

## **Paul Taylors Biocentric Ethics: A Survey of Contemporary Environmental Conflicts**

**Sotonye Big-Alabo**

Department of Philosophy, University of Port Harcourt Rivers State, Nigeria.

**Email address:** sotonzopapaz@gmail.com

**Contact:** +2348064226401

### **Abstract**

This work is on Paul Taylors Biocentric Ethics: A Survey of Contemporary Environmental Conflicts. When we accept the concept of biocentrism there is bound to exist conflicts between interests and cultural values of humans and the well-being of nonhuman living beings. These conflicts as we shall see need fair resolution principles because they are equal competing claims. Thus, the concept of equality here deals with the fact already established. This work exposes that both humans and nonhuman living beings of the wild have inherent worth of their own, which deserve respect and consideration. In other words, they both have ‘right’ to pursue and attain their own ends without hindrance of any sort.

**Keywords:** Biocentrism, Environment, Conflicts, Principles and Egalitarianism.

### **1. Introduction**

Paul Taylor the American philosopher, is an advocate of creating quite a new ethics. In his famous book *Respect for Nature*, he proposes the following definition of environmental ethics: “Environmental ethics is concerned with the moral relations that hold between humans and the natural world. The ethical principles governing those relations determine our duties, obligations, and responsibilities with regard to the Earth’s natural environment and all animals and plants that inhabit it”<sup>1</sup>. The author differentiates two types of natural ecosystems: those that have never been exploited by humans (free of human intervention) and those influenced by human labour. He argues that human beings are obliged to work out an appropriate environmental ethics, which is independent from the ethics obligating within individual and social life of human beings. Paul Taylor points to the difference between a human-centered theory of environmental ethics and life-centered (biocentric) ethics, of which he himself is an advocate. Analyzing human centered and life-centered theories Taylor presents two concepts closely connected with them: of a moral agent and a moral subject. He writes: “A moral agent, for both types of ethics, is any being that possesses those capacities by virtue of which it can act morally or immorally, can have duties and responsibilities, and can be held accountable for what it does”<sup>1</sup>. Defining moral subjects he writes: “Moral subjects must be entities that can be harmed or benefited”<sup>1</sup>. Making his theory Taylor starts with the difference between material and formal conditions which require both in traditional human ethics and environmental biocentric ethics.

Biocentric egalitarianism (ethics) puts forth the view that all living things have equal worth as “teleological centers of life;” in other words, every living thing has its own biological interest and with that its own end—*telos*. This presupposes that all other capacities—such as sentience or rationality are not counted as holders of relevant value. Nonliving things, including water, rocks, and other abiotic things that comprise the habitats in which living things dwell, are

considered lacking in similar (intrinsic) value, and larger groups of animals, such as biotic communities and species, are considered subordinate in value<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, Taylor's egalitarianism was criticized when he claimed that it is less wrong to kill animals than plants for food and when humans' non-biological (extraneous) interests are allowed more significance than biological interests of animals and plants; these problems will be addressed later on in this work.

Environmental conflicts have appeared as important concerns stimulating local, regional, national and global security. Environmental catastrophes and issues all over the world are common and increasing fast. With respect to these fears, this work deliberates on the following aspects: historical development of environmental values, environmental conflicts, application of the priority principle, the ethics of bioculture and ethical harmony between humans and other living things.

The link concerning the environment and conflicts is diverse and complex. The roots of environmental conflicts differ through the world and their indicators vary considerably. Causes can range from control over important environmental resources such as fossil fuels to contestations over natural resources at the community and/or household level. Conflicts can showoff in different ways – from total wars and also genocide to differences at the local level. There appears to be pact that while conflict be determined by the actions (not necessarily violent) of actors, it relates to incompatibilities. In fact, Wallenstein argues that conflict is made up of three parts: incompatibility, action and actors – and therefore a 'complete definition' of conflict is 'a social situation in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strive to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources'<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Literature Review

Several authors Castro and Nielson; Yasmi et al. argue that conflict emerges when stakeholders have irreconcilable differences or incompatible interests, values, power, perceptions and goals.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, if unresolved or not managed, conflicts are likely to escalate and intensify. White et al. state: 'What distinguishes conflicts from mere disagreement is thus a behavioral expression of formerly latent attitudes where one party is perceived to take action at the expense of another party's interests'<sup>4</sup>. Some examples of expressions of conflicts are threats, beating, appropriation, insurgency, skirmishes, and interstate or intrastate wars<sup>5</sup>. Competition for finite environmental resources, divergent attitudes and beliefs as well as institutional factors trigger and exacerbate such environmental conflicts<sup>6</sup>. The issue of scarcity, whether perceived or actual, is a crucial component of understanding environmental conflicts. Broadly, scarcity conflicts characterize most environmental contestations and disputes addressed in this issue. The following are some types of environmental conflicts:

*Biodiversity conflicts*: conflicts between people about wildlife or other aspects of biodiversity<sup>4</sup>. This also includes conflicts relating to conservation of protected areas, green technologies as well as fair trade and patenting rights in relation to biodiversity and indigenous knowledge linked to natural resources. These conflicts can occur internationally and have serious regulatory and policy implications. Impacts on the natural resource base in terms of land clearing for development and agricultural production as well as the effects of genetically modified crops on biodiversity are important considerations as well. There is evidence to suggest that if conservation and environmental management policies are not formulated and implemented in a holistic way to balance the needs and interests of conservation and people, it can lead to conflict. For example, in this issue<sup>7</sup> finds that in Kenya environmental protection and management can create situations where 'people become the victims of animals' and then retaliate by killing

animals for bushmeat or to protect their crops or cattle from disease and predators. Linked to biodiversity conflicts are natural resource management (NRM) conflicts. Yasmi et al. highlight that conflicts, many of which include violence, in NRM are on an increase and are complex because of multiple actors and the wide range of issues and management strategies<sup>8</sup>. However, what is important to underscore is that conflicts over environmental resources can result in violent conflicts and this can transcend nation-state boundaries.

*Coastal zone conflicts:* Conflicts in coastal regions are attention-grabbing in that they could progress from a mixture of other kinds of conflicts. In this issue, Ahmed looks into such conflicts in specific and points out that coastal areas are distinctive in the dynamics they produce within environmental conflicts<sup>9</sup>. Obviously this has to do with high growth needs, high population density, environmental degradation and notably, poor and disorganized management to balance conservation and development. Here, the author points out two kinds of coastal zone conflicts – those that are related to ecosystem change and secondly, those related to coastal development.

*Conflicts disproportionately affecting women:* Women are regularly susceptible in the wider sense (physically, economically, socially and politically) and hence regularly carry an uneven impact of the effects of environmental conflicts and stress. Some authors in this issue marks out this point. Perry et al. affirms that despite the fact that the real costs of environmental conflicts on women are complicated and difficult to measure, women most times experience inordinate food and economic insecurity, and are also affected by insecure or illegal practices<sup>10</sup>. Omolo observed that women in pastoral communities in Kenya are made susceptible through cattle raids, which are often as a result of the droughts<sup>11</sup>.

*Conflicts about air quality and noxious pollutants:* This is a vital type of environmental conflict – noticeable in the literature and in this issue that describes matters relating to social justice and the right to live in a healthy environment<sup>12</sup>. Mix and Shriver stresses on local dweller views and concerns<sup>13</sup>. It is essential to have in mind that these studies also shows different views over environmental fears, which are essential in terms of handling these conflicts. Also, an essential theme is environmental racism and the connections amongst poverty and vulnerability. While most conflicts relate to demonstrations and legal disputes as local residents and environmental activists mobilize communities to declare their rights, there are also incidences of violent conflicts. Environmental conflicts associated with air quality issues, such as in the case of the South Durban Basin (SDB) in South Africa, often also receive considerable media attention. Other key types of conflicts include land and water conflicts.

### 3. Historical Development of Environmental Values

The development of environmental values spans from past centuries, and this is based on the adverse economic growth that has amounted to the prosperity of humanity in diverse forms. The impact of humans on nature or environment was witnessed in the world due to the increase in population, increase in the emission of carbon dioxide and sulfur dioxide, average life expectancy increase etc. To this effect, the examination by many Christians tend to look at the negative effects caused by the development of the material needs of man on the ecosystem as it tends to appeal to the anthropocentric environmental morality. It is essential that the morality behind the protection of nature has its basis primarily on the continuous use of nature as a basic wellspring for the development of humans. This presupposes nature to be invaluable unto itself,

thereby raising fundamental questions as to Christians being able to maintain such view in ambiance to global change in climate, the extinction of species and organisms that are genetically modified, putting in view the effects of human activity and technological applications pose to nature.

Inadvertently, the problems witnessed on the environment as a result of the developmental values exhibited by human value systems and not necessarily the usage of technological apparatus. It is interesting to note that “These values, which reside in the individual, cultural and institutional levels, guide the identification of environmental problems and human needs as well as the development of technologies to solve them”<sup>14</sup>.

It is obvious that pollution to the environment is recognized as a global issue bordering the world and humanity. According to Kronm, “As effective response to pollution is largely based on human appraisal of the problem”<sup>15</sup>. This admonition is supported by Sharp and Bromley when they posited that “Pollution control program evolves as a nationwide fixed cost-sharing effort relying upon voluntary participation”<sup>16</sup>. There is urgent need for responsibility education and transformation programs to properly educate individuals on the dangers of having a polluted environment as a result of their non-challant attitude towards nature.

#### **4. The Nature of these Conflicts**

The first concern that rises in handling the type of these conflicts is the biological and existential fact which is that together humans and nonhuman living beings of the natural world must constantly use and share the natural environment in the quest and realization of their unique and individual ends. Also in these circumstances of conflict, human beings, in chasing their interests and values, need make usage of natural environment and “...must also directly consume some nonhumans in order to survive”<sup>1</sup>.

The second concern or consideration in respect to the nature of these conflicts is that every legitimate values and interest which human ethical structures adopt are indirectly or directly conflicting to the principle of biocentric ethics or the ethics of respect for nature.

Therefore, the conditions of conflict could be well-thought-out also as the expression of humans’ right to realize and pursue their wellbeing and cultural values within their socio-cultural world. Using the directly above concern in mind, it will be appropriate to affirm with Taylor that the moral problems or conflicts concerning human ethical system and the ethics of respect for nature “arise when human rights and values conflict with the good of nonhumans”<sup>1</sup>.

Below are some perfect examples of conflicting claims:

- a. Cutting down woodland to build a Medical Centre;
- b. Destroying a fresh water ecosystem in establishing a resort by the share of a lake;
- c. Replacing a stretch of cactus desert with a suburban housing development; and
- d. filling and dredging a tidal wetland to construct a Marina yacht club<sup>1</sup>.

Looking at the above instances, we can conclude on human expression of their quest of interests and furthermore the realization of their cultural values as follows:

- i. Humans’ use of the natural environment and its nonhuman living beings as food, clothing and shelter;
- ii. Humans’ use of the natural environment and its nonhuman living beings as recreational ground, aesthetic and artistic ground; and

iii. Humans' extreme use of the natural environment and its living inhabitants in an unhealthy exploitative and manipulative ways, which has resulted in a complete transformation of these areas as we have it in heavy industrialized countries.

The above circumstances of conflict call for the payment of a price. Looking at the above situations one will ask questions and we cannot but admit that a price needs to be paid by both nonhuman and humans livings of the natural ecosystems.

## 5. The Application of the Priority Principles

Various calls and warnings have been made in respect to love and care for all living beings; to understand that both humans and nonhuman living beings of the wild have a part in occupying the earth and hence form a great community of life or biotic system. These warnings and calls have resulted to nothing and this is because they were not correctly complemented by principles to guide human behaviors and activities in their interaction or relation with the natural world and its wild living beings. Consequently, it is not sufficient for environmental theorist to debate for the good or value of nonhuman living organisms, but they ought to be able to forestall conflicts of duties which must surely arise and so, proffer solution through a system of rules and principles. In other word, it is not all about explanation of the moral value of nonhuman living beings and their natural occupants but also asserting applied means of determining and maintaining such moral course of action.

In respect to the above matter, Taylor made available principles for just resolution of conflicts among human interests and nonhuman interests. These principles must be important ones and must not just favour humans or nonhuman living being by transferring to any of them more value or worth. In fact it "must be consistent with the fundamental requirement of species-impartiality"<sup>1</sup>, these are part of the system of rules and standard of the ethics of respect for nature. The four rules are all negative ones since they do not tell moral agents the activities to involve in their interaction or relation with nonhuman living beings. Instead, all they can to do is to make moral agents understand what they are supposed to avoid in order to hold onto the moral attitude of respect for nature. However, the priority principles in contrast, give morally sufficient reasons for or against an action.

Hence for good understanding of the priority principles, it is appropriate to distinguish the two concepts: Basic interest and non-basic interest.

According to Paul Taylor, an interest is any kind of events or objects that assist to preserve and protect the good of a living being. This interest according to Taylor is inborn in a living being, even though the being in question lacks psychological capability or any sentient desire, aims and goal. There are several degrees of interest and as a result of this, a degree of more importance is given to one interest in contrast to another. For example, an interest Y of a being is seen as more essential than another interest Z of the same being, this happen only if it contributes more significantly to the realization of the being's good than Z<sup>1</sup>. Having the above differences in mind, we should comprehend that the realization of certain interests are basic and essential to the realization and preservation of a living being's well-being and end. Whereas the non fulfilment of some interests are not essential and non-basic to the preservation and realization of a being's well-being. Consequently, the most significant interests are those which are needed for a being to stay alive and this is called, basic interest.

In relation to humans, their basic interests is made up of "...those interests which when morally legitimate, they have a right to have fulfilled. These conditions include subsistence and

security, autonomy and liberty”<sup>1</sup>. In other words, human basic interest does not mean whatever we like, want or anything that makes us happy or contribute to our value system as some would consider.

These last interests can be categorized as non-basic ones. While for nonhuman living beings (animals and plants), what count as the fundamental of their basic interest rest on the being in question. Nevertheless, holding on to our explanation of basic interest, we can state in a broad sense that their basic interests are those features which unfulfilled, will result to serious deprivation or harm such that the awareness of their good is slowed down. Hence, nonhuman living beings need sunlight, water, mineral food and continual growth to achieve and realize their end.

Looking back at the priority principles, it is stated that they need to satisfy the five formal conditions on which the validity of any set of rules and standards are measured. Below are the five priority principles established and articulated by Taylor.

- a. The principle of Self-defense
- b. The principle of Proportionality
- c. The principle of Distributive Justice
- d. The principle of Minimum Wrong
- e. The principle of Restitutive Justice<sup>1</sup>.

It is important to state it here that these priority principles will never produce us with a straight answer to every single environmental conflict resolution; neither will they move us through in the hard cases, which are so difficult and complex that answers to such cases by reference only to these principles is impossible. These gaps from the principle do not mean that we should become illogical in our decisions and choices. Rather we should see each principle as representing “one cluster of morally relevant considerations one must take into account...in reaching decisions about what duties outweigh others”<sup>1</sup>. Lastly, we also note that these principles do not work as premises in a deductive argument that it is expressed in a normative statement of what we ought to do. Consequently, the realization of our reflection on the matter at hand lies on relevant and proper consideration and application of these principles, which will gain confidence in the fairness of our judgments<sup>1</sup>.

## **a) The Principle of Self-defence**

This principle “permits actions that are absolutely required for maintaining the very existence of moral agents and for enabling them to exercise the capacities of moral agency”<sup>1</sup>. Moral agents are permitted, according to this principle to defend themselves against unsafe and dangerous animals in an inevitable circumstances where there are no means of escape from such harmful animals or where the only option offered is killing the dangerous animal in self-defence. On the other hand, this principle does not allow the random killing of any harmful animals that does not pose any threat to moral agents. It does not also allow the intentional killing of harmful animals to promote the self-interest of moral agents. To understand completely the meaning of this principle, three concerns are further required.

The first concern to be looked at here is that unless there is a situation in which humans cannot differentiate dangerous animals from non-harmful ones, they are not allowed to destroy or harm a harmless nonhuman living beings. The second concern is that application of the principle by human must be constant with the principles of species-impartiality in a way that humans do not influence their way to protect and promote any species at the detriment of another one. Additional concerns of the insinuation of the principle of species-impartiality is that it is framed to also be species-neutral and species-blind. This entails that just as it is acceptable for moral

agents to protect themselves against dangerous nonhuman animals, even to the point of destroying, harming or killing them, so is it acceptable for nonhuman moral agents (if such exist) to kill any non-moral human agents who poses a threat to them. Lastly, the principle of species-impartiality is in consonant with the notion of equal inherent worth of both human and nonhuman living beings. Therefore, the point that moral agents protect themselves against harmful plants and animals that pose threat to them does not mean that humans have more inherent worth than them. And a human, allowing themselves to be killed by nonhuman living beings is not also well-suited with the ethics of respect for nature, since humans do not have less inherent worth than them. Lastly the third concern of this principle is that it allows self-defence only in circumstances which cannot be escaped or avoided. However, if we are open to the situation where we can avoid the attacker or escape such threat, we must not hesitate to leave.

Conclusively on this principle, we must make every rational effort to avoid such circumstances that will threaten our lives, understanding that every living being whether they are not dangerous or dangerous possesses inherent worth and also, the proper object of the attitude of respect for nature<sup>1</sup>.

## **b) The Principle of Proportionality**

The principle of proportionality and the other three remaining principles deal with cases of harmless nonhuman living beings. The principle of proportionality states that when the basic interest of nonhuman living beings clashes with the non-basic interest of humans, which are intrinsically incompatible with respect for nature, “greater weight is to be given to basic than to non-basic interests”<sup>1</sup>.

At this time the non-basic interest of humans are separated into intrinsically incompatible and intrinsically compatible with respect for nature. The former comprises of a harmful attitude of exploitation of nature, which merely sees nature and all its wild living beings as instruments for more end. Among the examples cited by Taylor to further explain situations intrinsically incompatible with respect for nature are:

Slaughtering elephants so the Ivory of their tusks can be used to carve items for the tourist trade. Killing rhinoceros so that their horns can be used as dagger handles. Hunting and killing rare wild mammals, such as Leopards and jaguars for the luxury fur trade<sup>1</sup>.

The latter kind of non-basic interest of human’s results in consequences which affect nature when they are contented. On the other hand such actions and practices are encouraged to be shunned if possible. The circumstances which this kind of conflicts present here are such that the fulfilment of these non-basic interest of humans are highly valued to outweigh the undesirable results which they have on nature. Examples of such no-basic interest of humans are:

Building an art museum or library where natural habitat must be destroyed, replacing a native forest with a timber plantation, damming a free flowing river for a hydroelectric power project<sup>1</sup>.

The above circumstances do not carry in them unhealthy attitude of exploitation as the first kind of situation that is intrinsically incompatible with respect for nature. Therefore as moral agents, we should not give in to the fulfilment of the first kind of non-basic interest of humans, even though such interests are morally permitted and highly approved by human society. The approval of such non-basic human interests only discloses the extent of anthropocentric attitude humans have undeniably acknowledged and accepted.

### c) The Principle of Minimum Wrong

This principle deals with situations where certain non-basic human interest that are intrinsically compatible with the attitude of respect for nature are permitted, even when such actions bear some kind of bad results on nature. These circumstances where the non-basic interest of humans are permitted to supersede the basic interest of nonhuman living beings of the wild are so significant that even rational persons with sincere attitude of respect for nature would as well give in to, are:

I. A situation where such interests lie at the heart of a civilized life and which “rational and informed people tend to adopt autonomously as part of their total world outlook”<sup>17</sup>. Minimum wrong principles allow least harm done, when there are no alternative ways of achieving the same purpose.

II. The second kind of interests are those sort that “stems from the central place they occupy in people’s rational conception of their own true good”<sup>17</sup>, which they consider most worth living. The interest in this circumstances are those that are extremely valued and considered by individuals as explaining the unified framework of their true good.

According to the principle of minimum wrong, these sorts of interests could also be pursued by those who have a sincere sense of respect for nature, provided they keep the least harm done to nature, when there are no other ways of pursuing such interests. Also, the practical import as regards the application of the principle of minimum wrong are seen in the following conflict situations.

**i. Habitat destruction:** This calls for the control of human population, change of consumption habit, regulation of mode of technological advancement and the recycling of already used area of the natural world<sup>1</sup>.

**ii. Environmental pollution:** it call for the adoption of certain anti-pollution controls for proper management of environmental pollution. For instance recycling waste products, or making them biologically harmless, refraining from dumping toxic chemical and radioactive substances on both land and seas, or better still stop producing them if they cannot be properly disposed, the use of antipollution devices on both cars and factory<sup>1</sup>.

**iii. Direct Killing** of animals and plants intentionally for the purpose of using them for scientific research calls for critical examination of such endeavor to see whether they are truly worth engaging, and if they are, to seek out if there are other alternative possibilities. In these conflict situations, our attention should focus on the fact that we must always seek and choose concerns that are morally relevant.

### d) The Principle of Distributive Justice

The principle of distributive justice deals with the conflict situations where the interests of both humans and nonhuman living beings are all basic ones, and this calls for fair consideration and sharing. It “...requires that when the interests of the parties are all basic ones and there exist a natural source of good that can be used for the benefit of any...each party must be allotted an equal share”<sup>1</sup>. The main concern of the principle of distributive justice is to

maintain and create a conceivable community of life where nonhuman living beings of the wild can carry out their numerous natural course of existence together with human beings.

It further deals with circumstances where it is possible for humans to make certain adjustments in their relation to the wild living beings, even in the conflict of their basic interests. Looking at the above stated situations, Paul Taylor gave four methods of realizing this principle.

**i.** ‘Permanent habitat allocation’ deals with humans, allocating perpetually some part of the earth to be for wild living beings. The rationale and justification of this practice is for the continuous existence and realization of wild communities of life.

**ii.** ‘Common conservation’ calls for fair sharing and wise usage of the earth resources for the mutual benefit of both humans and nonhuman living beings.

**iii.** ‘Environmental integration’ deals with careful planning, construction and developments on the part of humans which is consistent with the idea of preserving the ecological integrity of a place without any serious ecological disturbance and environmental degradation.

**iv.** ‘Rotation.’ This is a method of allowing both humans and nonhuman living beings to have their turn in the beneficial resources of the earth, for certain period of time. The purpose of this proposed practice is for just share of the resources for both parties, avoidance of environmental degradation, the renewal of renewable resources and preservation of non-renewable ones.

Considering the above stated approaches for just distribution of the available earth resource amongst humans and nonhuman living beings of the wild, we find that even what seems to be the fairest technique of distribution of these resources can never warranty perfect result of equal share. Consequently, we are morally indebted to make reparation and some form of reward through restitutive justice<sup>1</sup>.

#### **e) The Principle of Restitutive Justice**

The principle of restitutive justice requires that some form of reparation or compensation be made when the two principles of minimum wrong and distributive justice has not be properly followed. The two defenses of this principle lies on the following concerns: that whatever method of distribution we see as fairest can never assure perfect result of equal and, that restitutive justice in needed to restore the balance of justice when any moral subject has been wrong. On further concern we note two essential factors that can be of help to us when we make any amends or reward. The first here deals with the idea that the greater the harm done, the greater should be the amends or reward required, vice-visa. The second factor is our concern on soundness of the ecosystems, the health and their entire biotic communities of life, in such a way that we focus not on the good of individual organism but on the whole ecosystem<sup>1</sup>.

## **6. The Ethics of Bioculture**

The notion and impression of the ethics of bioculture was brought to lime light by Taylor to differentiate it from the nature and concern of biocentric theory of environmental ethics. Opposing to both biocentric ethics and human ethics established in this work, the ethics of bioculture is only concerned with human treatment of plants and animals in an artificially created environment subject to human control. In other words, the ethics of bioculture does not concern itself with nonhuman living beings in the wild or in the natural ecosystem. Therefore, the bioculture is a set of human social institution and practices through which the environment and the living organisms (both plants and animals in them) are manipulated and controlled to serve human ends. For example, “by means of hybridization, breeding programme, and other methods of genetic control, humans produce the kind of animals and plants that will best serve human

purposes”<sup>1</sup>. The first point to consider in the ethics of bioculture is that the life and death of these nonhuman living beings wholly depends on human verdict and choice. This is because they are the products of human manipulations which are essentially meant to serve human ends.

Another concern of the ethics of bioculture analyses that these human operations and creation was caused by two characteristics: First is the total human’s dominance over the environment and its inhabitants and, second is the treatment of nonhuman living beings as means to some human ends. In the latter way of thinking, only the instrumental value of these animals is considered. For instance, we hear of such saying as “a good watchdog, circus animal, laboratory rodent, variety of hybrid corn...”<sup>1</sup>. The primary guide and purpose of these human creation and manipulation is the quest to make life more liveable, enjoyable, more interesting more secure, in fact, more profitable for humans.

Further consideration shows the above view of human domination and use of these beings to further their own ends was earlier inspired mostly by the idea of the French Rationalist Philosopher, Rene Descartes who found humans rational power as equipping him with the knowledge and right to use other beings as some sort of tool for man’s end. It is obvious from the analysis thus reached, that the ethics of bioculture has become the paradigm of human civilization. This consequently calls for an ethical balance “between effectiveness in producing human benefits, on one hand, and proper restraints in the control and manipulation of living things, on the other hand”<sup>1</sup>. Hence every society should decide the shape of bioculture to adopt, but this does not remove ethical constraints as regard the use of nonhuman living beings even in this ethics of bioculture. There is a call on the part of moral agents to be responsible in their dealing and care for nonhuman living beings. This care towards them does not depend on personal likeness (in the case of pets) towards any particular organism. It is a responsibility that is carried out disinterestedly by any moral agent. In the final analysis, it is important to state that ethics of bioculture does not forbid the use of nonhuman living beings. But what is rejected here is the claim to human exercise of absolute and unconditional power, which should not be restricted by any moral constraints.

## **7. Ethical Harmony between Humans and Other Living Beings**

The ethical ideal of harmony between humans and nonhuman living beings do not exclude all the hard situations or cases which are beyond the application of the basic rule of conduct and the priority principles. This is because as we noted earlier, the “priority principles do not make up a logically complete system which can tell us what we ought to do in every situation of conflicts”<sup>1</sup> between humans and nonhuman living beings. Rather it is “a world order on our planet where human civilization is brought into harmony with nature”<sup>1</sup>.

The above development however, does not call for arbitrariness in our decisions and actions; rather it does call for a comprehensive vision of a world order (with respect for nature as a guide) where the human normative principles and the environmental normative principles which we have accepted “fits coherently into the total world order pictured as ideal”<sup>1</sup>. In other word, the coherence here is about the kind of ideal world order that will be established when we are sincerely committed to the moral attitude of both respect for persons and respect for nature, through the normative principles or rules that support both ethics.

Taylor defines human civilization “as equivalent to the total set cultures on Earth at any given time”<sup>1</sup>. Though human nature is the same everywhere and culture varies, we also observe that human civilization generally subscribe to the ethics of respect for person. It is

understandable that each individual, community and organization of various cultures does not only pursue their various interests without violating each other's moral rights, but are also bound to whatever laws in the legal and political systems that secure such moral right. Whatever culture of human civilization it may be, its values and interests and also its mode of realizing them is done within the moral attitude of respect for persons.

In the same manner, when we consider the ways in which various cultures regard the nonhuman living beings of the wild, the variation which is inherent in these cultures must be consistent with the moral attitude of respect for nature. In regard to this, cultural variations or differences should not be an excuse or a reason for unhealthy exploitation of nature, or a source of arbitrariness in our dealings with nonhuman living beings of the wild. Consequently, whatever world view on nature a culture adopts, whether that of oneness with nature in a mystical way or a non-mystical view of religious transcendentalism, animism or the concept of earth's stewardship etc. "the belief-system in question must allow the attitude of respect for nature to be adopted and put into practice"<sup>1</sup>. Although a particular culture's way of conceiving nonhuman livings of the wild may not agree with some, or all the elements of the biocentric outlook on nature as presented here; as such cultural belief-system must not be incompatible with the moral attitude of respect for nature or lend support to an exploitative attitude towards nature.

While the biocentric outlook on nature is "a rational and scientifically enlightened way of conceiving of the place of humans in the natural world"<sup>1</sup>, it should not be seen as the only view acceptable by any culture when an ethical ideal of harmony is realized. Other belief-systems compatible with respect for nature can also be adopted in addition to the biocentric outlook on nature.

The concept of harmony in this development is "preserving of a balance between human values and the well-being of animals and plants in natural ecosystems"<sup>1</sup>, such that there is a mutual co-existence and flourishing of both human interests, cultural values and the good of nonhuman living beings.

It is pertinent to note that as moral agents, human are to control and direct their relation with all living beings of nature by complying with the four basic rules of biocentric ethics, which are meant to support the ethical ideal of harmony between humans and other living beings. It is a fact that humans cannot help but cause some disruption of the natural ecosystem in the pursuit of their interests and values; they must constantly place some constraints on their actions and decisions so as to cause the least minimum wrong or the least possible interference. For this ethical balance and harmony to be a realization, the realm of nature must not to be considered as something to be consumed, exploited or controlled only for humans' ends, but something to be shared with other creatures. Unlike the ethics of bioculture discussed previously, human dominance and manipulative tendencies seen in that area is not allowed in this biocentric harmonious world.

The analysis seen so far reveals that the ethical ideal of harmony between humans and nonhuman living beings of the natural ecosystem is one, which both ethics of respect for person and respect for nature can be properly integrated and rationally considered in such a way that both human civilization and the natural ecosystem, together with their wild communities of life exist and flourished side by side.

## **8. Conclusion**

The examination of the causes and effects of environmental conflicts as regards man's responsibility to nature shows that directly or indirectly, man's actions and activities invites environmental conflicts. Just as it is obvious how disastrous and destructive environmental degradation can be to the well-being of human existence. In this regard, it will not be apt in following the view of Dalai Lama who said, 'the earth, our mother is telling us to behave. All round, signs of nature's Limitations abound...By protecting the natural environment...We show respect for Earth's living things'<sup>18</sup>. Consequently, the importance of environmental ethics cannot be relegated judging from its relevance and importance in re-sharpening the attitude of man towards the environment with the view of averting environmental conflicts. Thus, the sense of ethical consciousness is needful even as there is a split in ethical principles when it comes to the analysis of environmental issues.

Environmental conflicts take on diverse forms and have several and unpredictable effects in several perspectives. Especially, important points of conflict are in relation to climate change, conservation, water quality and availability, air quality and management aspects. Also, an alarming drift is the migration levels associated with environmental and other conflicts that often result in existing or new conflicts emerging in receiving areas.

Taylor's biocentric ethics has so much laudable appeal, which can make available a paradigm for the present day environmental call and additional articulation of environmental course. Notwithstanding the trials and encounters inherent in life-centered theory of environmental ethics, the study or investigation see the possibility of approving Taylor's biocentric ethics as a way of resolving the current day environmental issues and also articulating new environmental concern and consideration.

## **References**

- <sup>1</sup> Paul, Taylor. (1986) *Respect for Nature: A theory of Environmental Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 256-310.
- <sup>2</sup> Wallensteen, P. (2007) *Understanding conflict resolution*. London, Sage.
- <sup>3</sup> Castro, A.P. and E. Nielson (2003). *Natural resource conflict management case studies: An analysis of power, participation and protected areas*. Rome, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
- <sup>4</sup> White, R.M., A. Fischer, K. Marshall, J.M.J. Travis, T.J. Webb, S. di Falco, S.M. Redpath, and E. van der Wal (2009). Developing an integrated conceptual framework to understand biodiversity conflicts. *Land Use Policy*, 26, pp. 242–253.
- <sup>5</sup> Reuveny, R. (2007). Climate change-induced migration and violent conflict. *Political Geography*, 26, pp. 656–673.

- <sup>6</sup> Hellström, E. (2001). Conflict cultures – qualitative comparative analysis of environmental conflicts in forestry. *Silva Fennica Monographs 2*. Helsinki, The Finnish Society of Forest Science and The Finnish Research Institute.
- <sup>7</sup> Okech, R. (2010). Wildlife-community conflicts in conservation areas in Kenya. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 10 (2), pp. 65–80.
- <sup>8</sup> Yasmi, Y., H. Schanz and A. Salim (2006). Manifestation of conflict escalation in natural resource management. *Environmental Science and Policy*, 9, pp. 538–546.
- <sup>9</sup> Ahmed, F. (2010). Approaches to and tools for managing environmental conflicts in coastal zones in Africa: Challenges and prospects in relation to Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM). *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 10 (2), pp. 31–47.
- <sup>10</sup> Perry, E., C. Potgieter and U. Bob (2010). Environmental conflicts and women’s vulnerability in Africa. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 10 (2), pp. 121–136
- <sup>11</sup> Omolo, N.A. (2010). Gender and climate change induced conflict in pastoral communities: case study of Turkana in north-western Kenya. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 10 (2), pp. 81–102.
- <sup>12</sup> Jaggernath, J. (2010). Environmental conflicts in the South Durban Basin: Integrating residents’ perceptions and concerns resulting from air pollution. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 10 (2), pp. 137–152.
- <sup>13</sup> Mix, T.L. and T.E. Shriver (2007). Neighbours, nuisances and noxious releases: Community conflict and environmental hazards in the atomic city. *The Social Science Journal*, 44, pp. 630–644.
- <sup>14</sup> Bazerman, M., & Hoffman, A. (1999). Sources of environmentally destructive behavior: Individual, organizational and institutional perspectives. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 21, 39-79.
- <sup>15</sup> Kronm, D.E. (1973). *Response to Air Pollution Ljublygana, Yugoslavia*, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 63(2), 208-217.
- <sup>16</sup> Sharp, B.M.H. & Bromley, D.W. (1979). *Agricultural pollution: The Economics of Coordination*, *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*: 61(4). 591-600
- <sup>17</sup> Paul Taylor. (1994). “Priority Principles” in *The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book*, ed. Donald Van Deveer and Christine Pierce. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 207.
- <sup>18</sup> Dalai, L. (1990). *Foreword to Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, Retrieved from <http://www.dharmanet.org/./wheel7c.htm>.