existence, it conceals itself from emerging. In the technological era, conceptualizing Earth as a part of nature actually reduces Earth as raw materials and negates its withdrawal capacity. Furthermore, Levinas adds the concept of elements to make the concept

---

65Ibid.
66Erazim Kohak, “An Understanding Heart: Reason, Value and Transcendental Phenomenology,” in Ecophenomenology (See note 57), 26
68Toadvine, “Phenomenology and Environmental Ethics”.

58
of Earth more robust. In scientific paradigm, elements are those by which environment is being constituted. However, Toadvine urges, instead of comprehending “elements as materials from which nature is composed”, we should try to grasp “the manifested role of ‘elementals’—e.g., wind, sea, earth, sky—insofar as they bound and articulate the horizon within which all things show themselves”.69 He urges that the elements set the stage for the occurrence of an experience. These concepts of Earth and elements bring some important insights to environmental ethics. First and foremost, it rejects the technological reduction of Earth as a storehouse of raw materials. It also leads to accepting the limitation of the human capacity to disclose nature entirely and also reveals the temporality of our relationship with the environment. In a broader term, the concept of Earth and elements actually provide the material condition to uphold the lifeworld.

The third concept, put forth by Merleau Ponty is chiasm. To transcend the traditional dualisms, Ponty offers the concept of chiasm or reversibility to approach these dualisms from a different perspective. He suggests, there is nothing like passive perception. Therefore, chiasm provides the ontological structure of mediation. Chiasm emphasizes on the difference between experiencing an act as a subject and experiencing the same act as an object. For example, the experience of being in the world as touching and as touched. He explains this chiasm through sensible-sentient doubling or reflexivity of the body. Through this understanding, Ponty creates a new way of explaining the relationship between the body and the world. It explains the nexus between an individual and others, or an individual and the world. Toadvine extends this concept of chiasm in environmental ethics by emphasizing its key points. Firstly, he emphasizes on sensibility and embodiment. This provides the opportunity to take account of bodily intuition and feelings rather than logic and rationality, in environmental ethics. Secondly, it also aids in transcending the binary opposition and provides the scope for a chiasmic mediation among things. Each object experiences both sides of the feeling e.g. touching and being touched. Thus, rather than traditional teleology and value hierarchy in environmental ethics, this chiasmic mediation leads towards an “anarchic, creative, and hybrid becoming”.70 This becoming shows, there is no need for a transcendental world. Environmental ethics does not need a transcendental ground rather this embodied experience, the ontology of flesh with chiasmic mediation can be good enough to give rise to an environmental ethos.

---

69Ibid.
70Ibid.
The last concept put forth by Toadvine is poetic dwelling, which is primarily a Heideggerian concept. Heidegger claims that as human beings, we always dwell on the earth. For Heidegger, dwelling is not just an everyday endeavor rather dwelling is to protect and to absorb the fourfold i.e. earth, sky, divinity, and mortality. Poetic dwelling refers to that special dwelling which constantly focuses on protecting and saving the earth and sky, accepting one's mortality and awaiting the divinities. In the nexus of poetic dwelling, a thing is not merely an object indeed a thing is in its full essence gathering of the fourfold, as he explains through the example of the jug. Poetic dwelling enables one to gather the fourfold of things as well as to protect or care for those. Heidegger particularly mentions that in the technological era this poetic dwelling is not to be seen, as we dwell unpoetically.\(^{71}\) Retrieving and renewing this poetic dwelling can be a hope to transcend this current way of looking at things merely as objects. This poetic dwelling makes an important contribution to environmental ethics, and it can be said that it is a well-adopted concept that strengthen the discipline. Understanding the fourfold of a thing provides a value which leads to caring for the thing as it opposes the modern technological way of looking at things. Poetic dwelling directly points towards saving the Earth and gives an ethical way to build the human—environment relationship from a different perspective.

These four concepts not only show four different dimensions of creating a phenomenological relationship with the environment, indeed, all of these offer us a means to go beyond the subject/object dichotomy and to be able to realize a unity among human beings and the environment. Without getting caught in any metaphysical presumption, it reveals the experiences and through that it tries to attain environmental knowledge that can constitute a possible ground for environmental ethics. Altogether, it creates a different methodology to build the human—environment relationship which is based on the pre-theoretical experience and pre-reflective action.

v. Conclusion

I would like to conclude that throughout this chapter, I attempt to capture the importance of human beings and human experiences in the context of environmental ethics as demonstrated in the literature. In this regard, I particularly accentuate, giving importance to human beings and their experiences in the context of the human—environment relationship, though often is marked as anthropocentrism, borrowing from eminent scholars, I affirm, there is a need to re-define the notion of anthropocentrism itself. Taking account of human beings to comprehend

\(^{71}\)Ibid.
the complexity of the human—environment relationship cannot simply be marked as anthropocentrism in its traditional form. By duly acknowledging our fundamental limitation to transcend the anthropocentric bias, we need to incorporate the human’s role and the manner in which human beings engage with the environment, to attain a pragmatic form of environmental ethics. Although, these radical schools supposedly incorporate the role of human beings in formulating their ethical principles, they fall short in embracing a truly human-centric perspective from a value-neutral point of view, and thereby highlights the need of experiential realizations to invoke ethically prudent behaviors towards the environment. In this context, I see as a new stream of thought ecophenomenology advocates the need of an alternative ground for an environmental ethic, which is needed to be explored in detail.