

**INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE ON
ADVANCING AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS**

The human world is faced with a number of problems, and environmental crisis is perhaps one of the most alarming ones. Contemporary science of ecology has demonstrated that everything on earth is connected and the balance of nature depends upon the eco-systemic co-operations. Consequently, any major anthropogenic activity into earth's natural system may be detrimental to the health of the system and its inhabitants. However, this is now the case of the earth's natural system caused by human arrogant and unscrupulous behavior towards nature.

Humanity once assumed that the natural world is a never-ending resource, but has now realized this is not the case, as his drive towards industrialization and capitalism has negatively affected the environment to include the atmosphere and solar system. Humans' attitude through the use of technology exploits the earth recklessly, to which, unless positive action is taken immediately, doomsday will not be very far.

Being faced with such an imminent catastrophe, responsible thinkers from different regions of the globe and spheres of life - both academics and activists, have come forward to find ways in tackling this problem. Philosophers have also come out to review human traditional ethical principles towards nature and corresponding normative codes. Moral philosophers, in particular, have shown that traditional (Western) world-views and normative principles have thus far neither been genuinely eco-friendly nor morally adequate, even when a norm is made to fit the present-day demand of ecology. Again, it also fails to rise above the anthropocentric moral framework. Anthropocentrism takes human interests as only morally valuable, while the rest of non-human is regarded as valuable in so far as it serves human purposes only. This type of ecologically modified ethics is based upon utilitarian, material and consumerist outlook, and it has been christened 'shallow ecology' by Arne Naess, a contemporary environmentalist.

Most of the contemporary environmental thinkers, even African ethicists, hold that such traditional (Western) ethics herald anthropocentrism and speciesism. This exhibits human moral blindness and shallowness of heart towards non-human nature. This attitude goes against developing any healthy environmentalism. If this is to be overcome, humans require a commitment to consistency and non-arbitrariness in moral reasoning. Also, it requires a degree of good faith and the development of a sympathetic moral disposition towards nature. Furthermore, unless and until humanity sees living organism, plant species and landscape as having value in themselves, humanity would not really feel a direct moral obligation to save them. Genuine ecological ethics demands that we see ourselves as inseparably connected to other things and beings. Nature should be regarded as inherently or intrinsically valuable, irrespective of their usefulness to the members of the human species.

Due to the above reasons, many African scholars have in this special issue, reacted to environmental ethical discourses having been unsatisfied with Western (anthropocentric) outlook. Many of these African scholars believe that since African philosophy and culture is communal in nature, it can contribute to environmental debates. African communalism can be explained using John Mbiti and Ubuntu grand statement 'I am because we are and, since we are, therefore I am.' This statement sees the individual in terms of their several relationships with others and stresses the importance of interconnectedness of all beings. Communitarianism sees the individual as inherently communal being, embedded in a context of social relationship, interdependence with other beings. What this entails is that within this communitarian framework people share and upholds similar religious beliefs, proverbs, an understanding of morality and more importantly guided by the spirit of complementarity. These, among other aspects define a communitarian society. Based on this premise, it suffices to say that the main thrust of this special issue is to see how African cultural values, practices and religious beliefs supply us with necessary environmental knowledge upon which many Africans have tried to articulate communitarian ethics.

Tangwa had proposed eco-bio-communitarianism which reveals lessons from Traditional African society on environmental conservation. Segun Ogungbemi had proposed 'ethics of nature relatedness', Thad Metz had proposed 'Relational Theory of moral status', Mogobe B. Ramose called his 'Ecology through Ubuntu', etc. These African philosophers, as well as many others, have laid the background for African Environmental Ethics. The essence of this issue is to review some of these existing works, tackle some other issues within the subject matter as well as philosophize on new areas and discourse within the field.

We hope that these articles produce a stimulating and thought-provoking collection of new works in the field of African Environmental Ethics. There is no doubt that the coming years will bring forth new and exciting studies in this field, bridging various disciplines together and connecting basic research with African moral practices.

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this special issue. Thanks to the journal board for allowing the special issue, the authors for their interesting contributions, the editorial staff for their help in the production of this special issue and to the reviewers for improving the quality of the manuscripts.

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