An Alliance Beyond the Human Realm for Ecological Justice

By/Par Shashi Motilal
Department of Philosophy, University of Delhi

Abstract

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1. Introduction

The paper begins with an assumption that human development is desirable in a very innocuous sense.[1] Further, the paper also assumes that only that development is desirable which is fair, making it what Peter Penz (et. al) (2011) have termed as 'worthwhile development' in the light of the seven parameters mentioned by them. If we sum up the values that Penz (et. al) list as parameters of 'worthwhile development' then it would not be an exaggeration to say that a society that aims for 'worthwhile

[1]Though what would count as 'development' for humans, its scope and extent is undoubtedly a contestable subject especially in the face of an onslaught from the anti-development lobby.

development' in their sense, would also end up being a more environmentally 'just' society. But what do we understand by 'environmental justice in the first place? Is it all about conserving the environment even at the cost of harm to human welfare - the agenda of the 'environmental fascists and misanthropic biocentrist'?[2] Shrader-Frechette terms this 'environmentalism' which is different from environmental justice which she understands in the context of distributive and participative justice (or injustice). In her words, "Environmental justice requires both a more equitable distribution of environmental goods and bads and greater public participation in evaluating and apportioning these goods and bads." (2002:6).

Environmental justice understood in this sense is an anthropocentric understanding of justice that concerns itself predominantly with injustices caused by discriminatory practices of distribution and participation based on race, class, ethnicity, gender, or age. Important as this aspect of social justice is, it does not address the issues of the injustices and harm that we, the human community, cause or can cause to the environment (including animals and future generations) in our aspiration for development. In order to focus on this aspect of justice we need to go beyond Shrader-Frechette's understanding of environmental justice and think of ecological justice which is based on the idea that each element of the ecosystem is regarded as equally important for the sustenance and well-being of the entire ecosystem. Ecological justice is "necessary for integral human development – the economic, political, social and spiritual well-being of every person...Ecological justice celebrates the interconnection and interdependence of all beings, and recognizes our human responsibility to coexist in harmony for the well-being of the Earth community. Ecological justice promotes

[2] Shrader-Frechette (2002) refers to the views of environmentalists like Dave Foreman, J. B. Calicott, Garrett Hardin and Paul Taylor whom she calls 'environmental fascists and misanthropic biocentrist'.

human dignity, the self-determination of all persons, and the development of sustainable economies with justice for all within a finite world."[3].

Ecological justice is achievable if there is a clear understanding of relations at two distinct levels - one the relation among humans and another between the entire human community and other elements of the ecosystem. These relations are the basis of the 'alliances' that we form to address issues of human development and how they impact humans (both of the present and future generation) as well as the environment in general. However, when one talks of 'alliances' the more common form of alliance that comes to mind is that between international human agencies and organizations belonging to sovereign states all of which get together to address one or more global issues. Important as they are, the alliances amongst human communities must also extend beyond the human realm to the non-human realm; between humans and the non-human animal world as well as the natural environment in general, specially when we address issues like human - animal conflict, extinction of rare species of flora and fauna and animals, as well as human and environmental calamities caused by climate change. The paper argues for a non-anthropocentric alliance between the human and the non-human realm going beyond the alliance among human communities to achieve the same purpose of ecological well-being and ecological justice. It also attempts to show that the second kind of alliance (between human and the non-human realm) is the basis of the first - that between international organisations.[4]

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[3] devpeace_backgrounder_2011-2016_ecological_justice.pdf https://www.devp.org/sites/www.devp.org/files/documents/materials/devpeace_backgrounder_2011-2016_ecological_justice.pdf

[4] In this paper, I am not looking at the political alliances amongst sovereign states and international organizations to save the earth from climate change disasters and environmental degradation, for example; these may be important but what is more fundamental is the understanding, the eco-dialogue that human communities can have to understand the alliance between the human and the non-human realm.

In considering the alliance beyond the human realm, interesting philosophical issues arise. For example, in the first kind of alliance, i.e., among humans, every allying member is supposedly an equal partner and purportedly gains from the alliance, whereas in the second kind, the alliance beyond the human realm, the gain is one-sided. It is true that when the allying partners are more 'equal' we can expect more justice to all stakeholders; when they are not, injustices may result. So this raises the question -

1. 'Is there a sense in which both humans and the non-human world can be considered to be 'equal partners in an alliance'? - a presumption that would be implied by any ecocentric conception of justice.
2. But again, must an alliance always be amongst equals in order for it to be fair thereby promoting justice?

These two questions will be taken up in the concluding part of the paper based on the deliberations through the paper. For this purpose, I draw upon the views of both western and non-western philosophers, ancient and modern, to put forth the idea of an alliance that goes beyond the human realm. The aim is to understand the nature of the alliance beyond the human realm that will protect the interests of both humans and the environment and help to achieve ecological well being and ecological justice

1. ANIMAL 'RIGHTS' AND 'NEEDS': AN ANTHROPOCENTRIC APPROACH TO JUSTICE

In the traditional western discourse on the relation between humans and non-human nature, starting from Aristotle to Kant, and the rationalists in general, the overriding sentiment was that all human beings are equal in their 'humanity' by virtue of their rational nature. Further, being human was the quality that

accounted for the moral status of humans distinguishing them from amoral non-human animals. Being human was also the basis for 'human rights' which served as effective means of bringing about social justice. On the other hand, non-human animals and nature in general was treated merely as an instrument of human use and need, bereft of any moral status and of rights. This attitude resulted in growing injustices towards animals and degradation of nature at large. Philosophers like Peter Singer (1999) and Tom Regan (1999) are, perhaps, the first philosophers in recent times to have argued for the rights of animals thereby attributing equal status to both human and non-human animals in a very basic sense. The difference amongst most philosophers who are willing to ascribe some rights to animals is regarding the question - where should one draw the moral boundary and on what grounds? Whereas Regan champions animal rights based on a rights theory, Singer's approach for the moral considerability of animals is utilitarian and based on the principle of equal consideration of interests. For Singer, 'sentience' (experience) is the limit beyond which rights cannot be conceptually granted to elements of nature and he is hesitant to extend rights to vegetative life, because in his opinion there is not enough evidence to suggest that trees or ecosystems possess consciousness.

Though one may grant that extending the concept of rights to animals has brought about a sea change in our treatment of animals, the concept of 'rights' and the co-relative notion of duties (if there are any that humans owe to animals) are philosophically loaded concepts that do not offer a simple resolution of the problem. Criticising the rights approach, Ted Benton (1993) remarks,

> "... the case for attributing rights to non-human animals faces severe intellectual obstacles, their 'neediness' as natural beings is a feature shared with human animals.

> Moreover, a needs-based view of justice has the further advantage of extending the scope of cross-species moral concern beyond the narrow circle of species whose individuals satisfy [Tom] Regan's subject-of-life criterion. Need understood in terms of conditions necessary for living-well or flourishing is a concept applicable not only to all animal species, but to plant-life as well" (Benton 1993: 212).

According to Benton, human and non-human animals have the same needs which makes them equal in a very basic sense. Emphasizing another aspect of naturalism Benton says,"One aspect of human embodiment - our requirement for food- engages us in social relations and practices which inescapably include animals: as partners in human labour, as objects of labour, and of consumption, as well as competitors for habitats and common sources of food" (1993: 18). He further adds that "[I]f animal husbandry is tolerable at all, these considerations tell in favour of husbandry regimes which preserve opportunities for animals to establish and maintain the broad patterns of social life which are peculiar to their species. Where physical and psychological development requires more-or-less prolonged relationships between juvenile animals and adults, conditions for these relationships need to be provided" (1993:172). This approach to animals emphasizes the fact that human lifestyles need to change to the extent where any 'over indulgence' on the part of humans would cause harm to the wellbeing of animals on whom we are dependent in numerous ways. Although such an attitude towards animals would help in bringing about desirable results, it is still a very anthropocentric approach. The well-being of animals becomes important but only insofar as humans are dependent on animals not so much for their own sake.

Andrew Dobson (1998) talks of how one may consider humans and animals to be equal. He distinguishes between 'dispensers of

justice' and 'recipients of justice' in the context of a theory of distributive justice and argues that animals (as well as future generations of people) may not be dispensers of justice but they can be said to be recipients of justice (1998: 65). If it is in the interest of an animal to strive for its well-being (even if limited to basic needs and the instinctive behaviour of survival) it is still a recipient of justice. It follows that if certain human actions can cause harm to this striving to live "well" then these actions would count as being unjust to the animal. There have been many instances where aspirations for human development have harmed the wellbeing of animals, for example, the case where the Atomic Energy Commission of USA had conducted two atomic bomb tests in Canada in 1953 which resulted in the death of hundreds of sheep that were the victims of the nuclear fallout. (Shrader-Frechette , 2002: 189). This is clearly a case of injustice caused to animals on account of humans. As a being that can be a recipient of justice, it would be wrong/ unjust on the part of humans to inflict harm to it. In this innocuous sense of 'recipients of justice' we can avoid the controversies about rights claims, duties, obligation, etc. and simply say that both humans and animals need to be treated equally justly since both have an interest in their own well-being - both are recipients of justice, though humans are also dispensers of justice.

The notion of justice that comes across for the non-human world when we adopt the rights, or needs approach to understand the relation between the human and non-human world is anthropocentric as is evident from the fact that the animal rights activists draw boundaries of moral considerability leaving out non-sentient elements of nature and the needs approach also rests on the utility value of animals for fulfilling human needs of food, labour etc. Dobson's 'recipients of justice' status to animals as well as humans, fails to specify how the interests of humans (both of the present and future generation) stack up against the

interests of animals when these are in conflict. Though Dobson does give an elaborate account of the priorities, the basis of those priorities is not clear (Dobson 1998 : 33-61). It is the care ethics approach which goes beyond anthropocentrism and appeals to the notion of ecological justice to understand better the relation between the two realms. This is also to be found in many non-western cultures both ancient and modern.

3. DIMENSIONS OF CARE : MOVING TOWARDS AN ECOCENTRIC APPROACH TO JUSTICE

Val Plumwood (1999), a staunch believer of ecocentrism and a relentless critic of anthropocentrism talks of alliances between human and nature. Criticising ethicists (including Singer), who have drawn moral boundaries that distinguish humans as rights holders from the 'others' that cannot be ascribed rights, Plumwood says that drawing a moral boundary creates power relations which treat those beyond the moral boundary only instrumentally. She argues that rather than extending the boundary to include some animals we should stop thinking in terms of boundaries since it creates polarities in an 'all-or-nothing' way. Arguing for a 'care ethic' approach, Plumwood says that care "can be applied to humans and also to non-human animals and nature more generally" and further that "ethically relevant qualities such as mind, communication, consciousness and sensitivity to others are organized in multiple and diverse ways across life forms that do not correspond to the all-or-nothing scenarios assumed by moral dualism" (1999: 191). In her opinion, the "rationalistic economic calculus which divorces 'rational' and 'efficient' political and economic life from care, compassion, social and ecological responsibility is the ultimate modern expression of the West's ancient rationalist opposition between reason and emotion, male and female, culture and nature, in which it has now ensnared the entire globe and all its species" (1999:206).

The care ethic approach to the human and non-human world has always been the hallmark of most non-western ancient philosophies like Buddhism, Confucianism and Hinduism to mention a few. The idea of '*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*'(the idea of the entire ecosystem as a 'family' where each member is to be treated with mutual respect, care and recognition) pervades the entire ancient Indian philosophical tradition, barring the materialist Carvaka philosophy. The same idea can be drawn from the macro and microcosm view about the world expressed in the phrase - *yathā piṇḍe, tathā brahmāṇḍe* (the macrocosm is a organic whole like the microcosm) - a pervasive thought common to Hindu philosophy. Interestingly one could argue for the same cordial relation from the point of view of Buddhist metaphysics and ethics also. If the theory of 'kamma'(action) and rebirth as propounded by Buddhism is to be believed, and if one's actions in the present life determine what 'species status' one would have in subsequent births in order to bear out the fruits of past actions, it is in the self-interest of a person to do good deeds, including treating nature (animals) with compassion (karuna). Such a 'holistic' approach to the relation between humans and the cosmic world, seeped in metaphysical views transcending species and boundaries of the present generation of humans and animals expresses a ecocentric conception of both well-being and justice.

The writings of Vandana Shiva have also emphasized the importance of conceiving the human and non-human world in the light of ethical teachings from ancient Indian philosophy. In her book *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis* (2008), Shiva has emphasized the "ecological path of living with justice and sustainability". Citing ancient Indian philosophical sources, she maintains that "right living" consists in following "dharma" which can be construed as the bridge between resources (artha) and human needs (kama) and which secures the balance between the two. Dharma is also regarded as the

all-pervading principle of social and moral order in Indian philosophy. In Shiva's view, the global economy has created an "ecological imbalance" due to a conflict between "economic laws" on the one hand and "ecological laws" and "social laws" on the other. This imbalance has also led to a non-sustainable paradigm of equity where everyone has an equal right to pollute and deplete earth's resources whereas what we need is a sustainable paradigm of equity which recognizes the equal responsibility not to do that. Shiva discusses the concept of 'Earth Democracy' and states, "Earth Democracy begins and ends with Gaia's laws - the law of renewability, the law of conservation, the law of entropy, the law of diversity. In Earth Democracy, all beings and all peoples are equal, and all beings and all communities have rights to the resources of the earth for their sustenance."[5] This is yet another sense in which one can conceive of the equality of human and non-human elements of nature thereby facilitating a more just and fair ecological order.

However, even if humans and the non-human world are not equals, one can envisage a relation between them based on the sentiments of care and obligations ensuing from the power equation between them. Amartya Sen (2010) drawing from the teachings of Gautam Buddha in the *Sutta-Nipata*[6] discusses the asymmetrical relation between humans and nature and emphasizes the obligations of power or privilege that ensue from it. Where one party is more 'powerful' there is more responsibility on that party to fulfill the obligations it owes by virtue of the power/privileges it enjoys. Buddha argues that "since we are enormously more powerful than other species, we have some

[5] Quote is from an Excerpt from Shiva (2008) in *Alternatives Journal,* 35:3, 2009. p.22

[6]Reference found in Amartya Sen (2010) footnote 6 in Chapter 9: Plurality of Impartial Reasons. Footnote 6: The classic English translation of *Sutta Nipata* can be found in F.Max Muller (ed.), *The Sacred Books of the East*, vol.X, Part II, *The Sutta-Nipata*: *A Collection of Discourses*, translated by V. Fausboll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881). A later translation is *The Sutta-Nipata*, translated by H. Saddhatissa (London: Curzon Press, 1985)

responsibility towards other species that connects exactly with this asymmetry of power". (as quoted in Sen 2010: 205) The argument can be stated as follows: "if some action that can be freely undertaken is open to a person (thereby making it feasible), and if the person assesses that undertaking of that action will create a more just situation in the world (thereby making it justice-enhancing), then that is argument enough for the person to consider seriously what he or she should do in view of these recognitions"(Sen 2010: 206). The argument reinforces Dobson's view that as the exclusive dispensers of justice, human beings have obligations towards non-human nature to treat it with justice too. An argument along similar lines can also be offered towards an equitable solution to the issue of climate justice with regard to allocation of future carbon credits to developed and developing nations. If developed countries are in a position of taking actions (making lifestyle changes) because of their more powerful/privileged position then a policy decision (settling for fewer carbon credits) on their part would enable a more just situation globally. They would be fulfilling greater responsibility because of their greater ability to respond to that situation. The concept of human moral obligation (the obligations that humans have towards themselves as well as other non-human elements of nature) is a powerful concept that can be exploited to establish an amicable relation among humans and between human and non-human elements of nature. (Motilal 2015: 1-24)

In recent times, there has been a significant revival of some indigenous approaches to the human-nature relationship in Latin America that have impacted the public policy and developmental agenda of countries like Ecuador and Bolivia, among others. Two bionomic concepts prevail in this new approach - *Pachmama* (a holistic notion of the world) and *sumak kawsay* (equivalent to that of wellbeing, or even the Ideal/ Good Life).

The Pachmama[7]

According to Ronel Alberti da Rosa (2015), the new Latin American national constitutions made a paradigm shift from the rights of the homo econimicus of the period of Industrial Revolution to a new paradigm that "tries to mediate the coexistence of three players that interact and establish a sort of moral pyramid: rational animals, irrational animals and the *Pachmama*." (2015: 77) He further says, " The Pachmama, as a kind of indigenous pantheist being, includes humans, their culture and science and all elements of the natural world, i.e., the non-rational world. The Pachmama has the role of regulating the communal life of cultural as well as non-cultural elements." (ibid.)

Sumak Kawsay[8]

The concept of Sumak Kawsay or Good Life has been widely discussed as an alternative to capitalist development and the possible principle of a new way of understanding the economy. It heralded a "new paradigm of development for Latin America" (Ramírez 2010: 5 as mentioned in Altmann 2014: 82) or a "biocentric turn" (Hernández 2009: 62 as mentioned in Altmann 2014: 82). Good Life was understood as "Living mostly in harmony and equilibration with one self, with the community and with the cosmos" (GTZ 2002: 24 as mentioned in Altmann 2014: 86) - a thought that resonates well with the idea of 'vasudhaiva kutumbakam'. "Good life means a way of living that tries to adapt to its environment. It refers to a reconstruction of indigenous principles, adopting them to actual and future realities but always based on the local community and its autonomy" (Viteri 2002: 5 as mentioned in Altmann 2014: 87). According to Altmann, "the Good Life as a central concept amongst others makes ecological

[7] The word comes from the extinct kolla language spoken in the Inca Empire.

[8] In Ronel Alberti da Rosa's view, the eudaemonic analogue to the concept of the Good Life can be found in the form of sumak kawsay in the Quechua language, and other forms among several indigenous cultures of Latin America.

aspects of the economy an important matter and provides a conceptual weapon to fight not only exploitation and oppression, but also a way of life that does not allow a harmony inside society and between society and nature" (2014: 91).

4. LIVING IN HARMONY WITH & LIVING IN HARMONY FOR

In understanding the relation that underlies the nature of the alliance between human and the nonhuman world one can draw useful insights from the work of Stuart Gray (2017), who has looked at this relation from the lens of cross-cultural interconnectedness. He is of the view that we need to "identify traditions and vocabularies that can provide broader historical and cultural perspective and thus leverage, for critical dialogue on issues of shared concern across national boundaries" (2017: 223). This is important since 'dialogue' is the basic foundation of an 'alliance' among humans and cross-cultural ecological dialogue can surely form the starting point on which sovereign states can enter into alliances to save the planet.

In Gray's view, the traditional understanding of the relation between human and nonhuman nature is that of ruling over - where humans rule over nature. The human-centric understanding of ruling is ruling over nonhuman nature and ruling with human elements, neglecting what he calls the "connectedness of rule that fundamentally links human and nonhuman interests". Explaining this connectedness he talks of a polycentric polytemporal conception of the self where one's "identity is intertwined with the geographic location in which one lives, the region's climate, loved ones, workplace and co-workers, pets, garden, electronic devices, and so on". He talks of the "co-constitutive nature of polycentric identity and the multi-dimensionality of the world in which we are porosly embedded".[9]

[9] Raimundo Pannikar expresses the same sentiment when he says,"The individual is just an abstraction, i.e., a selection of a few aspects of the person for practical purposes. My *person,* on the

Gray distinguishes four aspects of ruling which are:

1. Ruling over (the traditional relation between human and nature where the latter is only an instrument of use)
2. Ruling with (alliances amongst humans based on democratic principles)
3. Ruling for (where the ruler rules for all not just for human beings a form of p anocracy)
4. Ruling in a broader network of human and non-human nature.

The relation of 'ruling' in this expanded sense (including ruling-with, ruling-for and ruling-in the interest of nonhuman nature) is opposed to the merely 'instrumental' use made by the ruling-over paradigm. Nevertheless, it still remains an anthropocentric approach since it relies on the idea of rule and rulers and only humans can be rulers. Perhaps a better way to understand the relation among humans, and that between humans and nature (and thereby the alliances based on these relations), is to define them in terms of the idea of 'living in harmony' - 'living in harmony with' and 'living for the harmony of'. 'Living in harmony' is the essential idea in the various non-anthropocentric approaches to justice that were outlined in the paper and it is at the core of ecological justice. Thus, we have to do away with the concept of 'ruling over' and replace it with the concept of 'living in harmony with other humans', and 'living for the harmony of the ecosystem'. The first will ensure harmony amongst human communities in achieving social justice in all its forms (including environmental justice as understood by Shrader -Frechette) and the second will protect the entire ecosystem of

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other hand, is also in "my" parents, children, friends, foes, ancestors and successors. "My" person is also in "my" ideas and feelings and in "my" belongings." (1982: 90)

which humans are a part. Both these aspects of justice are captured in the idea of 'ecological justice' as defined earlier.

Aspiring for ecological justice is not an attitude of anti-development. It seeks to understand human development as integral and sustainable human development where sustainable is understood as sustainable for the harmonious existence of the entire ecosystem and not merely the existence of the human race. Human development must be evaluated by this parameter and not merely by an anthropocentric notion of justice.

5. Conclusion

It appears that it is the relationship between humans and nature that really defines the nature of the alliance between the two. But, in such an alliance, there is no room for ruling over nature. It is precisely for this reason that we may legitimately call this an 'alliance' where the allying partners are 'equal' in all the senses that were culled from the western and non-western approaches to the relation between humans and non-human elements of nature. It is not a contract to be fulfilled by terms and conditions to which all parties agree. It is an understanding that humans have about the interconnectedness and continuum between humans and other elements of nature. It is a sense of 'our being with nature' which is pervasive in nature. And this sense is not necessarily a conscious awareness of our need for nature and to live with nature, rather it is our sense of wanting to live in harmony with nature. It is our response-ability (our ability to respond) that connects with nature for our own sake as well as for its sake.

But, again to press the point about 'alliances' a bit more, one can argue that even if the allying partners are not equal there may still be an alliance between them. More often it is their mutual interest in a higher goal to be achieved through that alliance that brings them together, albeit all parties in the alliance are aware and desire the goal to be achieved. This would be characteristic of the alliance among humans in diverse societies/ sovereign states that

would be needed to solve global environmental problems like climate justice. Such an alliance is formal and to be maintained or 'played by the rules of the game'. However, as Sen has remarked "[M]utual benefit, based on symmetry and reciprocity, is not the only foundation for thinking about reasonable behaviour towards others. Having effective power and the obligations that can follow unidirectionally from it can also be an important basis for impartial reasoning, going well beyond the motivation of mutual benefits." (Sen 2010: 207) The 'alliance beyond the human realm' is to be understood in this sense where even if the allying partners are not equal, considerations of care, justice, respect and rights of nature can all constitute 'reasonable behaviour' and 'impartial reasoning' vis-a-vis nature. In this respect, our ways could be different but our goal is the same - A World United for Ecological Justice!

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