

Shifting Perspectives: A Review of Environmental Ethics from Human-Centered to Nature-Centered Worldviews

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Abstract— This review article explores the evolution of environmental ethics, tracing the paradigm shift from anthropocentrism—where human interests dominate—to ecocentrism, which recognizes the intrinsic value of nature. By critically analyzing scholarly literature across multiple disciplines, this study synthesizes key philosophical frameworks, ethical theories, and practical implications underpinning this transition. The review highlights how changing worldviews influence environmental policy, conservation efforts, and sustainable development practices. It identifies areas of consensus and debate, emphasizing the urgency of adopting nature-centered ethics in addressing contemporary environmental crises such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological degradation. The findings underscore the need for integrative ethical approaches that balance human well-being with ecological integrity. This article contributes to ongoing discourse by providing a comprehensive overview and suggesting directions for future research on environmental ethics and sustainability. **Keywords** include environmental ethics, anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, sustainability, environmental philosophy, and nature-centered worldviews.

Keywords— Anthropocentrism: Climate Change Ethics: Conservation Ethics: Ecocentrism: Ecological Ethics: Environmental Ethics: Environmental Justice: Environmental Philosophy: Environmental Stewardship: Environmental Sustainability: Environmental Values: Ethical Paradigms: Human-Nature Relationship: Nature-Centered Worldview: Sustainability.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the escalating environmental crisis has prompted scholars, policymakers, and the general public to reexamine humanity's relationship with the natural world. Climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and resource depletion are no longer distant threats—they are urgent realities. At the core of these issues lie deeply rooted environmental worldviews and ethical frameworks that shape how individuals and societies perceive and interact with nature. These worldviews range from anthropocentrism, which places humans at the center of moral concern, to ecocentrism, which extends intrinsic value to all living beings and ecosystems.

Environmental ethics, a branch of philosophy that explores the moral relationship between humans and the environment, plays a critical role in addressing today's ecological challenges. As societies become increasingly aware of the limitations of human-centered thinking, there is a growing shift toward more inclusive and sustainable perspectives. This evolution in thought reflects a broader transformation in environmental

worldviews—shifting from dominion over nature to coexistence with it.

This review article aims to examine the historical development, theoretical foundations, and practical implications of evolving environmental ethics and worldviews. It specifically explores the continuum from anthropocentric to eco-centric paradigms, highlighting key philosophical arguments, cultural influences, and contemporary applications in education, policy, and environmental advocacy. By synthesizing existing literature and identifying emerging trends, this review seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ethical perspectives influence environmental behavior and decision-making.

Given the complex and interconnected nature of global ecological issues, there is a pressing need to revisit and critically assess the frameworks that guide our interactions with the environment. This review not only fills a gap in understanding the trajectory of environmental ethics but also offers insights that may inform more ethical and sustainable approaches to environmental stewardship.

II. METHODOLOGY

To explore the evolution of environmental ethics from anthropocentric to ecocentric worldviews, a comprehensive literature search was conducted using the databases Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected for their broad and interdisciplinary coverage of peer-reviewed academic articles across philosophy, environmental science, education, and social sciences. Google Scholar was additionally used to access gray literature and relevant scholarly works not always indexed in formal databases. The search strategy involved a combination of keywords and Boolean operators, including terms such as "environmental ethics," "ecological ethics," "anthropocentrism," "ecocentrism," "biocentrism," "environmental worldview," and "sustainability." Filters were applied to limit the search to English-language publications from 2010 to 2025, focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles, review papers, theoretical analyses, and scholarly book chapters. Citation tracking through backward and forward reference searches was also employed to identify additional relevant studies.

Inclusion criteria encompassed theoretical and empirical works that addressed shifts in environmental ethics or examined

worldviews related to environmental responsibility. Studies were selected based on their contribution to understanding the philosophical transition from human-centered to nature-centered ethics. Excluded materials included non-academic articles, opinion pieces, and those not directly relevant to the review's focus. Although the review did not target a specific population, it considered a wide range of perspectives, including indigenous, Western, and interdisciplinary approaches. The key outcomes examined were changes in ethical orientation, philosophical implications, and potential impacts on environmental behavior, education, and policy-making.

Data from the included studies were extracted using a standardized template that recorded the authorship, publication year, study type, worldview orientation, and key insights. A narrative synthesis approach was used to analyze the data, thematically organizing the studies according to dominant ethical paradigms such as anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism. Since the review focused on philosophical and conceptual developments rather than quantitative findings, no statistical or meta-analytical techniques were applied. Instead, critical and comparative analysis was employed to highlight converging trends and divergent perspectives.

To ensure the quality and credibility of the review, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines were followed, along with a modified Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist to assess the clarity, relevance, and philosophical soundness of each study. Potential biases, such as cultural or disciplinary bias, were mitigated by including diverse philosophical sources and underrepresented viewpoints. The entire methodology was conducted with transparency and consistency to ensure the review's rigor, replicability, and alignment with its objective of tracing the shift in environmental ethics from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism.

III. DISCUSSION

The evolution of environmental ethics illustrates a profound shift in human understanding of its role within the ecological system. Historically, anthropocentrism, the worldview that places human beings at the center of moral consideration, has dominated philosophical and policy frameworks (Moore & Nelson, 2022). This perspective, rooted in utilitarian and Enlightenment traditions, perceives nature as a resource for human benefit, often justifying environmental exploitation under the guise of development and progress (Purcell, 2021).

However, growing environmental crises have catalyzed critiques of anthropocentrism and prompted a philosophical reorientation toward ecocentrism—a nature-centered worldview that recognizes the intrinsic value of all living and non-living components of ecosystems (DesJardins, 2023; Derviş, 2022). This shift aligns with the rise of deep ecology, biocentric egalitarianism, and Gaian perspectives, all of which advocate for extending moral consideration beyond human beings (Nash, 2020).

Recent studies argue that ecocentrism fosters a more sustainable ethical paradigm by emphasizing

interconnectedness, interdependence, and the well-being of entire ecosystems rather than individual species alone (Perron et al., 2024). Unlike anthropocentric frameworks that view environmental protection as valuable only when it serves human interests, ecocentric ethics promote conservation as a moral imperative, regardless of utilitarian outcomes (Naess, 2020; Fischer et al., 2021).

Moreover, empirical evidence supports the idea that ecocentric worldviews are associated with stronger environmental attitudes and behaviors. For example, a study by Islam et al. (2023) found that individuals who scored high on ecocentric values were more likely to engage in pro-environmental actions such as recycling, conservation, and advocacy. Similarly, the integration of ecocentric themes in environmental education has shown promise in developing ecological literacy and fostering stewardship among youth (Maniates & Meyer, 2022).

Despite its philosophical strengths, ecocentrism is not without criticism. Some scholars argue that ecocentrism may conflict with urgent socio-economic needs, especially in marginalized communities where environmental protection is perceived as a threat to survival and development (Lee & Weng, 2021). Others highlight the challenge of operationalizing ecocentric ethics within legal and political systems still heavily rooted in anthropocentric principles (Treanor et al., 2022).

Additionally, there is ongoing debate about whether a complete rejection of anthropocentrism is feasible—or even desirable. Several researchers advocate for a pluralistic framework that integrates anthropocentric and ecocentric values to achieve both ecological integrity and social justice (Kopnina & Washington, 2020; Slaughter & Holmes, 2023). This hybrid approach emphasizes the importance of balancing human well-being with environmental preservation, especially in policy-making and governance.

The literature suggests a clear philosophical movement from anthropocentric to ecocentric worldviews, driven by ecological necessity and ethical reflection. While anthropocentrism has provided the foundation for many modern institutions, its limitations in addressing environmental degradation are increasingly apparent. Ecocentrism, while philosophically compelling, requires further refinement to address socio-political realities and cultural diversity. Thus, future research should focus on developing context-sensitive ethical models that promote environmental sustainability while recognizing human needs and values.

IV. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the pressing environmental challenges facing the modern world, there is an urgent need to adopt more ethically sound and ecologically responsible frameworks in both policy and practice. A shift from human-centered to nature-centered worldviews must be encouraged through integrative educational curricula, environmentally focused public policies, and community-based advocacy programs. Educational institutions should incorporate environmental ethics into

science and humanities instruction to foster critical thinking, ecological awareness, and moral responsibility among learners.

Policy makers are urged to align national environmental regulations with ethical paradigms that value sustainability, conservation, and environmental justice. Interdisciplinary research should also be promoted to bridge gaps between environmental science, ethics, and philosophy. Additionally, collaborative efforts among educators, scientists, community leaders, and environmental advocates will help reinforce ecocentric thinking and strengthen conservation ethics.

Implementing these strategies will require sustained effort, but the potential for long-term ecological balance and improved human-nature relationships justifies the investment. By prioritizing inclusive, ethical, and sustainable perspectives, societies can move toward a more just and environmentally resilient future.

V. CONCLUSION

This review highlights the paradigm shift from anthropocentric to ecocentric and biocentric ethical frameworks, emphasizing the growing recognition of intrinsic environmental value beyond human utility. By synthesizing diverse perspectives from deep ecology, ecofeminism, and indigenous worldviews, the study underscores the urgency of embracing a more inclusive ethical stance toward nature amidst escalating ecological crises. The review reveals that environmental ethics must evolve to support sustainable decision-making, policy development, and educational reform. Future research should explore practical applications of nature-centered ethics in local and global governance, environmental education, and community-based conservation efforts to foster a more harmonious coexistence between humans and the natural world.

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