



Harmony In Progress: The Imperative Of Environmental Ethical Guidelines For Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Sustainable development, as a visionary concept, has become increasingly relevant in addressing the urgent issues of environmental degradation, resource depletion, and social inequality. This holistic approach seeks to enhance human well-being while safeguarding the interests of future generations. Despite its widespread acceptance, the complexity of achieving sustainable development is often underestimated. A critical yet frequently overlooked aspect of this endeavour is the incorporation of environmental ethical guidelines to steer and inform the path toward sustainability. This article explores the compelling necessity of incorporating environmental ethical guidelines into the framework of sustainable development. It addresses the challenge for overcoming speciesist anthropocentrism and advocates for an inclusive approach that extends the benefits of development to all entities, encompassing both humans and nonhumans. By doing so, I aim to foster a harmonious progression towards a sustainable future that respects and preserves the intrinsic value of all life forms and ecosystems.

Keyword: Sustainable Development, Environmental Ethics, Anthropocentrism, Intrinsic Value, Instrumental Value.

Introduction

In our contemporary world, the concept of 'sustainability' has risen to unparalleled prominence. This surge in attention is driven by the pressing need to address environmental crises such as the depletion of natural resources, deforestation, and the looming specter of climate catastrophe. The remarkable progress achieved by human civilizations in fields such as science, technology, industry, economics, and culture is undeniable. Yet, this advancement has come at a steep cost - the relentless exploitation and depletion of our natural environment.

In response to these challenges, a group of visionary thinkers proposes a fundamental shift in the way we approach development. They argue that while the pursuit of better living conditions for people in both developing and developed nations is essential, it must be achieved in harmony with nature's sustaining capacity. This transformative model of development is commonly known as 'sustainable development.' In this discourse, we will delve into the multifaceted dimensions of sustainable development and its crucial role in addressing the environmental crises that threaten our planet's future.

Influence of Anthropocentrism in Modern Development

In the Christian theology, it is believed that the God fashioned the natural world to meet the needs of humanity. This theological perspective influenced the development of modern science and technology, which sought to harness and manage nature for the betterment of humanity. Christianity, contemporary sciences, and classical economics were merged within an anthropocentric worldview to form the contemporary Western sociocultural context. In this framework, classical economics maintained that behaving in one's self-interest was the most effective way to organize the economy and, due to the enormous impact of the economy, society. However, in the twentieth century, self-interest has evolved into excessive consumption and selfishness. This stance was further validated and legitimized by anthropocentrism, as reflected in Christianity, scientific knowledge, and a dominator paradigm of social organization.

Consequently, it is concerning that the existing definition of sustainable development, when placed within the context of the existing ideological foundation of modern society, is incapable of being defined and incorporated as anything other than anthropocentric and is also inherently human-centered at the expense of nature. This is a situation that raises serious concerns. This is because it would be preferable to define and incorporate the concept as something other than anthropocentric and human centered. The Environmental Protection Agency defines the concept of sustainability as the notion that everything we require for our flourished life and well-being depends, directly or indirectly, on natural resources.

An anthropocentric approach to environmental policy promotes a management approach to environmental problems, believing that they can be managed without making big changes to how we produce and use things now. This way of thinking is why putting people first in environmental policy is bad for sustainable development.

In addition, a significant part of the anthropocentric attitude towards environmental policy is grounded in the belief, shared by anthropocentric thinkers, that there are no restrictions on the number of advancements that can occur. The anthropocentric viewpoint maintains that technological advancement will eventually answer all the problems that an increasing population causes. The United Nations emphasized the notion of sustainable development, which prioritizes human interest and ensures the quality of life of humans in present and future generations, providing all needs to humans at any cost. Rio Summit mentioned, "To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies."¹ However, a human-centred economic and social framework backed sustainable development. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development published the report "Our Common Future" (Brundtland Report), which emphasized a sustainable development which is defined as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."²

The goal of the Brundtland Report was to establish global equity for future generations by shifting resources from developed to less developed countries. This was accomplished through the transfer of resources. According to the Brundtland Report, all human beings should be able to satisfy their fundamental requirements, and it is possible to simultaneously have social justice, economic advancement, and environmental protection. In addition, it was asserted that each nation could realize its maximum economic potential and expand its resource base. However, it acknowledged that technological and social change would be required to achieve this fairness and sustainable growth.

The Goals of sustainable development is to improve the quality of human life and protect future generations by ensuring they have access to all the essentials they need to live a better life. This is

accomplished by implementing numerous policies and programmes. Technology, the economy, medical facilities, education, and even cultivating a healthy natural environment must be prioritized to progress into the future and transmit human worship from one generation to the next. In 1972 Stockholm Conference was mentioned in principle eight; "Economic and social development is essential for ensuring a favourable living and working environment for man and for creating conditions on earth that are necessary for the improvement of the quality of life."³

Humans are nothing more than efforts to conserve humankind's species and secure their quality of life by conserving the many members of the environment and preserving their diversity. All necessary stages must be completed, and to do so, we need a system that safeguards and ensures the survival of humanity. To ensure that natural resources are not wasted and to sustain human life without causing irreparable harm to the natural environment, efforts are being made to achieve both of these objectives. Therefore, it is essential to do whatever is necessary to improve the environment and ensure human survival. This entails doing everything necessary to ensure humans' survival in the environment. Sustainable Development Goals emphasize the protection of human interests. Eliminate the worst forms of poverty and hunger, provide food security, improve nutrition, and encourage environmentally responsible agriculture. Ensure that people of all ages live healthy lives and promote their well-being. Get everyone in the world through elementary school. Encourage gender equality and the advancement of women. Bring about gender equality and promote women's and girls' empowerment at all levels; ensure that everyone has access to water and sanitation and inexpensive, reliable, environmentally friendly energy. The traditional concept of Sustainable Development must be stable, sustainable and for human purposes. The Rio Summit mentioned, "The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations."⁴

Consequently, the primary human-centeredness can be considered the consequence of this sustainable development. In other words, human-centeredness and continuous progress are intrinsically linked in the context of humanity. Thus, human-centeredness and sustainable development are inexorably linked. Within the framework of the development process and reconceptualized sustainability of all life systems on Earth, not just human ones, would be incorporated into the reconceptualization and redefinition of sustainable development that would be required of social disciplines also. In every society's progress, there's a common focus on humans, often at the expense of the environment and nonhuman creatures, all in the name of sustainable development. However, we must overcome the speciesist anthropocentric viewpoint and reconceive sustainable development such that all environmental members are morally considered. This is because anthropocentrism promotes the dominance of non-human species and nature, which in turn causes severe environmental damage. We must create a healthy environment and community by respecting one another to ensure their continuing existence, which is essential for sustainable development.

Environmental ethical guidelines for transcending speciesism

To overcome the idea that humans are only morally valuable members and others have no such value, we have to follow the guidelines of environmental ethics to shape our development process in the way of sustainable development. Environmental ethics is a scholarly exploration into the moral connections between human beings and the natural world. It delves into the complex web of moral relationships that exist between humanity and nature, contemplating the intrinsic moral status and value of the environment itself. This field of study centers on our ethical responsibilities, expanding the realm of moral consideration to encompass not just our fellow humans but also the entire natural environment. Embracing an ecocentric perspective within environmental ethics offers a meaningful path to challenge and transcend the anthropocentric and speciesist outlook on the world. This ecocentric worldview plays a pivotal role in guiding the formulation of sustainable development approaches, where both humans and non-human constituents of the environment are granted moral recognition and consideration.

Embracing an ecocentric perspective within environmental ethics offers a meaningful path to challenge and transcend the anthropocentric and speciesist outlook on the world. This ecocentric worldview plays a pivotal role in guiding the formulation of sustainable development approaches, where both humans and non-human constituents of the environment are granted moral recognition and consideration.

The anthropocentric viewpoint asserts that all other life forms exist primarily to fulfil human requirements. Human interests are prioritised in deciding the morality of human behaviour toward nature. The term 'anthropocentrism' can be understood as a form of human-centeredness. Its roots trace back to Greek words, with 'anthropos' meaning 'human being,' and 'kentron' signifying 'center.' When we break it down, 'anthropocentrism' essentially conveys the idea that humans are positioned at the center of all purposes, suggesting that, based on its etymology, this worldview values all other entities as serving primarily the interests and needs of humanity. On the contrary, ecocentrism represents a broader worldview that attributes inherent value to both living and non-living entities and beings in the natural world.

Many ethicists have long considered the book of Genesis and the Judeo-Christian Bible as the foundational sources of anthropocentrism, a viewpoint that places humans at the center of the natural order. The concept of human dominance over nature and other animals can be directly linked to a passage in the book of Genesis, which states, "And God said, let us make man in our Image, after our likeness: and let them have domination over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."⁵

This biblical passage is often cited as the Foundation for the belief in human supremacy over the natural world. While there has been substantial critique of the anthropocentric perspective, especially regarding the problematic concept of speciesist anthropocentrism, it's essential to recognize that not all aspects of anthropocentrism are inherently detrimental. Let's explore the problematic sides of anthropocentrism, which we can understand through 'speciesism' and 'human chauvinism.' Speciesism is when we focus mainly on the moral duties and value we give to humans, but we often forget about extending those considerations to other species. This kind of anthropocentrism, known as 'speciesist anthropocentrism,' shows a biased preference for humans, ignoring our moral responsibilities to non-human species. Donald A. Graft defines speciesism in his essay "Speciesism" that "speciesism is discrimination, prejudice, or differential treatment justified by consideration of species membership."⁶ Another wrong side of anthropocentrism known as "human chauvinism," which promotes the idea of treating humans and other species differently in a manner that always benefits humans. This viewpoint essentially champions human superiority and favours humans over other species when it comes to sustainability and resource use. Meanwhile, both the speciesist and human chauvinism consider mere instrumental values for nonhuman nature, which mean that nonhuman nature is valuable only if they are capable of fulfilling human needs and desires. ecocentric worldview of environmental ethics sustainability comes out by critiquing this speciesist (where human chauvinist stances are subsumed) stances of humans.

Although the anthropocentrism altogether is not the against of contemporary notion of sustainability. Perspectival anthropocentric sustainability which is the basis of anthropocentric sustainability is not wrong rather desirable for any kind of sustainable development. Furthermore, the underlying philosophical stances underscore the inherent anthropocentric nature of sustainability. They highlight the fact that humans inevitably view the world through their own perspective, as it is from this vantage point that all thoughts and values are shaped. This perspective, often referred to as "perspectival anthropocentrism" by Frederick Ferre, is not something that can be eliminated but is rather an integral and, in many ways, desirable aspect of human consciousness. But, only with the perspectival anthropocentricity developmental process could not be run alone, for this, we need to transcend

speciesist anthropocentric notion of sustainability to the environmental sustainability by extending moral consideration to nonhuman beings by following ecocentric worldview of environmental ethics. To ensure the preservation of diversity and balance within ecosystems and the creation of a healthy environment, it is imperative to transcend speciesist anthropocentrism. This can be achieved by embracing an ecocentric approach to sustainability, which places a greater emphasis on the interconnected well-being of all components within the ecosystem. Ecocentric theories such as the Land Ethic, Gaia theory, Deep Ecology, etc., propose a significant shift in the way humans are positioned within the ecosystem. They advocate for a transformation in the role of *Homo sapiens*, from being conquerors of the land-community to becoming ordinary members of it. This transformation reflects a deeper connection and sense of responsibility toward the natural world. Aldo Leopold's word "changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it."⁷

A fundamental tenet of ecocentric holism is the belief that every living entity possesses an equal entitlement to flourish, prosper, and attain self-fulfilment. This is achieved through their contributions to the collective self-realization of the entire natural world. In essence, ecocentric holism places an emphasis on the intrinsic worth and interconnectedness of all living beings within the broader ecosystem.

Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic redefines "Land" as the central focus of life, encompassing all living and non-living members, such as humans, animals, plants, and the Earth itself. In this holistic perspective, all these components are seen as valuable members of the land community. The land ethic is a cornerstone of a holistic ethical approach, contrasting with anthropocentric sustainability. It prioritizes maintaining balance within the land's ecosystem, safeguarding not only individual species' interests but also the collective well-being of the land itself. There is no entity holds a higher or lower value than any other within the land; there's no notion of superiority or inferiority. Humans are not inherently superior to other creatures in the biotic community. Instead, all entities on the land are viewed as equal members who are interconnected, interdependent, and interrelated. The land ethic serves as the guiding system through which members of the land community collaborate and work in harmony with each other. This idea is evident in Leopold's words when he asserts that "a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."⁸

The Gaia theory stands as one of the highly influential holistic worldviews, emphasizing the intricate interconnection between individual living organisms and the Earth itself. This concept of Gaia is deeply intertwined, suggesting that all living and non-living elements interact closely to form a complex, self-regulating system that sustains life on Earth. In essence, the Gaia hypothesis reveals that the Earth functions as a living organism, where various components work in harmony to maintain homeostasis through processes like temperature regulation, oxidation state, acidity, and the interaction between rocks and fluids within the biosphere. Gaia hypothesis states, "Life and its environment are so closely coupled that evolution concerns Gaia, not the organisms or the environment taken separately."⁹

Deep ecology stands as one of the most significant and impactful worldviews. It emphasizes the importance of considering the well-being of the entire ecosystem. According to this perspective, if the overall ecosystem remains healthy and stable, the interests of individual beings are automatically safeguarded. Deep ecology firmly asserts that all entities, encompassing humans, nonhumans, and the entire biotic community, are intricately interconnected. Moreover, it acknowledges the inherent worth of nonhuman species, extending this recognition to entire ecosystems. Arne Naess proposed seven Deep

Ecology Principles to address the challenges posed by speciesist anthropocentrism and to acknowledge our moral responsibility to all members within an ecosystem:

Rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of the relational total-field image

Species are intricately connected within the biosphere, forming a complex web of interdependence. Ecosystem or biosphere members rely on one another, creating a profound and intrinsic value in their relationships. Should these connections be severed, these entities would cease to exist independently and undergo fundamental transformations. Their significance and identity are inextricably linked to their interactions with other inhabitants of the biosphere. This concept of interdependence and interconnectedness is referred to as an inherent relation, highlighting the essential nature of these relationships to the existence and functioning of the entire ecosystem.

Biospherical egalitarianism in Principle

Biospherical egalitarianism, as a guiding principle, asserts that every member of a biotic community, which encompasses both living organisms and the non-living elements of nature, possesses the same moral worth. It recognizes and respects the intrinsic value and equal moral consideration of all life within the biosphere, regardless of their specific characteristics or forms.

Diversity and symbiosis

Deep ecology, as a philosophical framework, firmly upholds the interrelated principles of diversity and symbiosis. It recognizes that diversity plays a crucial role in enhancing the chances of survival, both in the struggle for existence and in the generation of new life. Symbiosis is the key to living harmoniously with other organisms. It rejects the notion of "either you or me" and instead promotes coexistence and cooperation in complex ecological relationships. Diversity and symbiosis working towards a more harmonious and interconnected existence in the natural world.

Anti-class posture

The class-based societal structure encourages the exploitation of one class by another, creating a dynamic of oppression and inequality. This arrangement also imposes distinct ways of life for the exploiter and the exploited. According to the principles of Deep Ecology, this situation has detrimental effects on both the exploiter and the exploited, as it hinders their ability to fully realize their potential and live fulfilling lives. In essence, Deep Ecology highlights the anti-class posture that emphasizes the need for a more equitable and harmonious approach that benefits all individuals involved.

Fight against pollution and resource depletion

Deep ecologists are actively engaged in the battle against environmental pollution and the depletion of natural resources by focusing on the ecological well-being of the environment. They approach this challenge with a forward-looking perspective, always considering the long-term health of the environment. Their approach is rooted in an ecosystem-based and holistic strategy that takes into account the interconnectedness of all components within an ecosystem. By doing so, they aim to address issues such as environmental pollution and resource depletion comprehensively, with an eye toward sustaining the health and vitality of the environment for both present and future generations.

Complexity, not complication

Deep ecology differentiates complexity and complication in ecosystems. Ecosystems are complex, with multiple elements interdependently forming a web of relationships. This complexity can appear

complicated without understanding the interconnections, but once we grasp these relationships, we realize that every entity in the ecosystem is an integral part of it.

Local autonomy and decentralization

Decentralization plays a crucial role in nurturing local autonomy and fostering a harmonious ecosystem. Through decentralization, the various components of an ecosystem can achieve mutual understanding and possess the freedom to navigate and adapt within their respective niches. This freedom is a fundamental element in preserving the delicate balance of any ecosystem. By allowing members of the ecosystem to operate with autonomy, decentralization simultaneously enhances the prospects of survival for the diverse life forms within it. This is achieved by minimizing the likelihood of external forces disrupting the equilibrium of the ecosystem. These principles of deep ecology help overcome the narrow view of speciesist anthropocentrism.

Environmental Holism in Indian philosophy

The introduction of diverse ecocentric worldviews in Western philosophy has significantly influenced sustainable development. In addition, various schools of Indian philosophy, such as Buddhism, Jainism, and others, contribute to sustainable development through their ecocentric approaches.

Buddhist worldview to nature

Buddhist school emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and the natural world. It promotes compassion, mindfulness, and understanding of suffering. Buddhism teaches compassion for all beings, emphasizing ethical treatment of animals, ecosystem preservation, and reducing suffering. Mindfulness is applied to promote sustainable living and conscientious consumption. Buddhism acknowledges the impermanence of all things and encourages reverence for the natural world. Engaged Buddhism involves taking action to address environmental issues, while a simple lifestyle reduces environmental impact associated with consumerism. By adhering to the principles of Buddhism, adherents aim to create a more harmonious and sustainable relationship between humans and the natural world.

Jaina's approach to nature

Jain philosophy is a holistic approach to the environment, centered on non-violence, respect for all life forms, and the interconnectedness of all living beings. It emphasizes the importance of minimizing harm and suffering to the environment and its inhabitants, and the intrinsic value of all living beings. Jains are vegetarians or vegans, avoiding meat, fish, eggs, and root vegetables to preserve natural habitats and ecosystems. They advocate for responsible use of natural resources and environmental sustainability, participating in initiatives like tree planting and wildlife conservation. Some Jains choose an ascetic lifestyle, practicing compassion and *daya* towards all living beings. Jain philosophy encourages non-attachment to material possessions and worldly desires, promoting a simple, eco-friendly lifestyle.

Bhagavad Gita's principles for protecting environment

The Bhagavad Gita, a Hindu scripture from the Indian epic Mahabharata, promotes an ecocentric and holistic view of the environment. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms and the universe, promoting the concept of 'dharma' or duty to maintain harmony and respect for the natural world. The Gita encourages non-attachment to material possessions and worldly desires, promoting a simple and sustainable lifestyle. It also emphasizes the sacredness of all life and the importance of avoiding

violence. The Gita encourages a balanced, harmonious way of life, promoting a sustainable approach to environmental ethics and sustainability.

The Vedic Hindu tradition reflects respecting attitude towards nature. The Atharvaveda (12.1.12) says: *Mātā bhūmiḥ putro'ham pṛthivyāḥ*, which means 'The Earth is my mother, and I am Her child.' In later Hindu thought this earth or universe is understood to be God's body: *Ihaikasthaṁ jagat kṛtsnam paśyādya sacarācaram /Mama dehe gudākeśa yaccānyat draṣṭumicchasi //* (The Bhagavadgītā (11/7). It means that whatever we look for now and whatever we may wish to see in the future, God's universal body can reveal it to us; all things, moving and unmoved, are present in this one place. Thus, it can be concluded that Hinduism emphasizes the deep relationship between man and nature. Additionally, it is said that an ideal human being perceives both himself and nature within itself. The Vedic Hindu tradition's philosophy, mythology, values, and moral codes emphasize the idea that all living beings, from plants to humans, are part of a single family. The concept "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" is introduced, reflecting the belief that everything in the world is interconnected and belongs to a single family.

Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that the only way to preserve the natural world in all of its variety and splendor is to adopt an ecocentric viewpoint with a spiritual undertone (strengthened by deep ecological Self-realization and/or advaita theory of samadarśana). Since it is founded on instrumentalism, even the so-called 'enlightened' kind of anthropocentrism is unable to be of assistance to us in the long run. Nevertheless, we cannot have ethics if we do not take into consideration the 'perspectival' component of anthropocentrism, which is essential to the development of ethics. However, we must be wary of ideologues that persistently preach human chauvinism, which might be interpreted as speciesism.

The call to adopt ecocentric worldviews reflects a departure from speciesist anthropocentrism, where moral consideration is restricted to humans. Embracing an ecocentric perspective means extending ethical concern to all members of ecosystems, recognizing their intrinsic value. Environmental philosophy's goal is to guide human behaviour for proper sustainability, and although human reference remains vital, it's imperative to transcend speciesist anthropocentrism.

Fully embracing ecocentrism may disrupt human interests, just as a purely speciesist anthropocentric approach neglects non-human life. Thus, a balanced approach is needed for sustainable development, avoiding extremes. Ecocentric sustainable development can be achieved through a refined utilitarian approach, preserving wilderness, seas, mountains, and more. This shift reflects the idea that "ecology is a permanent economy," replacing unsustainable economic growth with integrated, sustainable development.¹⁰ It emphasizes that "simple living in service of others is central to making a shift from egocentric thinking and living to eco-centric thinking and living."¹¹

Endnotes

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