

Ecocentrism vs Anthropocentrism: A Critical Study

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Abstract

The unmatched power and grandeur of nature has been captured in the great books of literature. Eminent writers like William Wordsworth, Robert Frost, Walt Whitman, and T.S. Eliot devoted their time and attention to nature and derived pleasure from it. Not only great writers experienced this moment, but also great saints and religious leaders took nature as the primal force for liberation and salvation. The question whether man is superior or nature is? - has been a debatable topic since ages. Nature has been a fascinating subject to mankind since antiquity. Man has developed many theories around nature and himself; and some of the theories propounded that God, a supreme power, is the creator of the universe.

Religion which played a significant role in the making of several civilizations speaks about the importance of nature and its absolute power. Some of the religious books reveal that the God has given human beings power over the nature. However, the debate whether man is supreme or the nature would continue forever. In the present day scenario, when the world is facing environment crisis, the role of man becomes crucial in the preservation of life on our planet. The present article **Ecocentrism vs Anthropocentrism: A Critical Study** discusses various aspects of man and the nature, the interrelationship between them, the need for safeguarding the nature for the very existence and continuation of life. It deals with the topic - the supremacy of man vs. the power of nature. The study would critically analyze the various aspects of the inter-relationship between man and the nature.

Let us not, however, be very hopeful about our human conquest over nature. For each such victory nature manages to take her revenge” (Engels, 292).

Nature has been a subject of wonder and curiosity since the beginning. The theory of evolution and the creation of man has been an interesting subject. Life is considered to be the most important aspect of creation. It brings beauty to the creation and replenishes the surroundings. One cannot imagine the planet without life, and the whole of creation would have remained pointless without it. According to Genesis, the first chapter of the Holy Bible, God created heaven and earth, when the earth was formless, empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Then God said: “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness (Genesis 1. 1-4). When he (God) saw that Earth was teeming with life, he created man in his own image and gave him authority over his creation: “Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (Genesis 1-26). God’s covenant with Noah reflects the chosenness of man by him: “God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth” (Genesis 9-1). Thus began the journey of greatest creations according to the Holy Bible.

Scientifically, man is a dominant living being due to his unrivaled intelligence and survival skills. If man has been considered to be God’s elect to rule planet Earth, some religions strongly believe that nature is all powerful, and that God invariably manifests in all forms of nature. The topic whether man is superior? Or nature is greater? - is contestable.

Man may have achieved monumental feats in science and technology with greatest innovations to his credit, but nature with its great power can destroy everything built within moments, and this was evident in the recent tsunamis and earthquakes. The scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and the development in the natural sciences increased effects upon the concepts of nature. Nature is now seen as a fragile component which can explode anytime. If the effects of global warming, greenhouse emission, air and water pollution are alarming, the deadly race for weapons of mass destruction is frightening. The devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki will never be forgotten for the generations to come. Humans are responsible for the massive changes that are occurring in the environment.

The encounter between man and the nature has been both fascinating and terrifying, and thus Ecocentrism vs Anthropocentrism becomes an important subject in the age of science and technology. Anthropocentrism is human centered and it views humans as the central factor for all things. Ecocentrism is ecosystem centered which takes an environmental ethical stance and argues that ecological concerns should be over and above human priorities. It believes in a holistic approach to environmental ethics. The ecocentric ethic was conceived by Aldo Leopold which states that all species are a product of a long evolutionary process. Both anthropocentrism and ecocentrism are ways of understanding an extension of ethics to nature. Man with his intellectual abilities can come up with pragmatic solutions to withstand the unstoppable forces of nature. In the long course of history, human beings were able to mould their surroundings to make life easier, simpler and comfortable. In the process, they made many changes to landscapes and waterscapes.

The great poets of the Romantic period took imagination to the next level, and nature became a predominant thriving theme in the period. Imagination set its foot conquering the world of ideas. Men of wisdom began to search for the untold answers in nature and eventually nature became a shelter to many. Knowledge was in abundance and the inimitable journey with nature became a watermark event in the history of mankind. It was a period of quest and inquiry. The writers appeared as magicians on a grand stage. It appeared as if a whole bunch of birds are rushing out from a magician's hat.

Man and nature were two indubitable and perhaps the most memorable themes in the long history of writing. One cannot imagine man without nature, and in other words, life without nature. Man is embedded in the middle of the nature, and supported by its elements. Man gets plethora of ideas through nature alone. Nature could be seen as a teacher and an influencer - a dominating tool in all spheres of life. The Bible speaks about God's creation of nature: "But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. (Job, 12. 7-9)." The nature poet, William Wordsworth speaks about the growth of a boy from infancy in his poem, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

Shades of the prison-house begin to close Upon the growing Boy....

In these sentences, the poet states that an infant is shielded by heaven's divine power in infancy which eventually changes as the infant grows. The sentences resonates a connection between man and nature, beginning from infancy. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden: or, Life in the Woods* could be observed as the Bible of Ecocriticism. In the book, Thoreau criticizes the anthropocentric view of humans. He spends time in celebration of the nature and frames nature as a figure that can mentor or tutor humanity. For Thoreau, the morning bath in the pond is sacred, its "a religious experience" (Thoreau 79). Here, the nature is placed above religion and the writer remarks that nature guides our life: "It matters not what the clocks say or the attitude and labours of men. Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn for me" (80). He treats nature as the ostensive medicine for ailments: "Nature's universal, vegetable, botanic medicines" (123). Thoreau says that nature communicates astounding facts and notes that ponds are "much more transparent than our (human) characters" (178). However, these lines unswervingly prove the interdependence of man and nature which is principally essential for the continuation and sustenance of life.

Humans are the bearers of tomorrow's life, and asserting about the importance of planet Earth and for Pope John Paul II: "The earth will not continue to offer its harvest, except with faithful stewardship. We cannot say we love the land and then take steps to destroy it for use by future generations (Saint Germain, 7)". Nature is a gift and every human being has a kind of responsibility towards it. Any misuse of the nature can lead to disorder, and result in the disruption of the delicate ecosystems. Sadly, the destruction has already begun catastrophically and the deplorable effects have been observed in the environment. The present rate of global warming and other environmental changes sets the best example of the dreadful effects on the nature. Our today's actions would define the fate of future generations. Yet, it could be avoided if man behaves responsibly towards it.

Paulo Coelho in *The Winner Stands Alone* says that humans cannot be arrogant. He attributes to the fact that the planet is and was, and always will be stronger than us. He warns us that if we overstep the mark, the planet will simply erase us from its surface and carry on existing. He further ponders, "why don't they start talking about not letting the planet destroy us?"(Coelho,129).

In order to save planet Earth, one has to be nature-centered and in Franklin D. Roosevelt words a nation that destroys its soils destroys itself. He urges to protect the forests as they are according to him the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people (as qtd. in *AWAKENING INTO UNITY*, 193).

Sylvia Stults warns us by her poem titled 'Warned', to protect the environment. She restates to protect what has been given for free such as the waters, skies, wildlife and trees. She gives a wake up call to be observant about

the fatal day, when the resources become extinct: “For once they’re gone, don’t you say consider yourself warned of that fatal day” (Warned, Sylvia Stults, 2015). As our ancestors did for the past many generations, one must reassess themselves and work towards a stable ecology. One could fervently pray for a safer environment, and fondly remember the riveting words of Rachel Carson from *The Sense of Wonder* that there is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance of dawn comes after night and spring after the winter (as qtd in 117).

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