CHAPTER III

IMPORTANCE OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM

In the previous chapter, we have discussed the various religious beliefs and their significance for Environmental Ethics. Our discussion pointed out the anthropocentric perspective of many religious beliefs. Accordingly, in this chapter we will be taking up Anthropocentrism for a critical evaluation. Anthropocentrism tries to articulate the reality of environmental ethics from the perspective of human behaviour in terms of environment and institutions like society, state, culture, science etc. The angle from which we look at things is bound to be our own and it is that which determines whether our approach is anthropocentric or eco-centric.

Different types of ethics about the environment exist, and at present there is no consensus regarding which is most appropriate. Generally speaking, types of Environmental Ethics conform to one of the two paradigms, namely, anthropocentrism and eco-centrism. The former includes traditional western theories such as utilitarianism, deontic ethics and concepts of justice. Utilitarianism's central goal is the achievement of the greatest good for the largest number of people. Consequently, actions are seemed to be morally correct if they produce the greater net balance of good over evil. Deontic ethics emphasizes the rights of the individual and have as a fundamental tenet that individual rights must not be violated, even in the interests of
beneficial social consequences. Generally, theories of rights imply a duty not to violate the rights of others. Concepts of justice assume the fundamental equality of individuals, and therefore, focus on questions of fairness in the distribution of costs and benefits when decisions are made about the environment. Concepts of freedom are used to maximize freedom from coercion, the presence of opportunities of choice, and civil liberties and democratic forms of governance.

In general, Anthropocentrism in Environmental philosophy accords only an instrumental value to nature and non-human beings. It assumes humans as qualitatively different from non-human beings. Anthropocentrism, following Naess’ distinction may be termed ‘Shallow Ecology’. It considers the values of nature to be instrumental to humans. Even though there is the acceptance of certain rights of non-human beings, it is strictly secondary to human world. Anthropocentric Environmental Ethics or shallow ecology emphasizes the relationship between individuals and is said to be atomistic. Immanuel Kant may be considered as one who clearly argued for this form of anthropocentrism in olden days. According to Kant only rational beings deserve moral consideration¹. He believed that rationality has intrinsic value and hence worth seeking in itself as far as any rational being is concerned. Morally correct behaviour for rational beings is to help each other thereby contributing to their common goal of realizing a rational world. If rational beings bring harm to each other for personal gains, the attainment of a rational world would never be realized. Kant believed that only rational beings

contribute directly to achieve the intrinsic good of the rational world. Since non-rational beings do not contribute directly to the making of the rational world, the way they are treated by rational beings does not matter for the attainment of the rational world. Hence according to Kant it is quite justifiable to use non-rational beings as a means to the end of realizing the rational world.

Simmons talks about the special capacity of human mind so as to claim a qualitatively different status for human beings in our environment. According to him, human mind has idealistic as well as realistic dimensions. To be realistic according to Simmons is to acknowledge that there is a real world existing outside us and our part in it is accidental. To be idealistic on the other hand, implies that everything is a construct of our minds. Thus while the former denies any special role to the man in nature, the latter projects the world only as a human construct. Simmons supports the idea of Dualism in connection with the reality of man and nature. That is to say that man is a distinct reality and not merely part of nature. Man is endowed with intellect and various technologies that he puts into use are the results of applying his intellect. But technologies have the possibilities of adverse consequences too. Here then is the necessity of having a language of values.

Language has a key role in the field of science, which explores the external world. Language is not simply a reporting device for experience but it is “a defining framework” as the primary idea of language is to define reality\(^2\).

What is real therefore comes to us only through language. In language, there is the concept of 'signifier' and 'signified'. The relation between the two constitutes a linguistic sign and language is made up of these signs. We must note that the relation between the sign and the thing it represents is not a necessary relation, but only because of use and convention that a sign is a sign of something. Further, each signifier gets its value only because of a differential place within language as such. There is no one to one correspondence between linguistic propositions and reality. It implies that 'language of a subject' is primary. It is language that creates the possibility of subjective consciousness. For example, thought is the movement of signs. Language becomes the source of meaning and truth. Only within language can the world as well as ourselves be formed as an intelligible reality. But there is always an indeterminacy of meaning because any signifier can always receive retrospective signification. There is a chain of words with the possibility of slippage along the signifying chain. One potent source of this change in the signification is the use of metaphors.

Although metaphor has traditionally been seen as a rhetorical device, Simmons points out that it may function in a much wider context. Since language works by the transference from one kind of reality to another, it is metaphorical by its very nature and meaning shifts in the very use of language. There is no limit to the number of metaphors for any given idea. Also, metaphor states one thing while requiring us to understand another. Simmons notes:

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4 Simmons, I.G.: op.cit, p.161.
Many of our basic ways of handling language are metaphorical in ways we no longer question: organizations are spatial, with ups and downs; theories are buildings, with foundations and frameworks; time is money; leisure to be filled; we are ‘in’ or ‘out’ of work. Many kinds of discourse, therefore, are structured by something which needs considerable interpretation because its meaning is by no means fixed.

The important point to be noted with regard to metaphors is that in language the signifier does not yield up a meaning directly as a mirror shows an image. Aided by language man becomes the great interpreter of his environment. Through such interpretations of nature, man modifies the environment. Though every being modifies its environment, the modifications that man brings to his environment is manifold because of the language of science and technology he uses in interpreting nature. Man thus drastically alters the environment.

Economics is a science that informs the behaviour of humans who find their possession of means as insufficient to meet their desired ends. Environmental economics as well as resource economics deals with the direct contribution of nature to economic growth. The core idea in conventional economics is the study of demand and supply, which means consumers and producers. Both of them wish to maximize their satisfaction from a transaction. Consumers want some form of contentment from the purchase and the producers want to make a profit from it. Conventional economics

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5 Ibid, pp. 149-150.
assumes that both the consumers and the producers are in possession of perfect information about the state of market and of sources of alternatives and that the supplier does not have a monopoly of the product. This assumption thus has given to a tendency to construct highly rationalist models in economic theory, which does not always fit well with the world of reality. This then prompted the idea of 'conservation' within environmental discourse.

The conservation movement had scientific backing. Some of the pioneers of conservationism such as Gifford Pinchot had a scientific training. The emphasis of conservation movement was on wise management of natural resources. Pinchot observes:

The first great fact about conservation is that it stands for development. There has been a fundamental misconception that conservation means nothing but the husbanding of resources for future generations. There could be no more serious mistake. Conservation does mean provision for the future, but it means also and first of all the recognition of the right of the present generation to the fullest necessary use of all the resources with which this country is abundantly blessed. Conservation demands the welfare of this generation first, and afterward the welfare of the generations to follow. The first principle of conservation is development, the use of the natural
resources now existing on this continent for the benefit of the people who live here now.  

Pinchot always emphasized that the object of conservation is not to preserve the forests because they are beautiful or they shelter wild animals but to better human standard of living.

Herbert Marcuse sees the role of nature in the new world as seminal. He wishes to rediscover nature as an ally in the struggle against exploitative societies in which the violation of nature aggregates the violation of one human by another. He points out that nature in its present form of technologically controlled state has become another instrument for the domination of people. Marcuse envisages a technology of liberation than one of regressiveness which would recognize nature as a parallel life-force, which enhances the diverse experiences of life. According to Bookchin hierarchy and domination are the sources of all socio-political aberrations, including environmental degradation. Thus Bookchin questions the wisdom of those, for example the Deep Ecologists, who see the domination of some people by others as a consequence rather than a cause of environmental exploitation. He severely criticizes the deep ecologists for what he calls their 'misanthropy', that is the view that humanity is essentially an "ugly anthropocentric" thing, a "malignant product" of evolution, which overpopulates the world and devours its resources, destroys its wildlife and the biosphere. Simmons takes the cue from Marcuse and Bookchin and identifies the core of the problem as the

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6 Quoted in VanDeVeer, Donald and Pierce, Christine: *The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book*, p. 175.

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hierarchical system of human society. "Stop dominating each other" is the message he gives.

According to Simmons the theory of evolution can be applied to human culture as well as to species and it has to be focused in the end on the human community itself. This means that environmental factors do have relevance for kinship, rituals and material culture of humans. Thus anthropology may be understood as cultural ecology or ecological anthropology. Simmons sees anthropology as one of the seedbeds from which new models of the human-environment relationships might emerge though as yet this does not seem to have occurred. Simmons claims that science changes society but it is also socially constructed. This presumably means that the consideration of environmental concerns as a moral discourse as well as a matter of scientific understanding has to be from the perspective of anthropocentrism. Therefore the centrality of the scientific language with its practical interest makes Simmons to negate the pre-scientific metaphysical cosmology wherein animistic cultures are situated and also the Deep Ecology's respect and reverence of nature. Anthropocentric ethics accorded only an instrumental value to nature but through the proper channeling of human mind and his language of action, Simmons brings an eco-centric or bio-centric ethics within his anthropocentrism. So in order to succeed anthropocentrism must aim for the survival of nature and not just the survival of man alone.

7 Cf. Marcuse, Herbert: Counter-Revolution and Revolt.
9 Simmons, I.G.: op.cit, p.74.
Following Simmon's realization that language inevitably constructs reality, we cannot in principle distinguish between the constructed nature of our intelligible world and the independent structure of the brute world. But certain kinds of adjustments have to be effected in our ecological dimensions. These adjustments can be called as 'provisional structures'. Accordingly, population growth, personal psychology, social attitudes, human closeness to natural world and human nature itself may be taken as the structures that define our environment. But just as a sailing ship at sea needs an authoritative captain, as a railway network needs a hierarchy of spatial control over a large area, our planet Earth needs a command on its processes. Simmons claims that social sciences can occupy this position of command over technologies. In a similar vein Murphy points out the need to integrate Nature and Society. According to him the mainstream social sciences ignored this aspect of integral relatedness of nature and society and proceeded as if Nature did not matter. This had the dangerous consequence of manipulating Nature.

The critics of social sciences however argue that classification, systemization and theory formation, which are central to the scientific understanding of society, are inappropriate to the richness and diversity of the human condition. Simmons rebuts this criticism by invoking the idea of the 'life world' centered on a 'self', which provides an alternative understanding of social sciences. He points out that we may start with the way in which an individual makes an environmental construction through the processes of

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10 Simmons, I.G.: op. cit, p. 73.
11 Ibid, p 75.
perception and cognition. Perception is the term given to the
"neurophysiological process of the reception of stimuli from a person's
surroundings". Cognition then is the wider subjective context of perception.
It is not immediate in the same way as perception is because the past and
present stimuli and the behavioural responses of the present and the future
intervene in cognition. The whole complex of subjective and cultural response
such as memory, experiences and values are present in the process of
cognition. Thus environmental cognition can refer to elements in the
environment, to events, to pattern and concepts and qualities such as
sentiment, personal meaning and collective symbolism. Perception and
cognition together may be referred to as environmental knowing. It is clearly a
dynamic process, which receives and organizes the environmental
information, which helps individuals through their daily lives. Cognition co-
ordinates thought and action for human well being through good
environmental attention. Cognition and perception lead to one's behaviour.
Like 'mind' as the stimuli to body functions, nature needs both cognition and
perception in one string for its survival or functions. Thus a sort of
conceptualization is integral to the understanding of social as well as the
natural.

Simmons confirms that even 'arts' can be understood in terms of an
environmental cognitive construction. Arts are often defined as imaginative,
creative and non-scientific. However, to think of them as being essentially
aesthetic in appeal rather than practical in application is to exclude

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13 Simmons, I.G.: op. cit, p. 76.
14 Ibid, p 77.
15 Ibid, p.82.
architecture from being considered as a form of art. There is no doubt that many writers, creators of visual images, architects, gardeners and musicians have dealt with the environment in a manner that transcends the domain of aesthetics. Simmons points out that Graham Sutherland’s works demonstrate that both painting and drawing sought to show the inner structures of nature and the dynamics of change. Simmons says: “Painting and its allied arts are not simply visual portrayals of a scene. They can get into the bones of their subjects and hint at or lead us towards their functioning, as economic property or as ecosystem dynamics. They can also be normative, i.e. telling us what should be”.¹⁶ In fact this normative aspect of arts and aesthetics had inspired the ‘preservationist’ paradigm in environmental ethics. Thus John Muir, a contemporary of Pinchot argued for preservation of the wilderness for aesthetic and spiritual reasons. For Muir nature provides spiritual as well as aesthetic experience suggesting to man what ought to be his relation with nature, Muir says:

Watch the sunbeams over the forest awakening the flowers, feeding them every one, warming, reviving the myriads of the air, setting countless wings in motion—making diamonds of dew drops, lakes, painting the spray of falls in rainbow colors. Enjoy the great night like a day, hinting the eternal and imperishable in nature amid the transient and material¹⁷.

¹⁶ Simmons, I.G.: op. cit, p. 89.
¹⁷ Muir, John: To Yosemite and Beyond, Writings from the Years 1863-1875, Quoted in Donald VanDeVeer and Christine Pierce(ed.), Op.Cit, p. 175.
The point to be noted here is that though Muir's 'Preservationism' clashes with Pinchot's 'Conservationism', both are anthropocentric, for one argues for the conservation of nature from economic resource perspective with the goal of betterment of human life, the other argues for the preservation of nature for the satisfaction of certain peak experiences of humans.

However, the preservationist anthropocentrism may be shown to be differing from the anthropocentrism of the conservationist particularly when we reinterpret the Cartesian dictum: "I think therefore I am". Simmons restates it as "I care therefore I am". He points out that Descartes does not explain the meaning and relevance of 'I am'. What does Descartes mean by 'I am'? Is it a condition of being Human? But we are aware of the possibility of non-existence. So to understand Descartes it is better to enter into an alternative cosmos of being and meaning. If there is a condition of being 'human' then there is also a condition of non-beingness of humanity. That means, if we say there is 'existence' then there is a possibility of non-existence too. In the Heideggerian locution that Simmons adopts mankind becomes a state of 'Being', which becomes visible only in its relationships with the rest of the planet through its concern for all other beings. The world thus becomes not a set of objects but of significances and meanings among which is the possibility of non-existence. Thus Cartesian dictum may be transformed by a Heideggerian one that proclaims "I care therefore I am".

18 A concrete case where the two paradigms came into conflict may be seen in the controversy over the Hetch Hetchy Valley in California. The preservationists led by Muir fought for the preservation of the Hetch Hetchy Valley when the city of San Francisco wanted to dam the area. Pinchot and other conservationists supported the move of the city administrators as according to them the dam would resolve the problem of water supply faced by the people.


Since we inhabit all those parts of the world that are open to understanding and experiencing then we have the ethical duty to be the shepherd and custodian of that world, maintaining a respect for all the other life worlds, that it contains. One result of this worldview is that space becomes a qualitative mosaic, which we know as individuals and as species. It is this qualitative mosaic that should inform our behaviour. Our behaviour is determining the future of other species. We can use other species as a tool for the betterment of our lives or place ourselves as a custodian of them. Thinking and caring are two inseparable aspects of being in the world. Thinking is disinterested while caring is full of passion. Both thinking and caring are needed in the sphere of eco-phenomena. But beingness of thinking and caring are actualized at once only in a conscientious action. Thinking gets completed only in caring. It is rather the sharing of the thought. Thus we may argue that both thinking and caring have a role in the understanding of nature, which justifies an anthropocentric approach to the environment.

Simmons acknowledges the role of evolution in environment. Darwinism highlights the biological process of evolution. Even though evolution is primarily biological, Simmons understands it as a social process as well. According to him intellectual and moral progress is not an independent reality. It is part of biological progress. Biological progress is influenced by changes in the intellectual and moral aspects of humans. The
recent developments within the science of genetics such as cloning vouch for this. Intellectual and moral development of man is not a special creation but only a product of evolution. This evolution might have implications for both biological and social realms. Simmons argues for the role of consciousness in the process of evolution and reinterprets evolution through biological process as “evolution through moral behaviour”. Evolution from natural environment to the present day technological environment has a reciprocal relation. Thus the application of a particular technology may create havoc in the environment. The advancement of technology has rendered the idea of one world, one humanity and one life among the different species more or less irrelevant. Thus, even if one subscribes to the ideals of Deep Ecology, it must reckon human social and technological evolution. Evolution from natural to technological environment causes manipulation and contamination of resources. Lack of resource sharing brings environmental degradation and resource depletion. Thus Simmons introduces an anthropocentric perspective to the theory of evolution.

It follows from the above discussions that man should be accorded a preeminent role in the environment, man as the initiator of environmental care. Both human intellect and moral considerations along with his technological capabilities do have a significant part in taking care of nature. Anthropocentrism in environmental discourse helps systematic thinking and acknowledges bio-regionalism. Of course it places the onus on man in according a central place to certain values, which are lost in today’s locution of resource generation and conservation, notably care, reciprocity and
diversity. Anthropocentrism now has the responsibility to challenge some of the ways of scientific and technological research in particular those that lead to destruction rather than preservation.

The importance of anthropocentrism is all the more evident when we understand the meaning of sustainability within the discourse on environmental ethics. Scherer confirms that anthropocentrism has relevance in the ecological scenario. It is only man who can assert and presume the reusability of energy, choices and life-style. The ethics of sustainability can be defined as one that exhorts human beings not to act in any such way as to constrain future human beings from acting in that same way. It is sometimes affirmed as the basic obligation to future generations.22 According to Scherer the importance of Anthropocentrism in Environmental Ethics depends upon three key points, namely sustainability of choice, sustainability of life styles and sustainability of resources. Sustainability of choices depends upon our mode of thinking and accumulation of renewability. When people burn wood for cooking there is a choice of biogas cooking and electrical or other petroleum products for cooking. But the mode of thinking is the deciding factor to make a move. When the deciding factor is located in the same vision there arises scarcity, competition and even engenders other malpractices. We see that the energy choice might not be sustainable if the processes of making energy available consume materials faster than the accumulation of such materials. The sustainability of an energy choice depends on the rate of the renewability of the energy supply. In other words, the increased use of a

22 Scherer, Donald: ‘The Ethics of Sustainable Resources’ in Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III, Environmental Ethics, p. 334.
forest, resulting from increased per person use or decreased efficiency of use, can make a sustainable choice unsustainable. Equivalently, decreased use of a forest, resulting from decreased human population, decreased per person use or increased efficiency can make an unsustainable choice sustainable.

Bentham uses the term 'negative fecundity'\(^{23}\) to show the impact and consequences of sustainability of choices in environmental ethics. The terminology serves to illustrate the fact that when an act is done in order to achieve some effect today, might increase the difficulty of bringing about the same effect tomorrow through the same action. Therefore sustainability of choices in environmental ethics is not an easy task. It should incorporate both the non-human environment in which conditions of regeneration occur and the human environment in which further resource-use choices are made.

Sustainability of life styles focuses on social organizations. Social organizations are marketing bundles of human choices in various packages. Here the environmental problem in life style is that it promotes the use of the non-renewable energy with the effects of deforestation, air pollution or water pollution etc. Anthropocentrism has thus to observe keenly the matter of sustainability of life style.

Sustainability of Resources is understood as 'the material resource' for human use. A material, which is not currently usable to humans, can be termed as a potential resource. Resources for human beings are normally

\(^{23}\) Scherer, Donald: op.cit, p.336.
considered as valuable. But we may say that this concept is at once plausible and challengeable. We should understand that resources are renewable or non-renewable; sustainable or non-sustainable. Its duration is normally related to the sustainability of choices. Today, the predicament we face is that while choices are sustainable our resources are unsustainable. So, here man will be the coordinator of the environmental ethics and its implications. Justice and code of law, which govern human societies will have a rightful place in the use of things, properties or facilities and might be helpful in bringing a coherency towards ecological systems. Respect for an ecosystem is respect for the capacities that give it a good of its own, its structure, its resistance and its diversity. Hence sustainability of man is defined ecosystemsatically and it includes the conditions for their stable maintenance also. Man will be a right judge, expert monitor, who constrain and chastise impositions of harm especially when non-human beings are non-consensual. The challenges before an anthropocentric environmental ethics is great because of the diversities and unstabilities of the behaviour of non-human beings. In spite of all these problematics, the importance of anthropocentrism is clearly seen particularly when we deal with the responsibilities bestowed on humans. The local exhaustion of various natural resources, accumulation of polluting agents, climatic changes all highlight the centrality of humans in the environment. Environmental ethical principles that accords a preeminent role to man could be a safe emergency door towards survival of organic life system as a whole.
Anthropocentrism discusses human centered standpoint and only to humans that all duties are ultimately placed. Anthropocentric environmental ethics dominates natural environment as the resources for the well being of humans. Environmental ethics from the perspective of anthropocentrism argues that material and economic growth are for growing human needs. There is a merging of economic theory and ethical theory in anthropocentrism specifically when we consider the overall utility of natural resources. Here the judgement of all the affected parties will be affirmative and credible. The amalgamation of the two theories will be a step towards the maximization of total net expected utility. The emerging coherency between economic reasoning and pragmatic environmental ethics assumes that human beings can only be owners and cannot be owned.

The important point that we may take note of when economics and ethics are fused together is that in a more efficient situation the total welfare of the relevant parties is greater than in the less efficient one even if one is not able to say by how much. Efficiency may be explained ethically as the one that is heir to the higher values of truth, justice, love and beauty. Efficiency may be explained in the language of economics as the capacity to form a collective bond of identity with future generations or even with own co-beings. Generally speaking 'efficiency' can be defined as 'capacity of sustainability'. Goodin defines sustainability as "our collective self interest to manifest 'biocentric wisdom' and show respect for self-regulating natural systems".

Sustainability as a moral obligation is a general obligation, not a specific one. It is not an obligation, to preserve this or preserve that. It is an obligation if you want to make sense out of it, to preserve the capacity to be well off, to be as well as we. It is not meant for a specific preservation of resources. But whatever and whichever can be preserved is considered as an investment in terms of sustainability. Sustainability or preservation process may be an obligation to conduct ourselves so that we leave to the future the option or the capacity to be as well off as we are, which is to achieve a rational world. The common goal of achieving a rational world as Kant conceived would also include the 'sustainability principle' as 'enlightened self-interest', a notion which goes a long way in checking environmental destruction, protecting the health and stability of the planet Earth.

Anthropocentrism is thus intended as a means to an end, which we may call as sustainable economic system and social order. As Murdy says mankind is to be valued more highly than other things in nature by man. It is proper for men to be anthropocentric and for spiders to be arachnocentric. This goes for all other living species. Simpson points out that:

Man is the highest animal. The fact that he alone is capable of making such judgement is in itself part of the evidence that this decision is correct. And even if he were the lowest animal, the anthropocentric point of view would still be manifestly the only proper one to adopt for consideration of his place in the scheme

of things and when seeking a guide on which to base his actions and his evaluations of them. 27

Darwin's account of natural selection confirms the above view. As Darwin points out species exists as ends in themselves. If it is so, then it is only natural for man to behave in a manner that is conducive to his own survival. In other words man has the freedom to exploit nature for his proper ends. Thus Murdy argues that Lynn White's criticism of anthropocentrism is not justified, though he was right in reminding us how sadly short sighted we were in our mindless exploitation of nature. We may note here that the problem lies in selecting the 'proper ends'. We find it difficult to decide which end as progressive and thus needs to be promoted and which end as retrogressive and hence to be discarded.

The dualistic approach in Anthropocentrism eschews the fundamental equality of all life forms. The critics of anthropocentrism affirm that all species have equal rights. This however is a problematic notion as it becomes necessary for us to destroy pathogenic bacteria; unless we do that our own existence is under peril. Of course this does not sanction the wanton destruction of all life forms simply because they serve no useful purpose to man. Anthropocentric point of view ascribes value to things of nature as they benefit man. This is clearly an instrumentalist notion of value. Nevertheless as recent developments in ecological sciences reveal our dependent relationships with nature makes it imperative to value a variety of things in

nature. Thus anthropocentrism now recognizes that an individual's well-being is dependent on the well-being of the ecological support system as a whole. Murdy points out:

Continued growth of knowledge may lead to an awareness that no event in nature is without some effect on the whole of which we are a part and therefore we should value all items in nature. Thus, the modern view of anthropocentrism in environmental ethics holds that our anthropocentric attitude towards nature does not require that man be the source of all value; nor does it exclude a belief that things of nature have intrinsic value. Rather what it emphasizes is that though all species have intrinsic value, humans should behave in a manner that enables his/her survival than the survival of any other species. Moreover, anthropocentrism argues that humans are better judges as to what course of action to be taken keeping in view the entire ecological support system. According to anthropocentrism this is inevitable as humans are the only species the evolutionary process has ever produced that has culture and the requisite knowledge to shape the nature in any significant way that takes into account the ecological balance as a whole. The fact that we collectively failed in carrying out this task is no argument to deny the preeminent role humans have in the course of nature. As Murdy contends:

The "ecological crisis" is basically a crisis in human evolution.
Modern man stands at a crossroads. Continued geometric

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growth in human numbers, consumption of resources, and pollution of environments will propel mankind down a road of diminished options. ....It is anthropocentric to value the factors that make us uniquely human, to seek to preserve and enhance such factors and to counter antihuman forces which threaten to diminish or destroy them. Nature outside of man will not act to preserve human values: it is our responsibility alone\textsuperscript{29}.

When we assert the survival of our own species, the intrinsic value of other non-human beings may be neglected. However we may better remind us of what Teilhard de Chardin says about the future of man. Though man is not the measure of all things and not the source of all value, he is "the present crest of the evolutionary wave"\textsuperscript{30}. This comes with a responsibility for man to live up to the exalted status he has in nature. It calls upon us to strive for a comprehensive understanding of our relationships to the larger environment of which we are a part. This has to be achieved without relegating the human reality in any manner. As Murdy argues:

Effective participation in our own evolution requires not only that we establish a harmonious relationship to larger wholes, but in addition that we affirm the human phenomenon to be a vitally significant process in its own right and our individual selves to be holistic centers\textsuperscript{31}.

\textsuperscript{29} Murdy, William H.: op.cit, p. 321.
\textsuperscript{31} Murdy, William H.: op. cit, p. 322.
Midgley offers a critical account of man being central to the cosmos. The Enlightenment world-view had placed man at the center of the universe. However the subsequent developments in our scientific understanding as well as the progressive ideals that inform a democratic form of governance have eroded the certainty with which we had placed ourselves at the center of the cosmos. Of course there still is the view that we are the center as it is our own lives, and our own species that provide the natural focus on the universe. Thus Midgley agrees that the perspective from which we see things is bound to be our own and in that sense we still are the center of the universe. Each one of us is at the relative center of a particular life. Thus we may have no other choice but to be interested in ourselves and those around us. As Bishop Butler notes unless we have not enough self-love we cannot love others. However, as Butler points out:

The trouble with human beings is not really that they love themselves too much; they ought to love themselves more. The trouble is simply that they don’t love others enough.32

When we turn from self-centered individualism to species politics, things get more complicated. Here people tend to see themselves as placed at the objective center of everything and not just the perspectival subjective center of a particular life. Enlightenment view of Kant gives us such an objective view of us being the center of everything. Kant says:

As the single being upon earth that possesses understanding, man is certainly titular lord of nature and, supposing we regard nature as a teleological system, he is born to be its ultimate end.33

Midgley draws our attention to the three themes that Kant states here, namely the claim to dominance, the emphasis on intellect as its ground, and the reference to cosmic teleology. Thus the Enlightenment rationality construes humans at the center of the cosmos. It is this notion of preeminence of man that led him to exploit the nature and subjugate all other forms of being.

The post Enlightenment developments in science have eroded this sort of understanding of man considerably. Our conception of the universe has now changed and accordingly we have now realized that man is not the center of the cosmos. In fact the very talk of being at the center has become problematical. As Midgley points out we now accept that the universe is much larger and much less neatly organized that literally speaking the very idea of it having a center does not make any sense. Recently ecology tells us that unless we heed the guiding principles of nature, rather than distorting it to suit our conveniences, we must be heralding a catastrophe that would wipe out the present life forms including us. Thus Midgley notes:

33 Quoted in Midgley, Mary: op.cit, p.104.
The teleological assumptions that seemed to hold the symbolic core of 'anthropocentrism' in place are themselves no longer deemed scientific. The idea of a central cosmic purpose is as foreign to modern science as the idea of a central location is. The word 'anthropocentric' itself seems to have been invented to make just this point. Thus the *Oxford English Dictionary* quotes Haeckel...writing in 1876 of 'the anthropocentric error, that man is the premeditated aim of the creation of the earth'\(^{34}\).

The kind of anthropocentrism that would always privilege human interests above those of other life forms is no longer defensible given our current ecological understanding. This does not, however mean that anthropocentrism is no longer valid. On the contrary as pointed out by Butler we need to show concern for ourselves, our own species, which alone would prepare us to recognize the value of other beings. This anthropocentric concern would now make us realize that to save human beings, we need to save the entire bio-sphere from wanton destruction and exploitation. Thus we now have the task of reinterpreting anthropocentrism itself and an attempt in that direction is offered by Brian Norton.

Norton points out that many consider the possibility of environmental ethics as a distinctive form of inquiry, distinct from traditional ethics, is conditional on the rejection of anthropocentrism. That is, the distinctiveness of environmental ethics is thought to be based upon principles that attribute

\(^{34}\) *Ibid*, p.107.
intrinsic value to nature, independent of human value. Consequently it is argued that one has to reject anthropocentrism that treat humans as the only loci of intrinsic value. However Norton calls into question this equivalence by arguing that the usual debate between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism is of far less importance than is usually held. Thus Norton argues that non-anthropocentrism is not the only adequate basis for a genuine environmental ethics.

According to Norton environmental ethics cannot be derived either from rights or interests of non-humans or from rights or interests of future generations of humans\(^{35}\). He distinguishes between two forms of anthropocentrism, namely strong anthropocentrism and weak anthropocentrism. Our failure to distinguish between these two forms had in fact resulted in the privileging of non-anthropocentrism in environmental ethical discourse. According to Norton:

A value theory is strongly anthropocentric if all value countenanced by it is explained by reference to satisfactions of felt preferences of human individuals. A value theory is weakly anthropocentric if all value countenanced by it is explained by reference to satisfaction of some felt preference of a human individual or by reference to its bearing upon the ideals which

exist as elements in a world view essential to determinations of considered preferences.36

In strong anthropocentrism there exists no means to criticize the exploitative attitude of individuals who consider nature merely as a resource of raw materials to be used for human preferences and needs. Weak anthropocentrism takes our felt preferences as either rational or irrational; and is thus capable of criticizing the exploitative attitudes of humans. Thus Norton points out that weak anthropocentrism has the potential to address the environmental issues in an authentic manner. Weak anthropocentrism values nature and nonhuman entities for more than their use in satisfying unreflective human desires and needs. Rather it values them for enriching human nature.

Nevertheless, there are environmental thinkers who consider that unless we transcend the terms of discourse of anthropocentrism, a genuine environmental ethics remains a dream. They would consider even a weak anthropocentrism as a half way station on the road to ecological sensibility. Thus in the next chapter we take up for scrutiny a non-anthropocentric approach in environmental ethics.

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36 Norton, Bryan G.: op.cit, p. 165. A felt preference is a desire or need of an individual prompting him to act in accordance with the same without any rational assessment of the desire. In contrast, a considered preference is a desire or need that one expresses after careful deliberation.