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Rethinking “Anthropoholism as an Authentic Tool for Environmental Management”

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ABSTRACT

The quest for the most feasible approach to environmental management has assumed priority today because of the many links established between the environment and sustainable development. This quest has taken the centre stage beyond parochial considerations and practices into a unique discipline of its own known as environmental ethics because of the excruciating consequences that environmental degradation is already posing the present generation with impending dangers for the future. It is along with this vision of a feasible environmental management approach that this paper critically examines the theory of “anthropoholism” which claims to bridge the gap between anthropocentrism and holistic environmental ethics. Using the critical and exploratory approaches, the work appraises the theory of “anthropoholism” indicating that although it makes gleeful insights as to the indispensability of human beings in inaugurating a workable approach for environmental management and makes a place for different worldviews, it is too concise in its self-expression for a new theory, etymologically problematic and too simplistic in the application of concepts it drives from, downplays the self-regulating abilities of the ecosystem and exposes human species to danger within the larger context of the ecosystem. The work recommends that equilibrium ethics away from mere linguistic classification of approaches into anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric prototypes is the way forward for feasible environmental ethics.

Keywords: Anthropoholism; Anthropocentrism; Ecocentrism; Environmental Ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Rachel Carson never imagined that the small fire of environmental awareness she lit in her groundbreaking book, *Silent Spring*, published in 1962 was going to evolve into an inferno response giving birth to what is today labelled environmental ethics as well as the epochal event such as the “first Earth Day in 1970” (Rome, 2010). Although a recent discipline, environmental ethics has seen and continues to see expansion in extraordinary dimensions. The *terminus a quo* of the engagement has been the problematic nature of the

human relationship with the environment, a relationship that has been rightly labelled anthropocentric (Bassey & Pimaro 2019). It is the argument that this anthropocentric nature of the relationship has swung the entire ecosystem into a pool of crisis with far-reaching consequences beyond the present generation to include the future one(s) (Ogar 2019). Thus, the efforts all along have become the quest for a healthy relationship is what many a scholar labels non-anthropocentric ethics.

Consequently, scholars of environmental ethics have become sunk into camps of anthropocentrism, non-anthropocentrism and in recent times, a mid-way between the two (anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism). All of this is geared towards finding the best possible form of relationship between humankind and the environment for the good of both the present and the future generations (sustainability) (Lexikon der Nachhaltigkeit 2015). The theory of “*anthropholism*” has been proposed as part of the efforts aimed at solving this conundrum. Its ultimate goal is to provide a bridge between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism. The present excogitating effort is an appraisal of its (*anthropholism*) potentials in attaining its proposed goal. To achieve this, the work will take the following structure, namely, the meaning of *anthropholism*, brief survey on the causes of environmental crises, summary of the pioneering work on *anthropholism*, appraisal of the work, and conclude with a proposal for feasible environmental management.

A BIRD’S EYE VIEW ON GENESIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CRISES

The reality of environmental crises has gone beyond any mere disputations despite the counteractive pressures arising from skeptics (Haltinner & Sarathchandra 2020). Scholars have advanced multiplex factors responsible for this unwelcome development. Thus, Northcott avers that “just as the environmental crisis is complex in its nature, so its causation is also complex and multi-factorial” (2011, p. 222). Lerche classifies the factors under natural and anthropogenic problems (Lerche 2001). The natural causes are climatic variations, floods, droughts, earthquakes, landslides and avalanches, forest fires, volcanic explosions, food pests, meteoritic impact, hurricanes/typhoons/monsoons, tornadoes, sea-level fluctuations, ice floes, and ice sheets (Osuala 2019). Despite the fact the causes are labeled as natural, the impact of human beings in indirectly influencing them cannot be overemphasized. It is on account of this that Attfield has underscored that “because of human impacts on the world of nature, many people call the present age, ‘the Anthropocene’, coining this term to echo geological ages such as the *Eocene* (The Early Eocene was characterized by high carbon dioxide levels, inferred to be between 1,000 and 2,000 parts per million, Early Eocene Period – 54 to 48 Million Years Ago) and the *Pleistocene* (1.8 million to 10,000 years ago: it was during the Pleistocene that the most recent episodes of global cooling, or ice ages, took place. Much of the world’s temperate zones were alternately covered by glaciers during cool periods and uncovered during the warmer interglacial periods when the glaciers retreated). The two geological ages mean is that human impacts have become predominant over the whole surface of the Earth (Attfield 2018). Different scholars have classified these causes differently. For instance, Northcott puts them under the broad headings of the agricultural revolution, the commodification of nature, science, technology, and the mythology of progress and the moral climate of modernity (2011). The common denominator is that all these human activities have affected the environment adversely leaving the present and future generations to excruciating consequences. It is the need to address these environmental

crises and mitigate their impact that the discipline of environmental ethics is a necessity.

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Environmental ethics simply search out the answers to the questions of how humans should relate to their environment, how the Earth's resources should be used and how humans should treat other species, both plants, and animals (Palmer *et al.*, 2014). However, some believe that the constant change is simply a "necessary" condition of the planet and the planet will re-adjust to new conditions as it did in the times of the past. There are differences among scientists as to the definite cause and nature of environmental issues and how to solve them. There are also differences in the ways to environmental ethics; several experts think the traditional forms of ethical thought are good guides and some that these traditional forms (at least in the West) are too human-centered. There are also the views of Christians and other religious believers, who have a specific take on their role and responsibility towards the world of nature. According to Simon Blackburn (2003), "For many people, ethics is not only tied up with religion, but is completely settled by it" (p.9). Such people do not need to think too much about ethics, because there is an authoritative code of instructions, a handbook of how to live.

Ethics, which is a major branch of philosophy, encompasses right conduct and good life. It is significantly broader than the common conception of analyzing right and wrong. A central aspect of ethics is "the good life", the life worth living or life that is simply satisfying, which is held by many philosophers to be more important than traditional moral conduct. The most fundamental question that ethicists, most especially environmentalists often ask is simply what obligation do humans have concerning the natural environment. If the answer is simply that human beings will perish if they do not constrain their action towards nature, then ethics is considered anthropocentric. Anthropocentrism emphasizes the whole universe having the human as its pivot; it means whatever is around the man is only for him (Kopnina *et al.*, 2018). The history of Western philosophy is said to be dominated by the anthropocentric ethical framework that grants moral standing solely to human beings, it has come under considerable critical attacks from many environmental ethicists., John Passmore, in his book *Man's Responsibility of Nature* (1974), recognizes that the dominant western traditions "denied that man's relationship with nature is governed by any moral considerations whatsoever". In this tradition, the human being is the "despot" who rules nature with arrogance. He/she treats nature as mere wax to be molded in whatever manner humans desire wants it to be. There are two possible interpretations of this view about man's domination. The first one is that he is an absolute ruler of nature. God has made him the only subject who rules over nature and he can do so as far as he profits from doing so. Nature is not sacred. The second one is that in which human takes care of the living things over which he rules for their own sake. They govern them not with force and cruelty. Therefore, nonhuman nature is valued only in a functional sense for humans, without any moral standing.

On the other hand, are the non-anthropocentric/ holistic scholars. They reject the anthropocentric "man-in-environment image". As a philosophical movement, non-anthropocentric/ holistic scholars criticize the anthropocentric "dominant worldview". For them, the anthropocentric worldview is responsible for environmental destruction. Anthropocentric environmental ethics was challenged by non-anthropocentric/ holistic ethics which not only concern with the traditional conception of ethical entities but also related to the assumption in metaphysics, epistemology, and political philosophy. In their

understandings, entities such as species and ecosystems are accorded moral standing in place of, the individuals that constituted that whole. These holistic theorists assert that the expansion of moral duties and intrinsic value to groups, communities, or the whole of the species and ecosystem is paramount. Ethicists under this classification argue that ethics must meet the extension beyond humanity, and moral standing should be according to the non-human natural world. Under these ethics, humans have obligations in respect of the environment because they actually owe things to the creatures or entities within the environment themselves. Different philosophers have answered differently to such questions, which has led to the emergence of quite different environmental ethics. The following section examines Samuel Bassey “Anthropoholism”.

THE CONCEPT OF ANTHROPOHOLISM

The term *Anthropoholism* was coined by Samuel Akpan Bassey in his work entitled: “*Anthropoholism as an Authentic Tool for Environmental Management*”. According to him, “*anthropoholism* can be defined as a theory in environmental ethics that acknowledges man (anthropo) central role; perspective and place in eco-system as well as ontology but avers that Man is just a part of nature, such that he cannot exist independently of the environment, or cannot be understood without reference to the environment (holism)” (Bassey 2019, p. 162). The concept of *Anthropoholism* is made of two words, namely, “anthropos” which is a Greek word that means man or human being” and “Holism” which is often used to represent all of the wholes’ in the universe (Bassey 2019). The motivation for the theory rests on human indispensable responsibility to protect and care for nature because they depend on nature. Ultimately, *Anthropoholism* bridges the gap between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism as it emphasizes man’s central role within an interdependent and interconnected ecosystem (Bassey 2019).

A RESUME OF “ANTHROPOHOLISM AS AN AUTHENTIC TOOL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT”

The work begins by acknowledging the urgency to modify the unhealthy relationship between humans and the environment beyond financial and legal techniques to involve morals (Bassey 2019). The counter-productivity of scientific advancement on all life forms has called for urgent action. This call for action is linked with the Heideggerian call for humans to understand the essence of technology and consider it a necessity to mold their relationship with the environment as *beings-in-the-world* (Bassey 2019). The appropriate disposition for humans, therefore, should be stripped of all traces of anthropocentrism especially its strong version which shares similarities with discriminatory and oppressive indices that have characterized relations among humans in history.

The work continues by acknowledging that man’s role in the programme of environmental ethics remains central because of his obligation to the environment (Asuquo 2020). This reflects weak anthropocentric ideals even though it (weak anthropocentrism) should be shunned for its lack of holistic trappings. On the other hand, extreme holistic prototypes should be jettisoned for not acknowledging the role of man because the interest of the whole is tied to that of the parts. Following the above analysis, *anthropoholism* comes in to bridge the gap between anthropocentric and holistic environmental ethics (Bassey 2019). The next segment of the work undertakes extensive discussion on anthropocentric ethics alongside its variants, providing concrete reasons

why it is faulty, leaning on the criticisms of a wide range of scholars across the globe. Accordingly, weak anthropocentrism is preferred to the strong counterpart because of the qualities of control and stewardship that are inherent in it. The work submits that it is impossible to have a totally non-anthropocentric environmental ethics, hence the leaning on weak anthropocentrism even though the transgressibility potential to strong anthropocentrism looms with it. In order not to appear as endorsing weak anthropocentrism, the work marshals out reasons why *anthropoholism* differs from the former.

The work also discusses African holistic environmental ethics influenced by the African worldview that is communitarian and which bifurcates into extreme and moderate prototypes. Moderate communitarianism which *Anthropoholism* aligns with antagonizes the extreme one for its lack of recognition for individual rights. The confusion that trails the classification of African environmental ethics into either anthropocentric or non-anthropocentric categories is acknowledged, leading to the conclusion that *Anthropoholism* clears all of this confusion because of the bridge it builds between weak anthropocentric and holistic environmental ethics.

AN APPRAISAL OF “ANTHROPOHOLISM AS AN AUTHENTIC TOOL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT”

Anthropoholism must be celebrated for the novelty it represents in the efforts towards the best approach to environmental ethics. The originality that inheres in the theory makes it a groundbreaking pathway to environmental management. Indeed, the theory makes strong points that will always stare at any proposal for environmental care in a score of ways. First, man is a major cause of the problem and so must be a major part of the solution; and second, it is almost impossible to succeed in a workable theory of environmental ethics without considering man as a central being. The relevance of the theory to general religious and African worldviews is also commendable. Last but not least, the ingenuity of the theory in attempting to reconcile two approaches that are considered diametrically opposed to each other is extraordinary. These among other commendations have not left the *newborn* in environmental ethics bereft of some misgivings. The work is supposed to project a new theory to the world and it is only reasonable that it discusses the theory vividly in all ramifications. This is, however, not the case in this work as *Anthropoholism* itself is explained in only a few short paragraphs (three consistent ones) in a work of over seven (7) pages. A lot of space and attention was given to anthropocentrism and African holistic environmental ethics as though they were the main focus of the work. Although claims may be made that *Anthropoholism* seems to bridge the two; even at that, *Anthropoholism* must stand on its own to assume the uniqueness it deserves.

Furthermore, the fusion of the terms that make up *Anthropoholism* is problematic because it betrays the idea behind it. Man is part of the whole as the idea behind the term explains. Why treat man as not being part of the whole? Is man divided into two, one as alone and the other as part of the whole? If the term “anthropocentric” literally means man-centred, is the emphasis on the central role of man as evidently reiterated umpteen times in the work not synonymous with anthropocentrism? Why treat holism as a simple concept when, in truth, it is complex? This is what the work suggests. The scholarly reference to Alfred Adler in this theory is misleading because the sense he used it is quite removed from the bearings of this work since he was more psychologically inclined. If at all any name was to be mentioned in relation to the origin of the term “holism”, it should have

been the South African philosopher and statesman, Jan Christiaan Smuts. The origin and development of the concept is associated with him even though it has found application in different fields or disciplines. Smuts coined the term 'Holism' in the early twentieth century. He was acknowledged for the "contribution by writing the first entry of the concept for the 1929 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica" (Shelley 2018, p. 91). Better still; the use of the term should have been associated very closely with those who have used it within the context of environmental ethics. This is not difficult to locate in the plural intellectual productions in environmental ethics. The idea of holism embodies a system with a working principle that exemplifies interdependence. Man is part of the system and is not the author of the internal working principle in the holistic phenomenon. To imagine man playing a central role could translate to him controlling the system making him apart from the system. In a nutshell, the anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric trappings of *anthropoholism* embody a clumsy fusion of concepts in polar hermeneutical domains, for a thing cannot be and not be at the same time.

Anthropoholism arrogates to man some sort of exaggerated capability in controlling nature almost to the point of playing its author. This seems to take no cognizance of the inherent balance in nature by seeming to prioritize man's central place in controlling nature that predates him. Nature which is the whole overwhelms man who is only a part and the identity of man depends on nature and not that of nature on man in holistic axioms. The reason for this is embedded in the canon of holism which concretely lays claims to the dependence of the part on the whole and not the whole on the part. In other words, *Anthropoholism* ignores nature's corresponding responsibility in maintaining balance within its living system. This is a mistake that is common to both anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric environmental ethics. One of the simple ways to understand how this happens is the fact that things come into being and go out of being without any interference from the beings that make up the ecosystem in spite of the possible metaphysical relations they may bear or enjoy. Nature's self-regulating power should never be jettisoned in any agenda of environmental management. In other words, "the Gaia hypothesis of James Lovelock, namely that the Earth is self-regulating system, maintaining the conditions that support life" (Attfield 2014, p. 3) must not be taken for granted so humans do not bite off more than they can chew in their supposed struggle for balance in the ecosystem. This seems to be what Lerche advances when he writes that "basically, the natural processes of both rapid and slow geological evolution continue and mankind can perform only remediation after the fact, but cannot pre-ordain or control to a any significant extent the natural processes themselves" (Lerche 2001, p. 74).

Finally, *Anthropoholism* in its pretentious gait to protect other species of the ecosystem exposes the human species to danger. *Anthropoholism* interestingly acknowledges the reality of prey-predatory relationship among the beings in the ecosystem and calls man to only engage in this relationship to the extent that his survival permits (Bassey 2019). This caveat does not extend to other species in the ecosystem, implying that they have no limit to how they could court this prey-predatory relationship. Often, the accusations of exploitation and domination laid against human species are only a misinterpretation of man's quest to protect himself from his predators, a propensity for self-preservation that inheres in all nature's components.

CONCLUSION

It appears one of the problems associated with emanating a tenable theory for

environmental ethics is tied to the linguistic classification of theories into anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric types. The difference between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism may appear simple at the face level, but on deeper consideration, it may not be that simple? What is actually the difference? If it is about man-centredness, even in non-anthropocentric ethics, man still features prominently. It seems better to suggest a vision of environmental approach that thinks away from anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric categories because the pitching of one against the other is blurring the inroad for a workable environmental agenda. An Equilibrium Environmental Ethics seems to be the feasible approach. This equilibrium ethics will be geared towards maintaining balance depending on the best approach necessary as the circumstances demand. Such an ethics allows for multidimensional consideration of environmental crises and is action-packed since it is pragmatic in nature. The balancing gait of this equilibrium ethics will determine where and when humans need to act as well as when and where they need not. This is because it envisions the environmental problem beyond anthropogenic causes and acknowledges the self-regulating capacity of nature which is beyond the interfering capabilities of any singular species of the ecosystem.

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