

Should we save, what serves only human ends? A review on Environmental Ethics

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Ethical dilemma arise in pursuing conservation of environment at different levels. In this paper, we review various ethical philosophies and identify the determinants of responsibility. Boundary of pain, responsibility arising out of greater human purpose, eco centrism or deep ecological ethics, and socio-psychological roots of ethical consciousness are some of the guiding forces generating this responsibility. The paper concludes by identifying the process of internal commands replacing the external demands as a dominant institutional process for resolving ethical dilemma. The emergence of global responsibility, invariably generates pressure for evolving ethical norms with universal application. A discourse on ecological ethics we argue, must become much more pervasive if environmental conservation has to move beyond the concern of urban, intellectual advocates and become a grassroots movement.

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Anil K Gupta¹ and Riya Sinha²

The conflict among different choices arising out of a feeling of guilt, gratitude, responsibility or stewardship or just spiritual reverence towards nature is resolved or lessened through various ethical principles or frameworks. Different cultures have evolved stories that have guided us in hours of personal, professional, societal or even global crisis. The concern for nature in all its variations has been invoked among various communities and social groups through various instruments of culture such as religion, moral codes, beliefs, myths, legends, folk lore and of course the values that shape the way we define normative hierarchies of our preferences. Jainism, a religious order supposed to be at least five thousand years old considers all life as sacred including the micro-organisms. The Jain monks tie a piece of cloth on their face so that they do not while talking or otherwise consume organisms in the air. They do not wear chappals or shoes lest the pressure from their feet kills ants and other insects. They believe that each life form has a place and independent right to exist. This was perhaps one of the earliest philosophies of ecological ethics in which there was, and is, no confusion about which life forms *must* exist and which *can* exist. Today, conservatives argue that if small pox germs have to be annihilated from this universe, or plague bacilli has to be finished, why should there be a case for every life form to exist, regardless. This position obviously may appear an extreme form and symbolizes the very pragmatic utilitarian and anthropomorphic basis of ethics. Save what serves, the human ends!

Buddhist view and the Hindu view also enjoin the responsibility on human beings for protecting all living beings. Not just the useful ones. One of the seminal Vedic prayer requires Hindus to pray for all living beings, not just the humans, and certainly not just the ones who share their faith. Science and also the herbal drug industry today tell us that current utility levels need not determine the option value of nature. Though that is what seems most prudent course, tell the economists when we have scarce resources and we can not save all species. Species have vanished in past, what is so special if they vanish now. However, others would consider it objectionable. Rifkin (1980) argues, "a low entropy society would view as an obscenity any economic policy that contributed to the destruction of another species. Every species must be preserved simply because it has inherent and inalienable right to life by virtue of its existence" (1980:211). If every thing is connected to every thing else, sooner or later, destruction of nature will catch up with every aspect of human life. It has already caught up, some would argue.

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Major Debates on Ethical Systems :

Should our environmental responsibility emerge from the concern for consequences of our action or from the criteria that we chose to take those actions? There are several frameworks that have been used such as:

Libertarianism: the freedom of every person is absolute and thus if we have to conserve environment, then we should increase environmental resilience or homeostasis so that one's freedom can be accommodated with in environmental capacities.

Contractualism: The social contracts will determine the actions that are proper in any given context. One can evolve faith that binds parties to a contract about environmental care in such a manner that no one is worse off with every body improving to some extent.

Relativism: which aspects of environment should be conserved at what cost, in what time frame is determined by the context and culture specific values and norms. There are no universalistic concepts of standards.

Deontology: A deontological approach considers the concept of duty as independent of the concept of good. An act is good or bad not because of the consequences but by the very nature of act itself. Right means are important and the consequent ends are of less or no consequence.

Teleology: The moral worth of any action is evaluated on the basis of the consequences of that action.

Bentham (1748-1832) developed a simple universal principle for deciding what is good. He called that as the principle of utility in which any good act tried to maximize the amount of happiness to the doer and the ones affected by it. The critics argued that hedonic calculus could not be the basis of estimating moral worth of an action, "they argued that because some pleasures are inherently better than others (getting an education, say is better, than getting drunk), they are inherent worth that makes them desirable, it throws in question that the very possibility of hedonic calculus follows; it would mean that pleasure and pain are no longer considered the basic unit in terms of which the worth of all acts and goals are to be measured"(Goldberg, 1995.117). J S Mill also expanded the concept of utilitarianism by bringing in the dimension of will to do good rather than just the act of doing good to derive pleasure for all without causing pain to any one. The issue still remains that just as pleasure of every body is not treated as similar, the pain of every one is also not treated as similar. The boundary of those sentient beings whose pain affects us thus becomes part of our moral boundary.

What are the different ways in which ethical concerns thus manifests when describing the environmental problems or prospects ?One of the persistent issues which emerges in the dialogue on ethics is the distinction among facts and values. Goldberg states, " facts concern the way things actually are , the evaluations are the judgments about things ideally are ought to be" (1995:5). Amartya Sen in a very significant contribution (1981) on the Description as a Choice, had observed, what we choose to describe involves value judgments just how we describe also involved a value judgment. For instance he recalls that poor people were referred in earlier five year plans of India as poor people and later this term was replaced by weaker section. He wondered as to how the ones who carried the maximum burden could be called as weaker section.

The description he argues could be used for prediction as well as prescription. The descriptive “is” becomes the normative “ought”. The language of description invariably involves or has underlying criteria of selection. Ethical dilemmas lie at the core of what we select in a natural system to describe and thus prescribe or predict the consequences of our action on what has been selected, described, and considered as worth describing. The “worth” is a value judgment. The review of literature reveals several strands of this emerging consciousness about how do we choose to describe, how and why:

Determinants of Domain of Responsibility

a) Boundary of pain: does degree of pain suffered by other species determine the boundary of our responsibility. Some have argued that predation is a rule in nature, and thus why should anthropomorphic view of nature be decried so much. But survival of fittest is also a feature of natural system. Will that be acceptable as a basis of human social evolution? Darwin is believed to have remarked that human were not necessarily on the top of the ecological chain as some higher form than others. Each organism may have adapted to its niche and thus may have advantage over other species in that niche. No species was higher or lower than another. Our responsibility for another species may emerge from the pain we cause to it. The other view, as we shall see later, is that not every species may experience pain. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) held that "any being capable of suffering should have his or her experiences taken into account by utilitarian calculations. However, according to right theorists, any version of utilitarianism, no matter how carefully conceived it is, fails to provide sufficient protection for innocent life, human or nonhuman." (Pluhar, 1998:165). Pluhar asks, "Do animals have a prima facie right to life or a prima facie right not to be tortured.? One might hold that some animals have no serious right but do have a right not to be tortured or one might hold that that they have a prima facie right to humane treatment that could be overridden by the need to preserve allegedly more morally significant lives."(Pluhar, 1998:162). But then this argument raises another dilemma, which is about hierarchy of moral responsibility. Rene Descartes (1596-1650) proposed that "beings that are not rational are incapable of suffering. According to him, non-human animals are merely organic machines without consciousness, unlike humans, who allegedly are amalgams of material bodies and immaterial minds (souls). Though he claims that he does not deny that non-human animals are capable of sensation, he is denying that they can suffer." He reasoned, " my opinion is not much cruel to animals as indulgent to men...since it absolves them from the suspicion of crime when they eat or kill animals." (Pluhar, 1998:165). Recently, when a political leader died in India, his dog stopped eating food and relinquished her life voluntarily. How can an argument that animals do not suffer can be held valid. It is a different matter as we have argued that pain of pets, known animals and strange wild life may not cause similar pain to every body. But can one make this ‘is’ as ‘ought’ that is, the pain in all the three cases should also be different.

The bioethical discourse has generally been guided by three concerns, (a) “Descriptive meaning how people view life, and their moral responsibilities with living organism in their life; (b) Prescriptive bioethics: to tell others what is ethically good or bad, and (c) Interactive bioethics: debate between people, groups within society, and communities”(Macer, 1998:2-3) about the above two issues. There have been disagreements,” as to what should be included as having moral status- is it all sentient animals, all living animals, or all living beings, including plants (biocentric environmental ethics), or are inanimate entities also to be included within the scope of ethical concern, for example, the biosphere as a whole, ecosystems, species, land, water, and air (ecocentric environmental ethics)? "(Gillon,1998:310). The pain of a pet dog and a stray dog on the street does not affect every body equally. Animal right activist like Maneka Gandhi not only cares for stray dogs but also personally looks after many of the sick ones she finds on the road. The moral boundary that she considers while looking at her responsibility towards animals is

obviously bigger than mine who does not will ill to animals but does not go out of one's way to provide succor to them except rarely. I will feed birds and the first bread cooked every day is ear marked for birds. But I do not consider every injured bird any where as part of my responsibility. But some do and they build hospitals for injured birds from anywhere. Can I thus question the ethical values of those whose moral boundaries are broader than mine.

Is it pragmatism as the meat eaters imply or a distinct principle of environmental ethics, which generates relativism? Those who eat meat as a culture or community or just as an individual, find moral reasons to do so. For instance, they could argue that they eat meat because (a) it does not cause any pain to the animals, (b) it is a necessity for their survival in a given socio-ecological context, (c) it is tied to their cultural beliefs, rituals or religious or social identity, (d) it is more nutritious, or tasty, (e) it is linked to social or economic status, or for other reasons such as generating employment for those whose livelihood depends upon livestock rearing for meat purposes. This, they do despite the fact the energy consumed to produce one kilogram of meat is more than the energy consumed by growing a vegetarian source of similar quantity of calories. In Islam, the kindness to animal is ordained and it is suggested that even while killing an animal, it should be ensured that it is for food and not sport, it is through means that do not cause unnecessary pain to the animal (animal should not be killed twice, once by fear and then by physically by knife), and it is through lawful means. The seafood however, is considered valid for eating no matter how it is obtained (Al-Qaradawi, 1960:52-53). In most Buddhist societies, the meat eating is allowed and considered appropriate but killing is not. It is a different matter that social institutions evolve to permit and organize the killing also. In Christian or many other societies, there is no taboo on either eating or killing. In Hindu societies, the eating of meat and killing of animals is not only permitted but also considered culturally sanctified among many communities. Thus no religion except Jainism or cultural communities like Bishnois put an absolute bar on killing of animals. Among Bishnoi communities, there is a revered tale about people sacrificing their life for saving trees from being cut by an order of a king. In Rajasthan, a desert region, some of the best biodiversity is found even today in the villages near the settlements of Bishnois because of this cultural belief. Why should the life of poultry birds be less sacred than the life of fur animals is not settled by this discourse. Whether the pain of those who are known (say pets), who are around us or are easily visible (say the stray animals or birds in neighborhood) or those who are far away (whales for some mountain or desert people) or others not capable of pain (as is suggested by some scientific investigations) generate different kinds of ethical responsibility? From what we have seen, it seems to be so except from the perspective of some of the deep pro-life philosophies like Jainism.

In most religions there are verses implying some animals may have a soul, and at least a way of worship. The Prophet Mohammed divided creatures into angels, men and beasts " God the Most High created the angels and placed within them the intellect, He created the beast and placed within them sensuality, and He created the children of Adam and placed within both intellect and sensuality.....". As regards all humans being equal in moral status and superior to non-human animals, Singer argues that the principles cannot be defended within the terms of a nonreligious approach to ethics. He further argues "if we are considering public policy in a pluralistic society, we should not take a particular religious outlook as the basis for our laws" (Singer, 1990).

b) Responsibility for conservation arising out of greater human purpose:

Dower (1998:769) asks, "Should we care for the environment because other life forms in nature, or nature itself, have a value, moral status *independent of our interests*, or because it is in our own collective interests to protect it ?" The scope of moral responsibility needs to be defined and different cultures experiencing tremendous loss of environment are *defining it* implicitly by

making false trade off among development and environment. It appears as if one could have the former without the latter (unless we genuinely believe that western societies are indeed more developed than the rest, they certainly offer more consumer choices to their citizens. The interest of perfect strangers that is unknown and the unknowable such as unborn are not often taken into account in our moral discourse. Likewise the interests of many other species whose mind or preferences we cannot fathom also get ignored because, they are so to stay, perfect strangers (except of course pets or domesticated animals). Human purpose could be to prosper, without impoverishing other human and non human sentient beings. But it could also be defined by various cultures in negation of certain rights of others. Apartheid could not have emerged as a force otherwise. But the moral sanction for certain behaviors cannot always be judged by majority opinion. Can ethics be determined by voting on it? We do not think so. Great degree of consumerist culture survives in most democratic European societies and yet its sustainability is questionable. The democratic way of arriving at the human purpose does not make it more legitimate and moral.

Human purpose can be defined in minimalist terms. One cannot solve all environmental problems but one can certainly solve some. Should one not try to solve a few because others remain? There is a story of a person who was walking on a sea shore with lots of star fishes thrown by the waves on the shore struggling for life. He was picking up the starfishes one by one and throwing the same back into sea hoping that it would survive. A lady standing nearby asked him, "What are you doing? You can certainly not save these thousands of star fishes lying on the shore to die". He picked up a starfish, threw it into the sea and then said, "I can save at least this one".

At the same time our concern extends not just to those we know, see, or recognize. Our responsibility is for the whole universe and hence the international agreements such as Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), Climate change agreement, law of sea etc.

Agricultural Ethics: The responsibility towards long term sustainability of land, biodiversity, well being of animals, has been contrasted with a desire to intensify agriculture by crossing the natural barriers among species by using biotechnology or other technologies. For some, the biotechnological tools can lead to better environment if these help in reducing or eliminating chemical pesticides. But these tools can do the opposite by unleashing environmental risks. The biotechnological revolution involving incorporation of genes from one species into another has raised a whole lot of ethical issues. The invocation of precautionary principle itself has become contentious. If in doubt, this principle advises that we err on the side of conservation. Some have interpreted this to mean that no research need be done to explore biotechnological alternatives even if these were to have potential of solving some of the nutritional and food needs. Others argue that the issue of hunger is not that of production but of distribution. There is already enough food in the world for ensuring every person's basic needs. If it is not reaching their plates, it is an issue of the institutions, which prevent this from happening. Ethical dilemma are involved in not enabling hungry get sufficient food (from public distribution system) and thus use environmentally destructive land use practices (such as cultivation in marginal regions such as mountains, forests, deserts, and other semi-arid and other risk prone regions). Whether biotechnology can help solve this problem is as much issue of ethics as policy and institutions. The ethical dilemma are also involved when (a) intellectual property rights are granted over life forms (such as Harvard onco-mouse) or other organisms violating the sanctity of life as well as granting monopoly to those who did not and can not create life (except modifying it in laboratory), (b) risks are taken in releasing in environment of the genes which in their natural conditions did not have the possibility of diffusing among species and at scale possible now (say through transgenics tolerant to weedicides),(c) animals are treated with hormones or other reagents which increase their productivity but affect their well being or shorten their life cycle,

and (d) solutions are not developed to grow crops in problem soils such as alkaline or salt affected soils through biotechnological means. The ethics of exploiting natural resource beyond their sustainable limits (due to misguided public policies of making electrical power free or cheap for farmers and other urban users of water in many developing countries, water scarcity is becoming a reality with under ground water table going down every year), does not seem to arouse similar passions as a risk to say, monarch butterfly due to spread of Bt maize pollen on milkweed on which this butter fly lives.

Asymmetry of rights and responsibilities: Risks are involved not just when things are changed but also when they are left unchanged. It is this position justifying inertia which populist arguments have made their mainstay. Environment is degraded when poor people living in forest cut trees and sell fuel wood or herbs as raw material because value is not added to their resources and associated knowledge systems, or if value is added, benefits are not shared with them fairly and equitably. While exploring biodiversity or associated knowledge systems, ethics of extraction assumes asymmetrical rights and responsibilities (Gupta, 1994a, b, c, 1995, 1999, Pew Ethical Guidelines, 1994). We never acknowledge the creativity and innovations as well as traditional knowledge systems of local communities and individuals conserving resources in our writings (the whole discipline of ethnobiology has been a testimony to this), do not share benefits with them fairly, never share what we learned from them in their language (Honey Bee network set up in 1989 to document, disseminate grassroots creativity and green innovations is an exception, <http://www.sristi.org/honeybee.html>), and we complain when the same communities and individuals are forced to follow some times environmentally unfriendly actions. Studies have shown that the regions of high biodiversity in tropics are also inhabited by poorest people, have lowest educational levels (exceptions apart), have high emigration of males and households are headed or managed by women. Yet environmental ethical discourse has seldom reflected on these systematic relationships. Too much dominance of instrumental view of ethics is bound to leave such black holes of consciousness unattended.

According to Thoreau, "a man's relation to Nature must come very near to a personal one". Sagoff (1997) believes that stewardship is a form of fellowship drawing upon the tradition of Thoreau and John Muir. While the nature must be used, its value need not emerge from the economic purposes it serves. He adds, "we take our bearings from the natural world -- our sense of time from its days and seasons, our sense of place from the character of a landscape and the particular plants and animals native to it. *An intimacy with nature ends our isolation in the world.* We know where we belong, and we can find the way home". The human need for making sense of this world through natural prisms thus calls for ethical parameters requiring concern for nature. But should that be the major plank of environmental ethics.

c) Ecocentrism/biocentrism/deep ecological ethics:

The right of not just the animate but also the inanimate, not just the human but equally centrally the other species, and of not just the born but also the unborn get articulated in a combination of biocentric, eco-centric and deep ecological ethical perspectives. Ecocentric theorists include Goodpaster, Johnson, Rolston, Callicott, Leopold, Rodman etc., who essentially argue for moral rights of all beings and eco-systems. A lake has a personality if endowed with values, just as mountains have and so have species. Dr.K M Munshi (1952), a famous writer in his lecture entitled, "A Gospel of Dirty Hand" tried to link the soil with soul. He did not see any way we could understand the relationship between nature and human beings if we did not see the linkage between nutrient cycle, hydrological cycle and local institutions. He, of course, contrasted the ethic in which nature was held supreme, the local tribes overawed by nature, remained what some may call "primitive". Other tribes of social groups, which overpowered nature, vanished

into oblivion because they crossed the limits of nature. He argued for moderation. What deep ecologists argue however, is not just moderation but hands off policy. The “recognition of moral status of nonsentient living things can thus be depicted as the next step in the history of moral development”(Rawles,1998:276).

The view that flowers should not be plucked in a wild habitat open for human trails, but be left for others to enjoy (Rolston III, 1991:82) is a view in which fate of flowers rests on their innate goodness. It rests on their being good to see by human beings. However, if we were to replace the above dictum by, “Let the flowers live”, implies that the flowers are “goods of their kind, and in the absence of evidence to the contrary, are good kinds” (ibid:82). This view of ethical concerns does not require legitimacy from anthropomorphic perceptions directly. Human space for exercising their own perceptions and preferences in the way nature is allowed to exist or survive is replaced by a view in which, “a species exists; it ought to exist”(ibid, 91:83). The deep ecology view does not give primacy to human wants over the needs of other life forms. It considers destiny of various biotic communities deeply entwined. Leopold viewed a thing to be right when it helped in preserving integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community (1968) and it was wrong when it did the contrary.

Pedersen (1993) distinguishes two strands of modernity drawing from Giddens’ work (1990:17ff) which may have bearing on the evolution of ecocentric ethics. He refers to separation of space from place, and time from ecological space. Such a conception of ecological space does not require cultural association with a locality. Callicot (1994) hopes that such an international environmental ethic can evolve which can be compatible with local vernacular cultural traditions linked to space and time in a very different manner. The evolution of global time, and global space may also lead to emergence of global social group without a particular living space or habitat to qualify for specific environmental value. This has sometimes posed tremendously complex conflicts. Mercurieff (1990), Commissioner of the Sea Otter Commission, Alaska, raised a fundamental issue about the politics of defining resource boundaries and the legitimacy of the particular ways of local people in dealing with these. Distressed at the poverty of many of the First Nation peoples of Alaska, he decried the tendency of ‘Animal First’ activists to deny such peoples their autonomy in pursuing a sustainable coexistence in their ecological context. Mercurieff (in Gupta, 1991,1999) observed:

“They do not understand that in their desire to protect animals, they are destroying culture, economic and spiritual systems which have allowed humans and wild life to be sustained over thousand of years... Theirs (Animal First activists concept) is based upon a belief that animals and humans are separate and they project human values into animals. Ours is based on the knowledge from hundred of generations which allows us to understand that humans are part of all living things – and all living things are part of us. As such it is spiritually possible to touch the animal spirit. In order to understand them. Our relationship with animals is incorporated into our cultural systems, language and daily lifestyles. Theirs is based upon laws and human compassion...Because we are intricately tied to all living things, when our relationship with any part of such life is severed by force, our spiritual, economic, and cultural systems are destroyed, deep knowledge about wild life is destroyed, knowledge which western science will never replace...I leave you with this last thought – we have an obligation to teach the world what we know about proper relationship between humans and other living things” .

The deep ecological perspective has generated such a response from the very communities which co-existed with local diversity and nature for thousands of years. The

sacredness extends to earth, water and mountains. Biegert (1998) recalled striking narratives which contrast the perspectives of First Nation North Americans about waters with those of white settlers. He gave the example of the late Philip Deere of Oklahoma, medicine man of the Muskogee Nation, who termed rivers and streams as the veins of the world. Clogging them, one could say without doubt, would clog not just the life in them but the life of humans as well. The sacredness of water in all such cultures indicates that by polluting waters we are also polluting the spirits that sustain these waters. In Muslim thought, each creature has a *haqq that is a right*. Each creature is supposed to have a Unique *haqq* at any given moment though the nature may change from one moment to another. And yet that is the essence. Chittick (1998) summarizing these interpretations of the work of Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240) observes, "modern thinking in all its forms investigates objects, relationships and concepts while, at the same time, stripping them of their *haqq*s. This means that the issue of right activity is delegated to the human observer, the side of the subject and it is negated from the side of the object. The object itself is largely thought to be indifferent, unless it being a human being. Now a days, of course ecologists and others are striving mightily to give rights to nonhuman creatures as such. But 'hard science' can not take this seriously". Chittick recognizes the problems that modern mind faces in endowing the things, non human life forms with rights. He adds, "today's critical methodology can never acknowledge that people-much less animals, plants, and inanimate objects-have *haqq*s that belong to the actual stuff of the reality. It follows that such modern learning is incompatible with *tahqiq* (an approach to learning or inquiry; ed.), that is with giving things their *haqq*s".

Accountability towards perfect strangers and other non-persons: Human needs cannot always take priority over the needs of nature and other living beings. How do we determine our accountability towards the future generation those who are unknown to us? The future generation is made up of 'perfect strangers' - i.e., who are not known and are unknowable. We do not hear the voice of unborn. What should be the responsibility of the present generation to discern the needs, preferences of such sentient and non sentient beings with whom we are unable to communicate. There needs have to be responded using contemporary as well as traditional value system (Gupta,1991).

A story based on a song sung by lambada (semi-nomadic tribe originally from deserts of Rajasthan) tribal women in Shimoga district, India, speaks about a cultural system in which the rights of birds are being debated vis-s-vis the rights of human beings in a drought year (Honey Bee 6(3), 1995).

In a drought year, the crop has suffered very badly. A woman is coming back from the field after picking up whatever grains she could. On the way she meets a parrot. The parrot starts staring at her. She asks the parrot why he was looking at her so intently. The parrot replies that he was actually confused after looking at the woman's necklace. The necklace had a green agate stone. The parrot thinks it is a grain, not a stone. The woman asks whether he had had any food. The parrot replies, "Haven't you brought all the grain from the field, even the ones which had fallen on the ground?" The woman realizes that the parrot is hungry, but she also needed the grains very badly for her children. She asks the parrot to come home with her and share whatever she gives her children. But the parrot flies away leaving the woman dumbfounded.

Why did the Parrot fly away? How one tries to interpret the reasons, will depend upon as to how one conceptualises the right of different claimants/stakeholders over natural resources. Supposing if birds were considered as a natural legitimate stakeholder on natural resources then the rules and norms and the boundaries of natural resources would have to be developed and interpreted in an entirely different manner. Did parrot remember her young ones when he saw the lady preparing to feed her children. Did he think that he was a might bird. He could collect grains from anywhere,

whereas the lady could only walk a nearby distance. Or did he think that he had right over the grains so long as these were in the field. Once these were in the hands of women, she had rights over these. There could be several other reasons. The fact that the poet did not tell us why parrot flew away leaves this question to be reflected upon by every successive generation. The rights of birds in a drought year when human beings do not have enough for themselves is obviously not an issue that can be raised merely on utilitarian logic.

In the 9th century in South India, there was a famous Chola King by the name Parivallal. He was an extremely kind hearted person with a deep concern for all other living beings. He was also famous for his generosity. Once while going through a forest he stopped his chariot near a spring to drink water and relax for a while. On returning to his chariot, he saw a creeper with white flowers growing around the spoke of wheel of the chariot. While he had gone to the spring, a tendril of the vine had wound itself around the spoke of the chariot wheel.

If the chariot were now moved, the tendril would break. This, the King was reluctant to do as it would possibly hurt the vine. He left the chariot behind and walked back to the palace. The vine had a right to the support it sought and got. There are such tales, which serve as living light posts in the maze of moral conundrum. One might argue that this is taking the argument about right of non-persons too far. But then extreme positions provide a spectrum in which we ordinary mortals can choose our specific point of preference. The fact that a culture has such a precedence (real or imaginary is not important) points to the multiple planes at which it might evaluate moral choices. The same culture might also have precedences which might indeed have given more importance to human wants and needs over that of other life forms.

The cultures world over have evolved means to generate and monitor the responsibility towards other living beings. But this responsibility need not emanate only from human value systems. Goodpaster observes, "to be worthy of moral respect, a unified system need not be composed of cells and body tissue: it might be composed of humans and non-human animals, plants and bacteria." (Rawles, 1998:279). Johnson argues that "various beings other than individual organisms can meaningfully be said to have interests, and that these interests are morally significant". The beings in question include species and ecosystems. Brennan, critiques this position and suggests that the claim of Goodpaster "rests upon a naïve and scientifically outmoded view of ecosystems and species, neither of which have the characteristics that Johnson has attributed to them". Brennan disagrees with the claim that "ecosystems have interests, because he takes this claim to presuppose a view of ecosystems as goal-directed that the scientific community has largely rejected." (Rawles:1998:279).

d) Socio-psychological roots of ethical consciousness: The Internal Values

Hill (1978) brings in a personal psychological aspect while identifying roots of ecological ethics. He observes, "We are not going to be saved by nuclear power, not even by solar power: nor by any religious or political doctrine. The only thing that can save us is to become perfectly connected with our innermost feelings - this is our fundamental responsibility as human beings". He adds, "my psychological argument is that truly ethical behaviour originates wholly from the healthy, unhurt, undistressed parts of individuals; and unethical behaviour originates from the hurt part. If we want people to behave ethically, then we must provide environments that are supportive of the healthy part of individuals"(Hill, 1992:11).

Stone (1987) argues that monist (one best way to resolve ethical dilemma) arguments have to be tempered by moral pluralism. The latter implies that one looks at the ethical basis of not just the action choice but also the motivations of the actors, and the institutional context of both the actors

and the actions. There could be other planes as well. Can we not use an universalistic ethical principle in one part of our life space and use pluralistic values in other parts. We realized this when Gupta (1995) questioned the farmer participants in a doctoral study by a student Astad Pastakia. The question was about what ethical principles did they use when their crops got diseased or attacked by pest, when their animals got sick and when they themselves got sick. These farmers had been selected on the basis of their non chemical pest control innovations from the Honey Bee data base on grassroots innovations managed by SRISTI (Society for Research and initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions, Ahmedabad based NGO, <http://www.sristi.org>). Majority of those farmers who had solved the problem at the level of the pest felt that they try some domestic solutions first and if these did not work, they would not hesitate to go to allopathic doctor in case of their own sickness. Likewise, when animals got sick, they would try local traditional treatments and if these did not work, they would go to a veterinary doctor and not insist that animals be treated by a herbal healer only. But when pest or disease affected their crop, they had resolved not to use chemical pesticides no matter what. The segmentation of life space and pursuit of different moral principles in different spaces seems a way in which many people seem to resolve their ethical dilemma. The problem is that this may end up converging with a kind of utilitarian logic.

Kant's emphasis on human consciousness being at the center of philosophical discourse is sought to be replaced by many recent thinkers by *external context* of human life and its experience (Partridge (2000). We are not sure though. In fact Partridge seems to contradict himself when he advocates and rightly on our view for the need for what he calls, 'self transcending concern'. He defines this concern as, "By claiming that there is a basic human need for 'self transcendence', I am proposing that as a result of psycho developmental sources of the self and the fundamental dynamics of social experience, well functioning human beings identify with, and seek further, the well being, preservation, and endurance of communities, locations, causes, artifacts, institutions, ideals, etc., which are outside themselves and which they hope will flourish beyond their own life time.... Thus we can not regard our decisions and the values which we hold, to be restricted to and isolated within ourselves" (Partridge, 1981 in Partridge 2000). The alienation that may arise from lack of self-gratification may give place to a duty for environmental care through heightened sense of responsibility.

The institutional behaviour is the one where internal commands replace external demands. One does a thing not because s/he is being supervised but because that is the right thing to do. Environmental ethics is at crossroads. We are looking for new plimsoll indicators that will generate internal responsibility for caring for nature across different cultural contexts and worldviews. But what constitutes nature and whether responsibility for its care globally, regionally and locally will invoke equally strong internal commands is an open question. Legal and public policy instruments are evolving that seem to indicate increasing concern for environmental care. But call for such a concern in current geopolitical context from western countries immediately invites criticism from developing countries. They see this call from west as the sign of new emerging environmental protectionism. The argument that western societies accumulated wealth by destroying their environment, therefore developing societies also need to have the right to accumulate wealth by destroying their own environment is a precipitous argument. Moral discourse will have to take a center stage in each of these polarized polities. Dunlap, Gallup and Gallup(1993) have provided one of the most striking evidence against the notion that concern for environment stems from 'post materialist values'(muller-Rommel,1989). In a worldwide survey of citizen concern for The Health of Planet, high level of environmental concern was found in developing as well as developed countries. Such a concern is a necessary condition though not a sufficient one for taking effective action. Stern *et al* (1995) looked into the factors, which may influence these environmental concerns of the citizens. They reviewed four

kinds of factors that seem to explain the genesis of this concern such as, (a) personal background factors such as age, income, gender, education etc. Women are supposed to be more concerned towards environment than men; (b) perception of risks and benefits associated with objects. Those with egalitarian values and beliefs are supposed to be positively concerned about risks in technology and environment than say the ones favoring hierarchy and individualism; (c) the ones whose basic material and psychological needs have been met are supposed to have higher environmental concern; and (d) personal moral norms where one takes action to prevent environmental adverse effects since these might have adverse consequences on others. One of the important findings of the authors is that activation of personal stable values is possible through organized efforts which try to influence the values in the direction of conservation ethic or otherwise. A study done by Gupta *et al* (1997, SRISTI, 1998) to look at the profile of the green consumers had shown four types of consumers: 1) those who were active mobilisers, i.e. they practiced good and ethical conservation values and did not hesitate in persuading others to do the same; 2) these were populist mobilisers, that is they would not practice conservation themselves but expect and exhort others to do so; 3) these would be passive practitioners, they would practice strong conservation ethic but would not like to be known for it, they will not share with others about their behaviour; and 4) the ones who were indolent and indifferent, they would neither practice nor ask others to do so. The fact that there was not much difference among the proportion of each category indicated the possibility that social values could gravitate to either side depending on the nature of effect, available information and action of organized interest, would have on internal values.

Gandhi provided a thoughtful summary of environmental ethics when he said that the world had enough for every one's need but not enough for every one's greed. The concept of *aparigrah* (*not accumulating more than one needs*), *ahimsa* (*non violence*) and *frugality* developed by him provided practical guide to responsible living. These are no more universal lamp posts.

In the emerging modern consciousness in which a human being is responsible no more for his or her individual moral space but the whole world, Amato II (1982) argues that claims of guilt and gratitude will ultimately make us humble, and bring us in harmony with our collective destiny. The exploration of environmental ethics is thus a journey into an abyss of responsibility for self and society, for present and future generation, and for the human and the non-human sentient and non-sentient beings, things, places and also the time. We need to extract a slice of our time from the womb of ever forgiving nature, which is learning to forget forgiving. That is the real tragedy and also the challenge.

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