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Ethical Reflections: Balancing Human Needs and Environmental Preservation

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Abstract:

This research paper delves into the multifaceted discourse surrounding ethics, particularly focusing on environmental ethics and the concept of anthropocentrism. Ethics, rooted in philosophical inquiry, plays a pivotal role in shaping societal norms and individual conduct. Environmental ethics, a branch of philosophy, explores the moral relationship between humans and the natural environment, highlighting the importance of sustainable coexistence. Anthropocentrism, on the other hand, epitomizes the belief that humans hold central importance in the universe, often prioritizing human interests over those of non-human entities. Through a comprehensive literature review, this paper examines various perspectives and theories within environmental ethics, elucidating their theoretical underpinnings and practical applications. Additionally, it critically analyzes anthropocentrism, tracing its philosophical roots and exploring its ethical implications for biodiversity conservation and environmental stewardship. The study aims to contribute to scholarly discourse by shedding light on the complexities of balancing human needs with environmental preservation, ultimately advocating for a more inclusive and holistic approach to ethics that acknowledges the intrinsic value of all living beings and natural systems.

Keywords: Ethics, environmental ethics, anthropocentrism, sustainability, biodiversity conservation, moral philosophy, normative ethics, applied ethics, philosophical inquiry, human-nature relationship.

Introduction:

Ethics, as a dynamic discipline within philosophy, holds significant importance in shaping societal norms and individual conduct. Derived from the Greek "Ethica" and the Latin "Ethos," ethics delves into the realm of social customs, habits, and beliefs. It is often interchangeably referred to as moral philosophy, rooted in the Latin "Moralis," signifying manner, character, and proper behavior. At its core, ethics serves as a science examining the customs, habits, and conduct of individuals, seeking to discern notions of right and wrong. Through systematic inquiry, ethics elucidates concepts such as 'goodness,' 'virtue,' 'vice,' 'right,' and 'wrong,' aiming to provide a framework for moral evaluation and progress. Normative ethics constitutes one of the primary

approaches in studying ethics, endeavoring to construct universal moral standards applicable to all humanity. Within normative ethics, significant theories such as Deontology, Consequentialism, and Virtue Ethics offer distinct perspectives on moral reasoning and conduct. Meta-ethics or Analytic Ethics precedes normative ethics, engaging in semantic and conceptual analysis while probing the nature of ethical reasoning itself. Moreover, applied ethics emerges as a pragmatic branch, deploying moral principles to address real-life dilemmas ranging from euthanasia to civil rights, thereby bridging philosophical inquiry with practical solutions. By synthesizing ethical theories with real-world challenges, applied ethics endeavors to navigate moral complexities in personal and professional spheres. This paper aims to explore these dimensions of ethics, shedding light on its theoretical underpinnings and practical applications, thereby contributing to scholarly discourse and societal progress.

Environmental ethics, as a branch of environmental philosophy, delves into the moral relationship between humans and the natural environment. Traditionally, ethics focused solely on human concerns, but environmental ethics expands these boundaries to include non-human entities and their interrelations with humanity. This expansion often leads to conflicts arising from diverse ethical perceptions. While some uphold the belief that humans hold dominion over nature, others advocate for a nature-centered perspective, recognizing intrinsic value in all living beings. However, human activities driven by greed have disrupted the delicate balance of nature, resulting in severe environmental crises. As such, studying environmental ethics becomes crucial for addressing these challenges and fostering sustainable coexistence.

The importance of studying environmental ethics lies in its pivotal role in fostering sustainable development, which necessitates a delicate balance between meeting human needs and curbing excessive exploitation of natural resources. A prime example of this delicate equilibrium can be witnessed in the rampant mining and deforestation activities in the Amazon rainforest. These activities not only disrupt local ecosystems but also contribute significantly to global climate change, emphasizing the urgent need for ethical considerations in resource utilization.

The significance of studying environmental ethics lies in its pivotal role in fostering sustainable development, which requires a delicate balance between meeting human needs and curbing excessive exploitation of natural resources. This equilibrium is exemplified by the rampant mining and deforestation activities in the Amazon rainforest, disrupting local ecosystems and contributing significantly to global climate change, thus emphasizing the urgent need for ethical considerations in resource utilization. Increased awareness of environmental ethics motivates individuals to engage actively in stewardship and policymaking concerning natural resources, fostering responsible resource management and environmental conservation through collective action. Echoing Mahatma Gandhi's principle of trusteeship, environmental ethics underscores the

role of humans and businesses as caretakers of the environment, emphasizing the ethical responsibility in safeguarding the planet for future generations. Understanding environmental ethics is imperative for comprehending legal obligations regarding environmental protection, as delineated by laws such as the Environment Protection Act and the Water Act in India, providing a legal framework for ethical decision-making and accountability. Environmental ethics intersects with gender justice, as evidenced by ecofeminist movements such as the Chipko Movement and Appiko Movement in India, highlighting the intertwined relationship between environmental sustainability and social justice, particularly regarding women's roles in environmental activism. Principles like the Polluter Pays Principle emphasize accountability and responsible behavior in environmental matters, incentivizing environmentally responsible practices and encouraging the adoption of sustainable technologies and processes. Recognizing nature's inherent self-regulating mechanisms underscores the importance of respecting natural limits and avoiding exploitation, fostering a deeper sense of ecological awareness and responsibility. In conclusion, the study of environmental ethics is indispensable for addressing the complex challenges of balancing human needs with environmental preservation, providing a framework for promoting sustainable development and ensuring the long-term health of the planet. Embracing these ethical principles is essential for navigating the intricate interplay between human activities and environmental sustainability, thereby safeguarding the well-being of present and future generations.

"Ethical Reflections: Balancing Human Needs and Environmental Preservation" delves into the intricate discourse surrounding anthropocentrism, a concept deeply rooted in the perception of human beings as the central entity in the universe. Originating from the Ancient Greek words "ánthrōpos" meaning 'human being' and "kéntron" meaning 'center', anthropocentrism epitomizes the belief that humanity holds paramount importance in the grand scheme of existence. Often used interchangeably with terms like human centrism, human supremacy, or human exceptionalism, anthropocentrism denotes a worldview that prioritizes human interests and positions over those of other non-human species within the natural world. It encapsulates a perspective where human beings, distinguished by qualities like soul, rationality, and linguistic expression, stand apart from nature, viewing it as a realm to conquer and manipulate for their own needs and desires. From an ethical standpoint, anthropocentrism assigns intrinsic value primarily to human interests, relegating all other species to a subservient role. It posits that ethical codes and norms are constructs of human creation, devoid of any absolute rules beyond what humanity invents. This paradigm interprets the entirety of the world through the lens of human values, excluding the desires, goals, and values of non-human entities. Thus, anthropocentrism emerges as a philosophy concerned solely with human interests, overlooking the intricate interdependence and intrinsic worth of all elements within the natural ecosystem.

Literature Review:

The study conducted by Heruyono et al. (2021) explores the pivotal role of environmental ethics in nurturing environmental awareness within the Bandung Eco Camp community. Recognizing the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment, the research underscores the necessity of a shift in human perspective towards sustainable environmental practices. Through a non-formal environmental education approach, the study emphasizes the importance of integrating environmental knowledge into daily habits and actions. Drawing on secondary data analysis, the research reveals that the internalization of environmental ethics fosters a moral foundation, leading individuals to engage with nature ethically and philosophically, thereby mitigating potential environmental harm. This work contributes significantly to the discourse on how environmental knowledge can reshape human perceptions and behaviors towards the environment.

The study conducted by Pieter van Heyningen's master thesis titled "Finding the Balance Between Human Activity and Nature in the Development Debate," the author delves into diverse interpretations of the imbalance between human activities and global ecosystems. Employing the concept of 'problem' to encapsulate this disparity, the thesis navigates through theoretical and practical realms, even operationalizing interpretations at the business level. Utilizing a Foucauldian method, specifically Archaeological and Genealogical approaches, the thesis rejects a linear historical narrative to dissect various discourses or 'power structures' surrounding the problem. Van Heyningen identifies three dominant power structures: 'harder' interpretations emphasizing limits to growth and strong ecological sustainability, 'softer' interpretations favoring developmental goals over sustainability, and a third force embodying exploitation and illegitimacy. The thesis underscores the inadequacy of one-dimensional solutions to multi-dimensional problems, advocating for a diverse array of 'problem-solutions' to foster balanced and inclusive development, thus urging a nuanced approach to address the complex relationship between human activity and nature. (Van Heyningen, 2009)

The study conducted by Singh (2014) explores the critical intersection of environmental preservation, sustainability, and economic sustenance in the context of tourism destinations. Through a comprehensive examination of afforestation, carrying capacity, and soil erosion prevention, the study underscores the pivotal role of environmental conservation in ensuring the longevity and viability of destinations. By leveraging primary and secondary sources, including observational methods and print media, the research elucidates various techniques and tools for environmental preservation. The findings emphasize the dynamic nature of the environment and the imperative of maintaining its natural resources for future generations. With its focus on destination sustainability and economic implications, the study offers valuable insights and managerial implications for guiding future trends in environmental stewardship.

The study conducted by Lee (11-30-2023) explores the potential of ancient Greek philosophers such as Titus Lucretius Carus, Cicero, and Pliny the Elder to offer insights into modern environmental sustainability challenges. Drawing from the foundational works of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, Lee suggests that the philosophical principles and ethical concepts of these ancient thinkers provide a timeless guide for addressing contemporary environmental dilemmas. Despite the obstacles posed by industries like oil and gas, Lee contends that integrating the wisdom of Greek philosophy into current practices can contribute to more effective solutions. Through a literature review encompassing the teachings of these luminaries, Lee highlights the enduring relevance of ancient wisdom in shaping a more conscious and fulfilling approach to environmental stewardship. The study underscores the need to reevaluate our relationship with the natural world through the lens of classical philosophy, emphasizing the potential for transformative change in the face of pressing environmental challenges.

Zvingowanisei and Chirongoma (2023) delve into the pressing issue of the ecological crisis, highlighting its global ramifications and underscoring its particularly acute impact on African nations like Zimbabwe. They argue that conventional Westernized approaches to environmental conservation have largely failed to address the intricate relationship between humans and nature deeply embedded in African cultures, as exemplified by the Manyika people. Through a phenomenological lens, the authors explore how Manyika traditional conservation methods have been overshadowed by Western philosophical paradigms, leading to environmental degradation. They contend that the Manyika people's cosmology shapes their environmental ethics, emphasizing that disturbances to the environment are met with harsh retaliation. Moreover, they elucidate how Manyika women draw upon indigenous knowledge systems to foster sustainable interactions with their environment, advocating for the integration of indigenous environmental ethics to mitigate the impacts of the crisis. Ultimately, the chapter underscores the importance of recognizing traditional leadership and indigenous environmental strategies in tackling environmental challenges. This comprehensive review offers valuable insights into the intersection of culture, spirituality, and environmental ethics, urging for a reevaluation of approaches to environmental conservation in Africa.

The significance of studying anthropocentrism lies in its profound impact on human attitudes, values, and practices towards the natural world. Rooted in philosophical traditions, religious beliefs, and even scientific paradigms, anthropocentrism asserts human superiority over all other beings, placing human interests and desires at the forefront of moral consideration. This worldview not only influences ethical frameworks but also shapes policies and actions concerning environmental conservation and resource management. Understanding anthropocentrism sheds light on the complexities of human-nature relationships, exposing the underlying assumptions and biases that

often prioritize human needs over the well-being of non-human species and ecosystems. By critically examining the philosophical arguments and historical contexts that uphold anthropocentric perspectives, researchers can contribute to broader discussions on sustainability, biodiversity conservation, and ethical responsibility towards the environment.

Significance of the study:

The study delves into the profound significance of anthropocentrism, a philosophical concept rooted in the belief that human beings hold central importance in the universe. Originating from the Ancient Greek words "ánthrōpos" meaning 'human being' and "kéntron" signifying 'center', anthropocentrism underscores the notion that humans possess unique attributes such as rationality and language capacity, setting them apart from and above other entities in nature. This mindset, prevalent in environmental ethics, often prioritizes human interests over those of non-human species, relegating the latter to mere instruments for human use and exploitation. The study explores philosophical arguments supporting anthropocentrism, tracing its lineage from Platonic dualism, Protagorean views, to religious doctrines like Judaic-Christian tradition, all of which emphasize human dominion over nature, echoing sentiments of superiority and entitlement.

Moreover, the study contextualizes anthropocentrism within the philosophical frameworks of thinkers like Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, and Wittgenstein, each contributing to the perpetuation of human-centric ideologies. These philosophers, through various doctrines and suppositions, reinforce the notion of human primacy in the natural order, asserting that only humans possess intrinsic value while relegating non-human entities to instrumental status. Whether through the hierarchical perspectives of Aristotle, the mechanistic worldview of Descartes, or the linguistic biases of Kant and Wittgenstein, anthropocentrism emerges as a pervasive force shaping human interactions with and perceptions of the natural world. By scrutinizing these philosophical underpinnings, the study aims to illuminate the profound implications of anthropocentrism on ethics, ecology, and the broader discourse surrounding humanity's relationship with the environment.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To examine the philosophical roots and historical development of anthropocentrism, including its origins in ancient Greek philosophy, Judeo-Christian tradition, and modern philosophical movements such as Cartesian dualism and Kantian ethics.
2. To analyze the different forms of anthropocentrism, including perspectival anthropocentrism, strong anthropocentrism, and weak anthropocentrism, in order to understand the variations in attitudes towards human-centeredness and its implications for environmental ethics.
3. To evaluate the ethical implications of anthropocentrism, including its impact on biodiversity conservation, attitudes towards non-human beings and entities in nature, and the moral responsibilities of human beings towards the environment.

4. To assess the criticisms leveled against anthropocentrism, including accusations of speciesism, human chauvinism, and its failure to account for the intrinsic value of non-human beings and natural entities.
5. To explore alternative ethical frameworks, such as biocentrism or cosmocentrism, and consider their potential for providing a more inclusive and holistic approach to environmental ethics that acknowledges the interconnectedness and intrinsic value of all living beings and natural systems.

Methodology:

The research methodology employed in the study, "Ethical Reflections: Balancing Human Needs and Environmental Preservation," adopts a qualitative approach to delve deeply into the intricate relationship between human needs and environmental conservation. This qualitative methodology facilitates a nuanced exploration of the ethical dimensions surrounding these issues, allowing for the examination of diverse perspectives, values, and experiences. Data collection involves a comprehensive review of literature spanning various scholarly sources, including books, research papers, conference proceedings, case studies, and internet resources, aiming to capture the multifaceted nature of ethical considerations within the intersection of human needs and environmental sustainability. Additionally, the qualitative research approach provides flexibility in gathering and analyzing data, enabling the exploration of emergent themes and the in-depth examination of individual cases. Through this methodology, the study seeks to uncover underlying ethical dilemmas, tensions, and potential pathways towards achieving a balance between meeting human needs and preserving the environment, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the ethical complexities inherent in addressing the intertwined challenges of sustainability and human well-being.

Concept of Anthropocentrism and its Natures:

Anthropocentrism, deriving from the Ancient Greek words *ánthrōpos* (meaning 'human being') and *kéntron* (meaning 'center'), encapsulates the belief that humans occupy the central or paramount position in the universe. It can also be referred to as human centrism, human supremacy, or human exceptionalism, all essentially revolving around the notion of human-centricity. Within environmental ethics, anthropocentrism denotes an outlook characterized by the prioritization of human interests and perspectives over those of non-human entities in the natural world. This perspective places humans at the pinnacle of existence, attributing unique qualities such as soul, rationality, and linguistic expression solely to them. Consequently, nature is often perceived as a domain to be dominated rather than harmonized with. Anthropocentrism asserts human entitlement to exploit and manipulate nature according to their needs and desires. Morally, it champions the autonomy and significance of human interests above all else, with ethical codes and norms being

human constructs, devoid of any inherent external authority. In the realm of anthropocentrism, intrinsic value is exclusively ascribed to human beings, relegating non-human species to a subordinate status, existing solely to serve human purposes. This worldview disregards the desires, aspirations, and inherent worth of other forms of life, interpreting everything through the lens of human values and objectives. Thus, anthropocentrism is inherently anthropocentric, focusing solely on human interests while disregarding the broader ecological interdependencies and moral considerations involving non-human entities.

Philosophical Justifications for Anthropocentrism:

Anthropocentrism, the belief that human beings are the central or most significant entities in the universe, has deep philosophical roots. This research explores various philosophical arguments supporting anthropocentrism, tracing its origins from ancient Greek philosophy to modern thinkers.

Platonic Dualism:

Plato's dualistic worldview, distinguishing between the material world and the world of ideas, laid the groundwork for anthropocentrism. According to Plato, only humans possess reason, enabling them to grasp the true essence of reality beyond the physical realm. This elevated human rationality above nature, fostering the perception of humans as superior beings.

Protagorean View:

The assertion by Protagoras that "Man is the measure of all things" emphasizes human subjectivity in defining reality. This perspective underscores human cognition as the ultimate arbiter of truth, reinforcing anthropocentrism.

Aristotelian Hierarchy:

Aristotle's hierarchical view of nature posits that beings with higher reasoning abilities hold dominion over those with lesser capacities. He contends that the natural world exists for the benefit of humans, with each species serving a purpose in the human-centric ecosystem.

Judaic-Christian Tradition:

The Judaic-Christian tradition reinforces anthropocentrism through the notion of humans created in the image of God, endowed with spiritual superiority over other beings. The biblical narrative depicts humans as divinely ordained masters of the Earth, tasked with subduing and utilizing nature for their benefit.

Descartes' Mechanistic Worldview:

Descartes' conception of the world as a mechanistic system, with humans as the primary operators, aligns with anthropocentric principles. His dualism between mind and body further reinforces human dominance over the material world.

Kantian Ethics:

Kant's moral philosophy assigns intrinsic value solely to humans, relegating non-human

entities to instrumental status. His emphasis on rationality and moral agency as uniquely human traits bolsters anthropocentrism.

Wittgenstein's Linguistic Analysis:

Wittgenstein's skepticism towards animal cognition, rooted in language limitations, reflects a bias favoring human intellectual superiority. His contention that animals lack complex mental states reinforces anthropocentrism.

Impact of Science and Technology:

The advent of science and technology has facilitated human exploitation of nature, further entrenching anthropocentric attitudes. Western-centric scientific progress emphasizes human needs and desires, relegating nature to a mere resource for human use.

Cornucopian Optimism:

Cornucopian philosophers reject environmental concerns, believing in human ingenuity to overcome challenges through technological advancement. This optimistic outlook reinforces anthropocentric faith in human ability to control and mitigate environmental crises.

Varieties of Anthropocentrism in Environmental Ethics and Their Implications:

Anthropocentrism, the philosophical notion that human interests are paramount, manifests in various forms within environmental ethics. These variations, ranging from perspectives deeply rooted in human-centric views to those more inclusive of non-human interests, play a significant role in shaping our attitudes towards the environment.

Let's delve into the three prevalent types:

I. Perspectival Anthropocentrism:

Perspectival anthropocentrism posits that human perception and understanding of the world are inherently shaped by our position and existence within it. Advocates, such as Fredrick Ferre, argue that it's natural for humans to prioritize their own species. Mary Midgley supports this view, contending that acknowledging the importance of our species is morally justified. This form of anthropocentrism suggests that a balanced recognition of human significance can coexist with a respect for other beings. Furthermore, some philosophers propose that self-love, when properly understood, lays the groundwork for compassionate treatment of others, including non-human entities. Thus, while human interests remain central, perspectival anthropocentrism encourages an expanded consideration for the well-being of all beings.

II. Strong Anthropocentrism:

Strong anthropocentrism takes a more exploitative stance, prioritizing immediate human preferences without regard for the well-being of non-human entities. This perspective often aligns with a hierarchical view of nature, where humans dominate and exploit other species without moral consideration. The concept of "speciesism," introduced by Richard Ryder and

developed by Peter Singer, epitomizes this attitude, justifying differential treatment based solely on species membership. In strong anthropocentrism, the suffering of non-human beings is deemed inconsequential, as humans assert dominance over nature without recognizing moral parallels between themselves and other species.

III. Weak Anthropocentrism:

Contrary to strong anthropocentrism, weak anthropocentrism acknowledges the moral obligations humans have towards the environment, albeit within an anthropocentric framework. This perspective recognizes the value of environmental conservation and condemns actions such as factory farming and animal testing. However, it permits exploitation of non-human beings when necessary for human survival, highlighting the complex interplay between human and environmental interests. While weak anthropocentrism may lead to policies resembling those of strong anthropocentrism in certain circumstances, it ultimately rests on the premise that human well-being is paramount but aligns with broader environmental interests.

Precaution towards the Environment:

Enlightened anthropocentrism emphasizes humans' moral obligations towards the environment, drawing parallels to individual moral responsibilities. This perspective views actions leading to pollution and environmental degradation as inherently immoral, recognizing the interconnectedness of human and environmental well-being. Moreover, it underscores the importance of biodiversity conservation, framing it as a moral imperative for humans to preserve the richness of life on Earth. Some proponents of this view, rooted in religious beliefs, argue that neglecting environmental stewardship is a disrespect to the divine creation.

Criticism and Discussion:

Anthropocentrism, which prioritizes human interests and values above all else in nature, faces numerous criticisms challenging its validity and implications. These critiques emphasize the one-sidedness of anthropocentrism and argue for a more holistic understanding of the relationship between humans and the environment. One primary criticism against anthropocentrism is its narrow focus on human beings, neglecting the intrinsic value and significance of non-human beings and non-living entities in nature. This perspective fails to recognize the interconnectedness of all life forms and ecosystems, essential for maintaining ecological balance. Moreover, critics argue that privileging the human species over others perpetuates speciesism and human chauvinism, undermining the moral fabric of our relationship with the natural world.

In discussing these criticisms, it is essential to consider our perspective and acknowledge the importance of transcending anthropocentrism. Our viewpoint must shift from seeing humans as separate from nature to recognizing our interconnectedness and interdependence with all life forms. This acknowledgment is fundamental to our well-being and the sustainability of the planet. By

prioritizing human interests at the expense of biodiversity conservation, anthropocentrism neglects the intricate web of life upon which humans ultimately depend. Furthermore, anthropocentrism's portrayal of humans as the pinnacle of creation, separate from and superior to nature, is criticized for its arrogance and disregard for natural laws. This mindset has led to exploitative behavior and environmental degradation, evident in the current global environmental crisis.

Critics also contend that anthropocentrism fosters possessiveness, selfishness, and individualism, hindering collective action for the greater good of all beings. This self-centered approach overlooks our responsibilities towards non-human entities and diminishes our sense of interconnectedness with the natural world. A holistic perspective, such as cosmocentrism, emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all elements within the universe. By recognizing the intrinsic value of all beings and the importance of preserving biodiversity, cosmocentrism offers a more sustainable and ethical approach to our relationship with the natural world. It acknowledges that humans are part of a broader cosmic ecosystem and have a responsibility to act as stewards of the Earth.

Conclusion and Findings:

Anthropocentrism, rooted in the belief that humans occupy a central position in the universe, shapes our understanding of the world and our relationship with nature. Throughout history, various philosophical justifications have reinforced this human-centric perspective, from Platonic dualism to Kantian ethics. However, anthropocentrism is not without its criticisms. Critics argue that it neglects the intrinsic value of non-human entities and perpetuates a hierarchical view of nature that prioritizes human interests at the expense of biodiversity and ecological balance.

In light of these criticisms, it is imperative to transcend anthropocentrism and adopt a more holistic perspective that recognizes the interconnectedness of all life forms and ecosystems. This shift requires acknowledging our role as stewards of the Earth and embracing a cosmocentric worldview that values the well-being of both humans and non-human beings. By prioritizing biodiversity conservation and fostering a sense of interconnectedness with the natural world, we can address the environmental challenges we face and pave the way for a more sustainable future. Additionally, promoting environmental education and fostering a deeper appreciation for nature can help cultivate a sense of environmental responsibility and empower individuals to take collective action towards preserving the richness of life on Earth.

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