

Thesis

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As the title suggests, this thesis is an attempt to study the views of John Passmore outlined in his book “Man’s Responsibility For Nature” (1974). It consists of the following chapters:

Chapter I- Introduction

Chapter II- Man’s Responsibility for Nature: A Summary

Chapter III- The Ethical Question

Chapter IV- The Religious Approach

Chapter V- Passmore On Animal Rights

Chapter VI- Conclusion

I give a brief exposition of the present ecological crisis in my introductory chapter, highlighting the scope and extent of the study undertaken here.

The second chapter gives a brief summary of John Passmore’s book, *Man’s Responsibility for Nature*, that serves as a text in the process of this study. The book has three parts. The first part begins with two chapters which are essentially historical and in which Passmore sets out to describe those Western traditions which tend to encourage and those which might serve to curb man’s ecological destructiveness. He gives two interpretations of the Old Testament view about man’s dominion: the first, that he is an absolute despot or ruler who takes care of the living beings God made subject to him only in so far as he profits from doing so, and, the second, like the Platonist shepherd who takes care of the living things over which he rules for their own sake.

Passmore then turns to four major ecological problems- Pollution, Conservation, Preservation and Multiplication. For him, pollution is simply the process of putting matter in wrong places in quantities that are too large and solving them means reducing the flow of substances or processes, which are wrong. A successful attack on pollution

involves not only the solution of problems, scientific and technological but also moral, political, economic and administrative.

Conservation refers to the saving of resources for future use. The fundamental moral question raised in conservation is the issue whether we ought to pay any attention to the needs of posterity. The saving of species and wilderness from damage or destruction accounts to preservation. Multiplication, as an ecological problem, discusses the question as to how we can determine whether our population growth is too rapid and what moral objections there are to the attempts made to control it.

The last part of Passmore's book is a confrontation between the ecological problems and the western traditions where he poses questions like, what the west has to reject and what to retain, if it has any prospect of solving the problems, which confront it. The focus, however, is not to explore in detail the ecological problems as such but rather to study the philosophical and ethical issues generated by them.

In the third chapter centres around the changes brought about in the scope and application of ethics. I set out with the classical understanding of ethics and switch over to the development of extension ethics and then come back to Passmore's understanding of a 'new ethic'. The term ethics derived from the Greek word ethos (character) refers to the philosophical science that deals with the rightness and wrongness of human actions. Going by its etymological meaning as habit, conduct, customs and usages, ethics has been understood in terms of what we are or what we do or what we are disposed to be or do in relation to other people, to ourselves or to God. Environmental philosophers are now proposing a critique of traditional Western moral thought, which it is alleged, is deficient for providing a satisfactory ethic of obligation and concern for the nonhuman world. They claim that this concern needs to be extended, in particular, toward 'nonhuman individuals, wilderness areas, and across time and species'.

Dissatisfied that the traditional ethical system is in no way good to look into the environmental crisis, Aldo Leopold went out of line and proposed a new ethic (his land ethic). This new ethic, he felt, would recognize an enlarged moral community extending to the entire biosphere and all the creatures interacting therein. The need for a wider perspective prompted Arne Naess to advocate the platform of Deep ecology. He insisted on a proper appreciation of nature that will lead to the recognition that 'equal right to live and blossom is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom'. The need to avoid environmental myopia also prompted Richard Routley to present to the World Congress the case for a new, environmental ethic, in which values in nature and the case for their preservation would be recognized. He argues that "the dominant Western ethical tradition" excludes an environmental ethic in principle- thereby, requiring us to develop one on a non-traditional basis. These theories aim primarily at extending ethical concerns beyond traditional limits- human life, health, and welfare- to include a large number of entities and collections of entities- for example, species and ecosystems that have not been given moral consideration previously.

However Passmore, arguing that normal western ethics is entirely adequate mounted an anthropocentric counterattack to address the contemporary environmental malaise- since he felt that the human actions that directly degrade the environment, indirectly harm human beings. He accepts that there are serious ecological problems- problems of pollution, conservation, preservation and multiplication and that changes are required but he asserts that, there is no need for the rejection of the basic ethical value systems of western civilization. What is needed, he says, is a more steadfast commitment to a 'perfectly familiar ethic'. He argues that ethics have always taught us that greed is evil and there is no need of a new ethic to teach us so.

He argues that the alternative proposed by some of the proponents of 'new ethic' is not only not needed- it is essentially irrational, intellectually incoherent, mystical and even dangerous. It involves abandoning the hard won western tradition of

critical investigation, a rejection of science, and civilization and a reversion to 'attitudes and modes of thought the west painfully shook off'. In short, it involves a return to the intellectual and cultural Dark Ages.

Any change in attitudes to our natural surroundings, which stood the chance of widespread acceptance, he argued, would have to resonate and have some continuity with the very tradition, which had legitimized our destructive practices. In Passmore words:

"It is one thing to suggest that Western societies must learn to be more prudent in their attitude to technological innovation, less wasteful of natural resources, more conscious of their dependence on the biosphere. It is quite another thing to suggest that they can solve their ecological problems only if they abandon the analytical, critical approach which has been their peculiar glory and go in search of a new ethics, a new metaphysics, a new religion"

This draws me to the discussion of the fourth chapter, the religious approach, which contains a discussion on the religious understanding of nature and it includes, in passing, a survey of a few major religions and indigenous religions. Religions provide a framework for changing out attitudes. Our religions teach us that the land, rivers, mountains, minerals, oceans, and other species should be held in trust for God, but can be used for the general welfare of humanity. As the historian Lynn White observed,

"What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny-that is, by religion."

On the question as to whether 'we ought to pay any attention for the needs of posterity', Passmore argues that 'men do not need religion to justify their concern for the future'. That concern, he says, arises out of their character as loving human beings.

“Religion, indeed, tell its adherents-whether in the accents of the East or of the West- to set such concern aside; ‘to take no thought for the morrow’. In short, the faithful cannot hope by recourse to Revelation, Christian or Muslim, to solve the problems which now confront them”.

I have shown that religion has a part to play too in tackling with the environmental crisis. The threat of global ecological collapse need not lead us to abandon our religions or our religious traditions. Rather it could be a major stimulus to their revitalization. For many, an important component of the current environmental crisis is spiritual and ethical. What we need, therefore, is to reaffirm our religious teachings. Each religion and culture has something to offer for the promotion of conservation and environmental protection. From each religion, several injunctions or exhortations can be brought out to form a code for environmentally sound and sustainable development. For example, in some religions and cultures, humanity has been entrusted with nature. No religion says that we have the right to destroy our habitat and creation; as a matter of fact, no religion sanctions environmental destruction. On the contrary, penalties and admonitions are mentioned for those who do so.

To cite a few, the Hindus accept the whole creation as the unfolding of the supreme one into many. According to Atharvaveda, the Earth is not for human beings alone, but for other creatures as well. The following stanza from the Isavasya-upanishad is^{an} outstanding testimony to the best idealistic concept of ecological harmony in Hindu religion:

The universe is the creation of Supreme Power
Meant for the benefit of all;
Individual species must therefore learn to enjoy
its benefits by forming a part of the system in close
relationship with other species;
Let not any one species encroach upon the other’s right.

(Isavasya-upanishad 1-2)

Islam permits the use of the natural environment, but this utilization should not involve unnecessary destruction, Humans are not the owners, but the maintainers of the due balance and measure which God provided for them and for the animals that live with them. The Qu'ran, in a suggestive and meaningful verse (Qu'ran 47:15), says:

A picture of the Garden is promised
to those who are safeguarded (against evil).
Therein are rivers of water unpolluted
and rivers of milk whose flavor changeth not ,
and rivers of wine, delicious to the drinkers,
and rivers to clear run honey.
Therein for them are all kinds of fruits
with protection from their Evolver, Nourisher and Sustainer.

Similarly, the East Asian traditions of Confucianism and Taoism, share a worldview that might be described as 'organic, vitalistic and holistic'. Nature is regarded as possessing worth or value 'for its own sake', and human interference should be minimal, if not nil in Taoist thinking. We cannot approach nature as a thing to be mastered but as a partner in a relationship. The goal is doing nothing contrary to nature. Confucianism emphasizes the inter-relationship of the 'human order' and the 'natural order' and strives for a balanced reciprocal ideal. The seamless interconnection between the divine, human, and natural worlds that characterizes these traditions has been described as an anthropo cosmic worldview. There is a cosmology of a continuity of creation stressing the dynamic movements of nature through the seasons and the agricultural cycles.

In a similar vein, native religions or tribal religions de-center the human beings from the scheme of things called nature. They believe that spiritual forces permeate the things they see around them- stones, trees, rivers, etc. They live peacefully and even at

times, appealing among these inspirited beings as part of the wisdom of life. The religious views at the basis of indigenous life-ways involve respect for the sources of food, clothing, and shelter that nature provides. Gratitude to the creator and to the spiritual forces in creation is at the heart of most indigenous traditions.

Many writers have attributed the origin of caring about nature to Mysticism. Mysticism is commonly defined as the doctrine or belief that through contemplation and love man can achieve a direct and immediate consciousness of God or of divine truth without the use of reason or of the ordinary senses. It is a method of realization of the Ultimate Reality. In nature mysticism, everything is seen and worshipped as divine.

Passmore admits that although 'nature-mysticism, with its veneration of nature as sacred or divine, is incompatible with the central, Christian or scientific, Western tradition, it had nevertheless had a continuing importance'. Mysticism, he continues, has helped in establishing the value of contemplative enjoyment of nature and has insisted on the unifying links between human life, on the one hand, and the life of nature on the other. He brands mysticism as 'rubbish' that needs to be removed if we are to address environmental issues rationally and practically.

"Mystical contemplation will not reveal to the chemist the origins of the Los Angeles smog nor enable the engineer to design an effective device for reducing its intensity.... Mystical contemplation will not clean our stream or feed our peoples'.

In Christianity, there is a common thread of thought found both in the Old Testament and New Testament concerning the concept of nature and the rules governing our responsibility. Although Genesis 1:26 and 28 have been interpreted as giving dominion and absolute control over nature, there are places where responsibility has been clearly defined. For example, Genesis 2:15 says:

And the Lord God took the man and put him

into the Garden to dress it and keep it.

The word 'dress' has been interpreted as a duty of man to manage, and the word 'keep' has been interpreted as the second duty to protect from harm. Further the scripture also clearly establishes God as the sole owner, while humanity is actively responsible for the care of the world: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it"(Psalm 24:1), and "Every animal in the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:10).

The New Testament provides instruction of stewardship and the consequences of not carrying out the stewardship role in accordance with spiritual teachings. The key instruction is that we must be faithful to use and put to work that which God has entrusted to us (Luke 19:13, Mark 25:15). But this is done with the sole purpose to honour God and glorify His gift of creation (I Corinthians 4:2, I Corinthians 6:20). We are accountable for the stewardship role in Christianity. Thus the Christian religious tradition has established a working and harmonious relationship between humanity and environment, which encourages respect for nature.

The Christian view and attitude has been blamed for the ecological crises. In the year 1966, the historian Lynn White addressed the American Association for the Advancement of Science on 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis' and laid the blame squarely at the feet of Christianity'. Although several scholars have exposed weaknesses of White's position, elements of his argument still prevail in discussions about the environment and Christianity. For White, Christianity accepted this biblical view of creation, fostering the attitude that human beings transcend nature and may exploit it. He argues that this attitude has shaped the development of modern Western science and technology, which have posed threats to our environment. Passmore has based a number of arguments and defenses on this accusation and as such I have dealt with this at length in this chapter itself.

In the fifth chapter, I dwell a little on the origin and the development of the animal rights debate. Traditional discussions on rights have usually been confined to the rights of humans but an area that has gained considerable momentum in the recent years in the field of ethics is the ‘animal rights’ debate or simply the debate about human beings’ treatment of animals. Tom Regan in his *The Case for Animal Rights* most eloquently articulated the view that ‘animals have rights’. He explicitly rejects rationality as the basis for the right to life and argues that the right to life is based upon inherent value. For Regan, only beings with inherent values have rights. In order to possess moral rights, he argues, an individual must not be merely sentient but also a “subject-of-a-life. Gary Francione also advocated the extension of moral consideration beyond the human community. He argues that we have a moral intuition that "it is wrong to inflict unnecessary suffering on animals", yet our actions fall well short of our moral wisdom.

For Passmore, the core concept of morality, such as the concept of rights, do not apply to something called nature. Animals and plants either individually or collectively, do not recognize mutual obligation, do not participate in moral community. Nature should be respected not because it has rights, or has inherent worth, interests or a good of its own, but because such an attitude of respect is consistent with living a rational, moral, and humane life. By destroying aspects of nature we risk our health and the health of our future generations, and also debase ourselves by being destructive, cruel or simply insensitive. He argues at length the attitudes that have influenced man’s relationship with nature, ^{but} to be concluded with the same and simple view that ‘animals do not have rights’.

Passmore’s view that rights cannot be applied to what is not human speaks for itself that it makes sense to speak of rights only on the context of human beings or human society. This argument that the concept of rights derive exclusively from human society presumably rests on a social contract account of rights. Here I have shown that

Passmore's account of animal rights fits well into the 'Social contract theory' or 'contractualism', a theory, which has been 'unfriendly towards animals'.

Passmore however admits a change of attitude over the last century and a half, where men has begun to recognize that they ought not unnecessarily to inflict pain on animals. This means that they recognize at least one point at which the relationships with nature are governed by moral principles. But he insists that 'what has happened over the last century and a half in the West is not that animals have been given more power, more freedom, or anything else which might be accounted as a right'. Rather what has happened, in his opinion, is that men have lost rights: they no longer have the same power over animals; they no longer treat them as they choose. He further adds, 'but that men have lost rights over them does nothing to convert animals into bearers of rights'.

These observations, he says, were 'in passing', 'straws in the wind', 'personal reactions of unusual sensibility.' Yet it would not be appropriate to interpret them as mere expressions of individual over-sensibility. I have shown the developments in the animal rights movements over the years despite Passmore's argument that the attitudinal change in man's treatment of animals is just 'in passing'

In the concluding chapter, while summarizing the result of this study, I attempt a critique of Passmore's thesis of *Man's Responsibility for Nature*. This book, despite its title, is not primarily concerned with philosophical discussion of man's responsibility 'for' nature (as opposed to his obligations to other humans), but rather with some philosophical aspects of a set of contemporary problems, which can be loosely classified as 'environmental' (or perhaps, less accurately 'ecological'). The notion of 'Responsibility' is nowhere explicitly analyzed therein. Does it then make sense to speak of taking responsibility for nature, or being responsible for nature, or to appeal to nature as any basis for justifying environmental responsibilities? Passmore thinks that

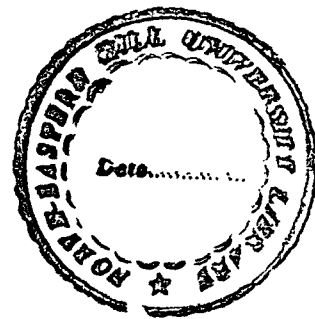
our primary, essentially our only, responsibilities are to humans and directly only for humans, and not directly to or for nature at all. Nature only enters as the indirect object of the responsibilities. Thus Passmore's position is that of 'to ourselves' or 'for ourselves' and not 'for nature'.

Summing up, Passmore's thesis as a whole does not offer a concrete model for sustainable development. Passmore in dismissing religion as a basis for rectifying the environmental problems, fails to grasp the significance of different religions in their treatment of nature. Thus in essence, Passmore's thinking does not bring much difference to what has already been man's essential attitude concerning nature. His thesis, emphasizing on the virtues of western science and its advances, instead gives a somewhat subtle blessing to the existing human-centered relationships with nature with its component exploitation and destruction. To put it simply, the status quo has been upheld by Passmore's thesis of 'Man's Responsibility for Nature.'

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**A CRITICAL STUDY OF
JOHN PASSMORE'S MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR NATURE**

**IMNAINLA
Department of Philosophy**



**A thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the Degree of the Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy
In the North Eastern Hill University
Shillong**

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
NORTH EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
SHILLONG
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DECLARATION

I, Ms.Imnainla, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form a basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis had not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

This is being submitted to the North Eastern Hill University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy.

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I started work on this dissertation with a feeling of trepidation. I was, for all practical purposes clueless as to the direction in which I was expected to go. My respectful and sincere gratitude, foremost, would be to Professor (Mrs.) Sujata Miri – my Guide, who showed me the way. This modest piece of work would not be in its present and complete form if it were not for her patient and unambiguous guidance over the past few years of my research. Through gentle, witty and at times, temperamental encouragement, she taught me not only the intricacies of the subject at hand but also valuable lessons in the virtues of hard work, perseverance, and thoroughness. I thank her for affording me the privilege of time- Time, which could have been utilized in other more pressing matters. Many a time bypassing more deserving cases, she unfailingly kept aside sizable chunks of time to give personal attention to my research in spite of many failings on my part.

I wouldn't be doing justice if I did not express my sincere gratefulness to the teaching faculty of the Philosophy Department, whose tireless dedication to their noble profession shaped my life and outlook to life. Their guiding presence right from my Post Graduate years has been a blessing to me and it has been a privilege to have been associated and worked with a faculty as this. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the office staff at the Philosophy Department.

Having got this far in life, I reserve a special place in my heart for my parents, who had faith in me. They knew me better than I did myself and egged me on in my

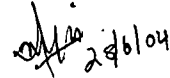
moments of ennui and second thoughts. I thank them for their constant support and encouragement. To them I give my love, respect and gratitude.

My research would have been greatly delayed due to lack of resource material had it not been for the tireless efforts of Lanu, Asang and Kima. Ever resourceful, they managed to ferret out rare and elusive material from places as far out as Pune. Most of this thesis is in fact, the result of the material I got hold of through their efforts. My gratefulness is always with them. I thank Moa for helping me edit the final draft and for always having a solution to those niggling computer problems.

Thank you Shilu and Ako for the comfortable accommodation in the last few months of my research. For the warmth of a homely atmosphere, for unhindered access to the computer, for giving me a part in the cycle of daily upkeep, I am forever indebted. I will always remember my little nieces Chubaren and Imlijung and nephew Moalong for all the joy and laughter we shared.

Friends are forever. Without all the friends and acquaintances I made since my Post Graduate days I would never made it through university. I cherish all the times we had together - through joy, sadness, tears, fun, sickness, mischief, studies, examinations and research- Those will be the best years of my life. Thank you all for shaping my life.

Above all else, I thank my God Almighty for keeping me well and enabling me to complete this humble endeavour.


Imnainla

*Dedicated
To
Mom and Dad*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is only one Earth, the only planet that we know of that supports the mechanism of life. Through countless eons, the planet has evolved and life within its envelope of breathable air has diversified immensely. Life's unique ability to adapt to almost any circumstance of location and ambient conditions has ensured its resilience and survival.

The Earth is also fragile. Because life is so specialized and intricate, it is very easy to disrupt a species' environment and its way of life. Unfortunately, the actions, which allow man to live the way he does today, are the largest forces, which upset the equilibrium, and damage (and in some cases destroy) other lives. There is, without doubt, much damage which man has inflicted on his environment (often, quite needlessly). It requires no genius of mind to recognize the fact that deforestation, poaching of animals, indiscriminate usage of insecticides which are often carcinogenic and otherwise damaging, uncontrolled fishing, pollution in the seas, air pollution from factories and proliferating usage of motor transport are greatly responsible for the Environmental Crisis today. There are some destructive acts which man has caused unintentionally. Unfortunately, accidents are a part of

equilibrium. E.g. Oil spills in the oceans as a result of careless shipping practices as we can see from the instance of the Super tanker Exxon-Valdez along the coast of Alaska, offshore drilling and other accidents. Parallel with the ominous entrance of nuclear technology into warfare, came the somewhat oxymoronic declaration-“Peaceful nuclear applications” which has no doubt added a new dimension of lethality to life and environment with the danger of nuclear reactor breakdowns and the component fallout, which can cause death, radiation sickness, fatal cancers, and more frighteningly, the prospect of genetic abnormality for generations to come. Incidents like those at Three Mile Island in USA and Chernobyl in the erstwhile USSR offer us a terrifying glimpse into the damage potential of Nuclear power.

Man is responsible for this environmental destruction. When one looks logically at this problem, one may find it hard to comprehend. Man is slowly killing that which gives him life: Earth. We need the Earth to feed us, shelter us, and delight us. Without it, we cannot survive. Every day, industry is taking more and more of this fragile planet away from its rightful place, and perverting it into a solution for our short-term needs. The tragedy of human development and upkeep at such a disproportionate cost merits the need for serious introspection on our part.

This thesis is an attempt to analyze the views of John Passmore as stated in his book *Man's Responsibility for Nature*. In addition to the chapters giving an historical treatment of some traditional western attitudes to nature, there are chapters on pollution, the conservation of natural resources and preservation of natural areas, and the need to limit human numbers, which Passmore categorizes as problems. My aim, however, is not to explore in detail the ecological problems as such but rather to study the philosophical and ethical issues generated by them. As the book makes abundantly clear, many of these environmental problems raise issues of considerable philosophical relevance and importance. Despite the urgency and importance of solving many of these problems, and the fact that many philosophers in the past have discussed man's relation to nature, Passmore's is one of the very few recent attempts by a philosopher to deal with this issue. The book *Man's Responsibility for Nature* is an important contemporary statement of a particular view of man's relations to nature, and is in many ways a pioneering attempt to discuss 'the fundamental moral, metaphysical and political assumptions' which so often underlie arguments on the subject. Passmore's book, as some see it as initiating the revival of 'applied philosophy', is similar in its attempt at once to defend a rational environmentalism and to free it from mystical and deontological entanglements. The emphasis is that

other people, as well as plants and animals form a part of our environment.

The thesis consists of the following chapters: -

Chapter I- Introduction

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In the second chapter, I give a brief summary of Passmore's book which begins with two chapters that are essentially historical- 'Man as a Despot' and 'Stewardship and Cooperation', where he sets out to describe (a) those western traditions that tend to encourage and (b) those that might serve to curb man's destructiveness. He gives two possible interpretations of the Old Testament view about man's dominion: the first, that he is an absolute despot or ruler who takes care of the living beings God made subject to him only in so far as he profits from doing so, and the second that like the Platonist shepherd who takes care of the living things over which he rules for their own sake. Passmore then turns to four

major ecological problems- Pollution, Conservation, Preservation and Multiplication.

To him, pollution is simply the process of putting matter in wrong places in quantities that are too large and solving them means reducing the flow of substances or processes into places, which are 'wrong'. A successful attack on pollution involves the solution of a great variety of problems not only scientific and technological but moral, political, economic and administrative.

As regards the problem of conservation, the fundamental moral issue that arises is whether or not we ought to pay any attention to the needs of posterity. Questions like, should there be any agreement that it is wrong to destroy wilderness or undomesticated species? is often considered in the discussion of Preservation. We can think of wilderness and of species as having instrumental or an intrinsic value. On the first view, wilderness and species ought to be preserved only if, and in so far as they are useful to man. On the second view, they ought to be preserved even if their continued existence were demonstrably harmful to human interest.

Multiplication, as an ecological problem discusses as to how we can determine whether our population growth is too rapid and what moral objections there are to the attempts made to control it. The precise

importance of population growth as a source of ecological destructiveness is highly debatable. According to him the limits we ought to attempt, as a generation is not with the number of posterity as such but with their sensibility, their civilization and their happiness. For him to surrender our freedom, to abandon all respect for persons in the name of control over population growth is to make sacrifices, which our proper concern for posterity cannot justify.

Passmore finally sets in confrontation Western traditions and ecological problems and asks what the west has to reject and what to retain, if it is to have any prospect of solving the problems, which confront it. If Western civilization is to survive it should change its ways in important respects but the only point of issue, he says, is just how fundamental the changes need to be. To solve ecological problems, Passmore says we should get rid of those rubbish that come in our way. He rejects the view that mysticism can save us while science and technology cannot. Another view he rejects is the view that nature is sacred. Ignorance as an obstacle to the solution of ecological problems, Passmore feels, can only be dispelled by science. Hence he suggested that there should be minor revolution within science.

The third chapter is an account of the change brought about in the scope and application of ethics. The focus here is on the classical understanding of ethics followed by the development of extension ethics. I then present the counter argument thereof, with special reference to John Passmore's understanding of a 'new ethic'. The term "ethics", derived from the Greek word *ethos* (character), refers to the philosophical science that deals with the rightness and wrongness of human actions. Going by the etymological meaning of ethics as habit, conduct, customs and usages, ethics has been understood as that branch of philosophy that deals with the moral dimension of human life. Thus over the years ethics has been understood in terms of what we are or what we do or what we are disposed to be or do in the relation to other people, to ourselves or to God. Environmental philosophers are now proposing a critique of traditional Western moral thought, which it is alleged, is deficient for providing a satisfactory ethic of obligation and concern for the nonhuman world. They claim that this concern needs to be extended, in particular, toward 'nonhuman individuals, wilderness areas, and across time and species'

Dissatisfied that the traditional ethical system is in no way good to look into the environmental crisis, Aldo Leopold went out of line and proposed a new ethic (his land ethic). This new ethic, he felt, would recognize an enlarged moral community extending to the entire biosphere

and all the creatures interacting therein. The need for a wider perspective prompted Arnae Naess to advocate the platform of Deep ecology. He insisted on a proper appreciation of nature that will lead to the recognition that 'equal right to live and blossom is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom'. The need to avoid environmental myopia also prompted Richard Routley to present to the World Congress the case for a new, environmental ethic, in which values in nature and the case for their preservation would be recognized. He argues that "the dominant Western ethical tradition" excludes an environmental ethic in principle-thereby, requiring us to develop one on a non-traditional basis. These theories aim primarily at extending ethical concerns beyond traditional limits- human life, health, and welfare- to include a large number of entities and collections of entities- for example, species and ecosystems that have not been given moral consideration previously.

Bryan G. Norton assumed a less reactionary posture and argued for "weak anthropocentrism", an attitude towards nature that would enhance and ennoble human life and character as well as protect the environment. All these literatures gave birth to environmental ethics as a distinct discipline with environmental philosophers drafting and vigorously defending a variety of revolutionary theories to bring nature within the purview of ethics. These theories aim primarily at extending ethical

concern beyond traditional limits- human life, health, and welfare- to include a large number of entities and collections of entities- for example, species and ecosystems that haven't been given previous moral consideration. J.Baird Callicott says that an environmental ethic is supposed to govern human relations with non-human natural entities. It would, for example, prohibit or censure as wrong, certain modes of conduct affecting animals and plants. According to an environmental ethic, he adds, it may be wrong to mutilate a tree, or pollute a river or develop a wilderness.

However Passmore, arguing that normal western ethics is entirely adequate, mounted an anthropocentric counterattack to address the contemporary environmental malaise- since human actions that directly degrade the environment, indirectly harm human beings. He accepts that there are serious ecological problems- problems of pollution, conservation, preservation and multiplication and that changes are required but there is no need for entirely rejecting the basic ethical value systems of western civilization.

Ecological problems, we are told, are basically due to greed and shortsightedness, and what is needed, he says, is a more steadfast commitment to a 'perfectly familiar ethic'. He argues that ethics have

always taught us that greed is evil and there is no need of a new ethic to teach us so. That would be re-inventing the wheel. He says that the alternative proposed by some of the proponents of 'new ethic' is not only not needed- it is essentially irrational, intellectually incoherent, mystical and even dangerous. It involves abandoning the hard won western tradition of critical investigation, a rejection of science, and civilization and a reversion to 'attitudes and modes of thought the west painfully shook off'. In short, it involves a return to the intellectual and cultural Dark Ages.

A morality, a new religion, Passmore continues, is not the sort of thing one can simply conjure up. It can grow out of existing attitudes of mind, as an extension or development of them. Passmore's larger purpose is to argue, in opposition to writers such as Lynn White, that our present ecological crisis does not require radical changes in our way of thinking about the natural world. Skeptical of the prospects for any radically new ethic, Passmore cautioned that the traditions of thought could not be abruptly overhauled. Any change in attitudes to our natural surroundings, which stood the chance of widespread acceptance, he argued, would have to resonate and have some continuity with the very tradition, which had legitimized our destructive practices. In Passmore's words:

“It is one thing to suggest that Western societies must learn to be more prudent in their attitude to technological innovation, less wasteful of natural resources, more conscious of their dependence on the biosphere. It is quite another thing to suggest that they can solve their ecological problems only if they abandon the analytical, critical approach which has been their peculiar glory and go in search of a new ethics, a new metaphysics, a new religion”

The fourth chapter contains a discussion on the religious understanding of nature and involves a survey of a few major religions. It looks into the origin of western traditions as proposed by Passmore. Here ‘religion’ is understood as those systems of belief, ritual, institutional life, spiritual aspiration, and ethical orientation. Teachings can be marked as ‘religious’ in the way they assert that people are essentially connected to a Supreme Being whose authority is distinct from worldly powers. Some religions, for example, Buddhism spell it as an achievement of a state of consciousness that transcends the attachments and passions of our ordinary social egos. Religious attitudes thus turn on a sense of what Paul Tillich calls ‘ultimate concern’.

Here I wish to argue that religion has a part to play too in tackling the environmental crisis. The threat of global ecological collapse need not lead us to abandon our religions or our religious traditions. Rather it could be a major stimulus to their revitalization. For many, an important component of the current environmental crisis is spiritual and ethical. It is

here that the religions of the world may have a role to play in cooperation with other individuals, institutions, and initiatives that have been engaged with environmental issues for a considerable period of time. Religions are beginning to respond in remarkably creative ways. They are not only rethinking their theologies but are also reorienting their sustainable practices and long-term environmental commitments. In so doing, the very nature of religion and of ethics is being challenged and changed.

The main argument for Passmore's thesis having stemmed up from accusations on Christianity as the root of all ecological problems, he tries to justify the Christian attitude, which Lynn White had blatantly accused. He starts from the creation history and tries to clear up misconceptions and misinterpretations of passages on creation in the book of Genesis. He gives a detailed explanation on the Hebraic and Greek influences on the Western attitudes to nature. Thus this chapter dwells on this justification at length.

The fifth chapter centres on origin and the development of the animal rights debate and Passmore's stand on man's treatment of animals. Traditional discussions on rights have usually been confined to the rights of humans but an area that has gained considerable momentum in the recent years in the field of ethics is the 'animal rights' debate or simply the debate about human beings' treatment of animals. Most of the

participants in the animal rights debate agree that it is wrong to treat animals cruelly, to inflict needless pain and suffering, and to kill for no good reason.

Tom Regan explicitly rejects rationality as the basis for the right to life and argues that the right to life is based upon inherent value. For Regan, only beings with inherent values have rights. In order to possess moral rights, he argues, an individual must not be merely sentient but also a "subject-of-a-life". Gary Francione advocated the extension of moral consideration beyond the human community. He argues that we have a moral intuition that "it is wrong to inflict unnecessary suffering on animals", yet our actions fall well short of our moral wisdom. The routine suffering we inflict on animals is unnecessary in every sense of the word. He believes that the only requirement for entry into the moral community is sentience. Peter Singer challenged the attitude that animals are ours to use in whatever way we see fit and offered a 'new ethic' for our treatment of animals. He provided the moral foundation for animal liberation movement, and at the same time paved a way for philosophers to begin addressing the moral status of animals.

Passmore holds that only the beings capable of having interests can have rights. But I am convinced, he says, that it is appropriate to speak of animals as having 'interests' unless 'interests' are identified with *needs-*

and to have needs, as a plant, too, has needs, is by no means the same thing as to have rights. It is one thing to say that it is wrong to treat plants and animals in a certain manner, quite another thing to say that they have a *right* to be treated differently. For him, “the idea of ‘rights’ is simply not applicable to what is non-human”. For Passmore, the core concept of morality, such as the concept of rights, do not apply to something called nature. Animals and plants either individually or collectively, do not recognize mutual obligation, do not participate in moral community. Nature should be respected not because it has rights, or has inherent worth, interests or a good of its own, but because such an attitude of respect is consistent with living a rational, moral, and humane life. By destroying aspects of nature we risk our health and the health of our future generations, and also debase ourselves by being destructive, cruel or simply insensitive. He argues at length the attitudes that have influenced man’s relationship with nature, to be concluded with the same and simple view that ‘animals do not have rights’.

Passmore’s view that rights cannot be applied to what is not human speaks for itself that it makes sense to speak of rights only on the context of human beings or human society. This argument that the concept of rights derive exclusively from human society presumably rests on a social contract account of rights. Here I show that Passmore’s account of animal

rights fits well into the Social contract theory or contractualism, a theory, which has been 'unfriendly towards animals'.

Passmore provides a well researched and eye opening study of the historical ideas about the moral status of animals in western thought, which no doubt, is an unfriendly one. Passmore however admits a change of attitude over the last century and a half, where men has begun to recognize that they ought not unnecessarily to inflict pain on animals. This means that they recognize at least one point at which the relationships with nature are governed by moral principles. But he insists that 'what has happened over the last century and a half in the West is not that animals have been given more power, more freedom, or anything else which might be accounted as a right'. Rather what has happened, in his opinion, is that men have lost rights: they no longer have the same power over animals; they no longer treat them as they choose.

Passmore has made an observation in regard to the change of attitude in man's treatment of animals. These observations, he says, were 'in passing', 'straws in the wind', 'personal reactions of unusual sensibility.' Yet it would not be appropriate to interpret them as mere expressions of individual over-sensibility.



In the last chapter, I have summarized the findings of the study. Passmore does not seem to have done justice to the title itself. He started with the title “Man’s Responsibility for Nature” but his whole discussion does not take into account what responsibility for nature is all about. He has only given primacy to the responsibility of man towards humanity.

CHAPTER II

MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR NATURE: A SUMMARY

Passmore's book comprises of three parts. (a) Part One- titled 'The Traditions' has two chapters that are historical, titled "Man as a Despot" and "Stewardship and Co-operation with Nature". It records and analyze past thinking about man's relationship with the natural world.

(b) Part Two examines, serially four central "Ecological Problems" namely- 'Pollution', 'Conservation', 'Preservation' and 'Multiplication'.

(c) Finally, in Part Three, Passmore returns for a 'Reconsideration' of the western traditions, and concludes that there is adequate diversity and flexibility within western civilization on which to base a rethinking of our treatment of nature.¹ He does admit that the West needs, to some extent, 'a new concept of nature' and 'a new set of moral principles to act as a guide in its relationship to nature'. He says the west must learn to cultivate an active cherishing of nature.²

'The Traditions' takes its cue from a question raised by the intellectual historian, Lynn White, Jr.- does the religious and philosophical culture of Western Civilization provide a basis for an ethic

¹ Passmore, 1974, p195

² Ibid. p186

of environmental protection?³ Passmore defends the western traditions by saying that they are “far richer, more diversified, more flexible than its critics allow.”⁴ He admits that we are destroying our habitation and that a need has arisen to take action if Western civilization is to survive, but the only point of issue, he says, is just how fundamental the changes need to be. He refers to Leopold as suggesting that the west stands in need of a ‘new ethic’- an ‘ethic of conservation’ which deal with man’s relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it.’⁵ However a detailed discussion on whether a ‘new ethic’ is needed or not, and how Passmore reacts to it, will be made in a separate chapter that follows.

Lynn White is shown as saying that our ecological problems derive from ‘Christian attitudes towards man’s relation to nature which are almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also by those who fondly regard themselves as post-Christians’- attitudes which lead us to think of ourselves as ‘superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim’.⁶ White is convinced, first, that ‘orthodox Christian arrogance towards Nature’ must somehow be dispelled and, secondly, that science and technology are so imbued

³ Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155, 1967, 1203-07

⁴ Passmore, 1974, p3.

⁵ Ibid. ,p4

⁶ Lynn, white: ‘The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis’, *Science*, 155:3767 (March 1967), p.1204

with Christian or post-Christian 'arrogance' that 'no solution for our ecological crisis can be expected from them alone'. The point that Passmore wants to arrive at [and he has repeatedly mentioned this] is that the attitude, which has influenced the western mind, is the Graeco-Christianity and not the Judaeo-Christianity (as the critics have supposed).

Passmore says that Genesis has often been blamed as the source and origin of the West's ecological troubles. He observes that the accusation made against the Western attitudes to nature is that it is infected with arrogance. Genesis, Passmore admits, tells man not only what they can do but also what they should do. God creates man and tells him: "To have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over the earth and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26) He also issues a mandate to mankind to "be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28)

The first creation story tells us that man was given dominion over the animals. The second story says that the animals were created as man's auxiliaries, as 'helpmeet for them', where Adam is represented as giving names to the animals. He then points out that in primitive thought to have possession of a thing's name is to have power over it.⁷ Here

⁷ Passmore, p8

Passmore tries to show that despite the fact that the Old Testament (O.T.) insists man's dominion over nature, God did not leave the fate of the animals entirely in man's hands. There is evidence that God gave 'every green herb' as food to 'every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air and to everything that creepeth upon the earth.' Even when God flooded the earth, God took pains to ensure the preservation of the beasts as much as men. Proverbs 12:10 teach men to care for their sheep and cattle. The image of the good shepherd whose flocks 'will not want' comes as naturally to the lips of the psalmist as it does to Ezekiel.⁸

Critics base their accusations on the idea that man is an absolute ruler and he take care of it only as long as he profits from it. Passmore claims that although the O.T. does not in any way hold that whatever exists was created for man's sake, one point is absolutely clear that 'nature is not sacred.'⁹ Nature in itself is not divine because man rules over it. Unlike Eastern religions, he says, the religion of the Hebrews recognizes a sharp distinction between God and nature. Man's dealings with nature are sharply separated from his dealings with God. It is his relationship with God, which really matters. The Hebrews did not consider nature as having a 'mysterious life' and this certainly left man free to exploit it without any qualms like other societies. They do not equalise nature with God. In fact they attribute and dedicate everything

⁸ Passmore, p8

⁹ Ibid. p9

to God who owns everything. But man has been given the liberty to exploit it as far as there are no restrictions labelled against it. Passmore emphasizes that the Old Testament, does not set up an unbridgeable gap between man and nature. Secondly, it is uncompromisingly theocentric: nature exists not for man's sake but for the greater glory of God. It is here, Passmore points out, that in "the Christian separation of man from the animals and the Christian view that nature was made for man, lies the seed of an attitude to nature far more properly describable as 'arrogant' than the purely O.T. conception of man's dominion"¹⁰

Passmore says that the Christian attitude is distinct from others as it derives its attitudes from a God who is anthropocentric- a man-centred God. He agrees with the critics of Christianity when they say that Christianity has encouraged man to think of himself as nature's absolute master, for whom everything that exists was designed. He does not agree however when they suppose that this is Hebrew teaching. He rather believes that it originates with the Greeks.¹¹

In the Greek religion as well as the Greek Enlightenment man's place in nature was a major point of dispute between the Epicureans and Stoics. The Epicureans find it absurd to suppose that God created for

¹⁰ Ibid. p12

¹¹ Ibid., p13

human use, the world with all its vices and shortcomings. The Stoics, on the other hand, hold the view that all creatures are designed to serve man. Man is the only one who can make advantageous use of nature so they were created for them. The universe, as they saw it, is a vast body, providentially governed to serve the interests of only its rational members- men and gods, and as such free from moral censure.¹²

“If, then, one can speak of ‘Christian arrogance’ in supposing that all things are made for men, it must be with the proviso that it is not Hebraic-Christian but Graeco-Christian ‘arrogance’.... It is one thing to say, following Genesis, that man has dominion over nature in the sense that he has the right to make use of it: quite another to say, following the Stoics, that nature exists only in order to serve his interests.”¹³

Passmore admits that even the Graeco-Christian doctrine of nature does have practical guidance in two ways- conservative and radical. First, the conservative interpretation is that since God has designed everything for man’s use, it is impious for man to change it. Men were free to use nature as they chose- provided they did not worship it as sacred- but otherwise it was best left alone, created as it was in the form most suitable for their needs. As for the radical interpretation, which he

¹² Ibid. , p15

¹³ Ibid. , P17

takes it to be the crucial one, it understands that everything on earth is for man's use and this gives him the liberty to modify nature, as he will. Cicero's Balbus is referred to here saying that, "we alone have the power of controlling the most violent of nature's offspring, the sea and the winds, thanks to the service of navigation.... the rivers and lakes are ours...we give fertility to the soil by irrigating it, we confine the rivers and strengthen or divert their courses... by means of our hands we try to create as it were a second nature within the world of nature."¹⁴ Cicero foresaw man as a demi-god, constructing with his hands a new nature. Robert Jungk is also shown as presenting a similar attitude in the modern times that man is trying to take God's place by recreating and creating a 'man-made cosmos according to man-made laws of reason'.¹⁵

Passmore, however points out that when Cicero talked of man taking control of nature, he (Cicero) did not see it leading to the creation of a science based-technology with its potential benefits as well as its potential dangers. In the 17th century, Passmore adds, Bacon and Descartes could see that this 'second nature' was not going to be all good only and that it had its potential dangers. Bacon started emphasizing that 'knowledge itself is power'. He argued that learning should be referred to use and action, which he said, is true not only in

¹⁴ Ibid., p18

¹⁵ Ibid

the case of practical philosophy' as navigation, but also in the case of what Bacon called 'philosophy of universality'. Man would gain mastery over things only through intellectual knowledge and "overcoming her resistance not by force but by his intimate knowledge of her secrets". The dominion that was symbolized when God called upon Adam to give names to the animals was in the back of Bacon's mind when he thought of his projects for the advancement of science as restoring to man his original dominion over the animals.

Like Bacon, Descartes looked forward to new techniques, as successful as the old crafts, but based on science. What Descartes rejected, Passmore says, was the pious thought that everything was made by God for man on the ground that 'an infinite of things exist, or did exist...which have never been beheld or comprehended by man and which have never been of any use to him'. He commits himself only to the much weaker position that 'there is nothing created from which we cannot derive some use'.¹⁶ Descartes identifies the human mind with consciousness but every other finite existence "is a mere machine, which men, in virtue of that fact, can manipulate without scruples. Animals not only cannot reason but cannot even feel"¹⁷- this, Passmore claims, is the charter of the Industrial Revolution.

¹⁶ Ibid, p20

¹⁷ Ibid, p21

At this point Passmore says that Descartes inherits the Stoic ingredients in Christianity rather than its more distinctive teachings; man is lord of nature in virtue of his rationality, and that rationality has not been irremediably perverted by the Fall. From the beginning there were objectors but their views did not prevail. The Baconian-Cartesian approach to nature dominated the West, at first merely as an aspiration, eventually as an achievement.

G.P. Marsh was the first to describe man's destructiveness as arising out of his ignorant disregard of the laws of nature. He said that nature in its original state was not adapted to supporting a civilization but man in order to civilize it was forced to transform it without any sense of guilt. Marsh and other ecologists saw that when man attempted to transform nature, they never do what they want to do, because nature is not a soft piece of wax. When man is trying to adjust one thing, many other harmful adjustments are taking place in nature.

Engels also wrote that for every victory man has over nature, it takes its revenge on man. He understands that, in the process man by no means rule over nature like conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature- but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in the midst, and that all our mastery

of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to know and correctly apply its laws.' To Engels, ignorance and greed are characteristic of capitalism for it is not at all concerned about the consequences of its actions. He argues, " that communism alone can save nature, through its destruction both of capitalism and of Christianity- from the greater profits demanded by the former, the 'senseless and unnatural' contrast between man and nature typical of the latter." (P.25)

However, the Soviet Union, has shared the ideology of capitalism as is evident in the attitude of the Soviet historian Pokrovskiy-" It is easy to foresee that in the future, when science and technique have attained to a perfection which we are as yet unable to visualize, nature will become soft wax in his [man's] hands which he will be able to cast into whatever form he chooses."(p.25) In the East, Japan regards nature as sacred and worships it directly. Yet, this has not prevented Japan from developing an industrial civilization. China was technologically inventive, yet the ideal of conforming to nature has been very powerful in Chinese thought affecting even everyday actions. The only startling exception being Hsun Tsu who argues that it is not enough to let nature develop, conforming to it as it does so; it will go astray unless man

corrects it by acting upon it, just as human beings will go astray unless they are educated.

Passmore commends the critics of Western civilization on their historical diagnosis about a strong Western tradition that man is free to deal with nature as he pleases, since it exists only for his sake. He says they are wrong in tracing this back to Genesis because Genesis and the Old Testament generally, tells man that he is, or has the right to be the master of the earth and all it contains. But it also insists that the world was good before man was created, and that it exists to glorify God rather than to serve man. Only with the influence of the Greek, Christian theology was led to think of nature as nothing but a system of resources, man's relationship with which are in no respect subject to moral censure.

This attitude to nature sometimes gave rise to conservative conclusions: God had made nature for man's use and it would be presumptuous to improvise on that. But a radical interpretation was that nature was there for man to modify and transform as he pleases. This was an interpretation of Bacon and Descartes, which was absorbed into the ideology of modern western societies, communist as well as capitalist and has been exported to the East. It brought about a metaphysics for which man is the only agent and nature a vast system of machines for man to use and modify as he pleases. Though this by no

means constitutes the entire Western tradition, nor does its rejection entail the rejection of the science with which it has so often been associated, ecologists are rejecting this metaphysics.

In a chapter on Stewardship and Co-operation with Nature¹⁸, Passmore presents two traditional views that deny man to be a despot in his relation to nature. The first one sees him as a steward, a farm-manager, actively responsible as God's deputy for the care of the world. The second one sees man as co-operating with nature in an attempt to perfect it. The first non-despotic tradition- the stewardship tradition dates back to the post-Platonic philosophers of the Roman Empire. They believed that man is sent to earth by God to administer earthly things to care for them in God's name. His responsibility is to look after the welfare of what he governs or take care of.

Some argue that God also meant the same thing when He told the Hebrews to subdue the world. In the same spirit, the environmentalist John Black maintains that Genesis makes this duty clear when God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to manage and protect it. He goes on to say that man, being made in the image of God has the responsibility to take care of nature just as God takes care of man- 'man is to nature, that is,

¹⁸ Ibid. ,p28

as God is to man'.¹⁹ To this, Passmore points out that Christianity does seem to pass moral judgment on man's relationship to nature. He admits that there is a recurrent New Testament image in which man figures as a steward representing God. However man's stewardship, he continues, relates to the church and not to nature.

Passmore points out that in order to present the idea of stewardship over nature, Black refers us only to an often-quoted passage from the Chief Justice, Sir Matthew Hale, who tells us in his characteristically legal terminology that 'the end of man's creation was that he should be the viceroy of the great God of heaven and earth in this inferior world; his steward....of the lower world'²⁰ Like a farm manager, man can be called to account if he willfully or carelessly degrade the earth's resources.

The second tradition- Co-operation with nature, the tradition that man's responsibility is to perfect nature by co-operating with it, coalesces with the first one to a certain degree. Taking the etymological meaning 'nature' as 'to be born' or 'to come into being', it is understood as actualizing that which is potent. The task of actualizing the

¹⁹ Ibid. ,p29

²⁰ Ibid. ,p30

potentialities of nature is taken to be at the disposal of man by way of perfecting it. The perfecting of nature requires skill and, in this sense, mastery; a mastery which perfects, not a mastery which destroys or enslaves. Man's duty in respect to nature, then, is to seek to perfect it by working with its potentialities.

On the contrary, Genesis says that the world was created complete by God and was perfect until Adam sinned. The Early Church Fathers like Augustine also did not suggest that man should carry this task upon his shoulders, neither did he say that God would help him if he did. The idea of a universe-in-the-making which man helps to form, in co-operation with a Spirit intend on civilizing it was reinstated by Fichte and other German metaphysicians. They emphasize the fact that nature has already been greatly modified by man so, co-operation with Spirit means co-operation with a spiritualised nature. Though at first man was forced to dominate, he is now able to deal with nature gently. It no longer resists but welcomes their attention.

Teilhard de Chardin points out two fundamental mistakes of Traditional Christianity- Firstly, it has supposed nature to be static, created once and for all by God at the creation; Secondly, its supposition that in order to save themselves, men must free themselves from, rise above the world. Whereas, in Teilhard's view, nature is equal to self-

creation and man must work with the world to help it 'on its path towards that final consummation for which the whole creation groaneth and travailed until now'.²¹ According to Passmore, such metaphysical systems are important because they testify that the Western civilization has an attitude to nature that cannot be reduced either to despotism or to stewardship. Nature, for it, is still in the making.

Talking about how we can judge the perfection of nature, Passmore shows that parks and gardens and reservations as representing a liberating as opposed to a tyrannical mastery over nature.²² The seventeenth and eighteenth century formal gardens show nature as bearing the sign of man perfecting them. The 17th century 'geometrical gardeners' felt that to perfect nature it had to be reshaped first. The 18th century 'pruners' felt that perfecting nature meant removing dead limbs, cutting off branches the tree is not strong enough to hold or which would prevent the free growth of other branches and help the tree to assume its perfect form. The first view encourages man in his relationship with nature is to think of himself as a ruthless despot, imposing order on what could otherwise be a meaningless chaos. Passmore supports the second view, the pruner shows his skill by bringing to light the potentialities of the nature on which he operates.

²¹ Ibid. ,p34

²² Ibid. ,p36

Another example that displays the despotic concept of perfection is that of town planning. The town planner often seeks to 'design with nature'. They do not think of man as being a despoiler. Here man seeks not to impose design but to use to the fullest of potentialities. The great virtue of the doctrine that it is man's task to perfect nature by design with it is that it is a half-way house between the despotic view that he should seek, merely, to dominate over it and the primitivist view that he should do nothing to modify nature, since it is perfect as it is. Passmore does recognize the fact that in the hands of some of its exponents, its potentialities may be reduced to the lowest point, that they remain as a raw material ever. At least in principle this view offers an alternative to despotism and primitivism alike.

Passmore started this section with a statement that, the traditions of the West are more complex, more diversified and more flexible. He ends with the note that, important changes in moral outlook have taken place and will continue to do so, 'but the degree to which their reforms have been in the long run successful depends on the degree to which they have been able to appeal to and further develop already existing traditions'.²³

²³ Ibid. , p 40.

Part Two of the book deals at length, the four ecological problems. He considers a problem to be ecological if it arises as a consequence of man's dealings with nature. Pollution, depletion of natural resources, the extinction of wilderness, the increase in human numbers; all these are categorized as ecological problems. To him an ecological problem is a type of social problem because we believe that our society would be better off without it. To solve an ecological problem as well as a social problem "is to describe a satisfactory way of reducing the incidence or the severity of the phenomenon stigmatised as a problem."²⁴

Pollution-Passmore finds this problem the simplest to analyse and most manageable of them all. He defines pollution as the "process of putting matter in the [wrong place] in quantities that are too large."²⁵ In this connection, wrong place would mean if - (i) it is displeasing to the senses (ii) it is dangerous to human health, and (iii) it destroys wildlife, plants or animals.

The solution to the problem of pollution depends upon solving along with it economic, moral, political and administrative problems. Scientifically speaking much has to be learned about pollution. When a scientist lays down acceptable levels of pollution, he is partly guessing and not really predicting with assurance. They are unable to give a clear and adequate standard of anti-pollution legislation that governments can

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.44

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.45

incorporate. Any scientific contribution to the solution will have to aim at understanding how a particular form of pollution arises and what its threats are.

A technological problem refers to the discovery of method of reducing the incidence of pollution. In Passmore's words, 'it is very easy to think up technical solutions of ecological problems if we consider them in isolation, and if we define a technical solution, without any reference to costs, as one which describes a way of freeing ourselves from the ecological condition which concerns us. Such a solution is somewhat said to be 'practical' but ^{not} 'operational'.'²⁶ He continues saying that "In so far as ecological problems can be solved only with the help of scientific discovery and technological invention, they can be solved only within the Western tradition. That much is obvious."²⁷ Technological innovations involve an element of ecological risks. But then abandoning it altogether will bring in economic and social risks. At this point the economist enters; who can use rational Western type methods of cost-benefit analyses. Passmore opines that ecologists and economists should work together as each has methods at his disposal, which the other needs.

The moral problems arising out of pollution is not overwhelming. A polluter who endangers the life and health of his neighbour can be co-

²⁶ Ibid. P48

²⁷ Ibid

erced by state intervention to prevent them from harming others. There are also considerable political difficulties in effectively legislating against pollution. Looking only at democratic-capitalist countries- it has been so far successful in some instances like- clean-up drives. Those that do come up against these legislations are those large industrial corporations who stand to loose much. Another political obstacle to reform is from established habits and expectations. We have all been accustomed to thinking that air and water exist only to serve us and they are infinite and self-repairable. As such we pollute it. To a certain extent, this problem has been successfully tackled but there is still more that needs to be and can be done.

Conservation- Passmore starts this chapter with a distinction between conservation and preservation. Conservation is defined as saving of natural resources for later consumption while preservation refers to saving from damage and destruction. The conservationist programme, he says, confronts us with a fundamental moral issue; ought we to pay attention to the needs of posterity? To give a positive answer would mean making two assumptions - first, that posterity would suffer unless we do so. Secondly, that if it will suffer, it is our duty so to act as to prevent or lessen its sufferings.²⁸ With the first assumption that posterity will suffer unless we change our ways, the suggestion that

²⁸ Ibid. ,p75

often follows is that posterity can safely be left to look after itself, provided only that science and technology be allowed to flourish. This interpretation of the situation comes from economists and from nuclear physicist who confidently declare that resources will never run out. Passmore quotes the nuclear physicist Alvin Weinberg, who tells us that 'the most essential resources are virtually inexhaustive'. If what these economists and physicists are saying is true, Passmore observes, there is no 'problem of conservation'. That there is a problem of conservation is highly disputed.

Passmore argues that we cannot be certain that posterity will need what we save- or on the other side that it will not need what we should not think of saving. There is always a risk too that our well-intentioned sacrifices will have the long-term effect on making the situation of posterity worse than it would otherwise be. That is the case for simply ignoring posterity.

On the other side, where we 'take thought for the morrow', our ability to love prepares to make sacrifices for the future. Sometimes while we try to protect what we love we often make the wrong decisions and destroy it. Over-protection can be as damaging as neglect. He says if the more pessimistic scientists are right, we now stand in a special relationship to the future. Passmore points out the fact that conservation

is not an isolated issue. By 'doing what is just in the present'²⁹, we may be doing what is best for posterity to a degree somewhat greater than is ordinarily allowed. If we were to concentrate on improving public facilities as distinct from private wealth, on diminishing noise and air pollution by substantially reducing automobile traffic, we might find that we have in the process decreased the level of industrial activity to a relatively harmless point. In general, people do not seem to find their present mode of life particularly enjoyable; we certainly need to experiment with alternatives, which are at the same time less polluting and less wasteful of resources. The recycling of resources both benefits us, as helping to solve the problem of wastes, and would, we hope, also benefit posterity. If we find ourselves in uncertainties, he says, we should concentrate our efforts on these double-benefit forms of action.

Preservation- It has been defined as an attempt to maintain in their present condition areas of the earth's surface which has not yet been explored and exploited by man and also protecting from extinction species of living beings which man has not yet destroyed. Preservation as an ecological problem considers questions like, 'should there be any agreement that it is wrong to destroy wilderness or undomesticated species?' We can think of wilderness and species as having either a purely instrumental or an intrinsic value. They are valuable not only as

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.99

economic resources but as providing opportunities for the pursuit of science, for recreation and retreat, as sources of moral renewal and aesthetic delight. But here, there can be clashes of interests, which then sharply raise the question of 'rights'. Closely associated to this is the debate whether rights are applicable to what is non-human. He has shown a preservationist appeal that often been successful. This not only draws attention to the unintended consequences of destruction but also tries to find, for example 'New means of mining, new means of restoring land, new methods of coping with those predators which are particularly damaging to human interests.'³⁰ A wider change in attitudes can also help by giving less emphasis on consumer goods, a greater appreciation of the value of contemplation, or quiet enjoyment, at simply looking at the world around us as itself an object of absorbing interest, not as an instrument or resources.

Multiplication- The rate at which the human population is increasing is likened to the reproduction of cancer cells by many ecologists like P.R. Ehrlich and others who say that 'people are pollution'.³¹ Passmore defends that as much as the population increase may seem offensive to the senses and a threat to health, biases such as the ones stated above are too vicious a judgment. As an ecological problem it is discussed as to how we can determine whether our

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.126
³¹ *ibid.*, p 127

population growth is too rapid and what moral objections there are to the attempts made to control it. The precise importance of population growth as a source of ecological destructiveness is highly debatable. Although a decline in the rate of population growth would not necessarily reduce the extent of pollution, the rate of depletion of natural resources, the rate at which species and wilderness are disappearing, it may be the most effective and feasible of methods available to us. There are of course forces, which tell against reduction of population growth like – ignorance, prudishness, religious ideology, social habits, female servitude and moral objections. He also discusses the moral objections to the methods of population control like infanticide, abortion, contraception, sterilization, periodic abstinence and legislative enactments. According to him the limits we ought to attempt, as a generation is not with numbers posterity as such but with their sensibility, their civilization and their happiness. For him to surrender our freedom, to abandon all respects for persons in the name of control over pollution growth is to make sacrifices, which our proper concern for posterity cannot justify.

Part III of the book, 'The Traditions Reconsidered' has a chapter 'Removing the Rubbish' where Passmore sets in confrontation Western traditions and ecological problems. He has sought, like John Locke, 'to be employed as an under-labourer in clearing ground a little and

removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge'- and, by way of knowledge, to effective action.³² The rubbish that he considers as lying in the way to knowledge are:

i. Mysticism- He refutes the view that mysticism can save us where technology cannot. He criticises Frazer Darling who suggests that the West can solve its ecological problems only by adopting the 'philosophy of wholeness', or 'the truth of Zoroastrianism'. Passmore believes that the West already has what Zoroaster has to offer. This attitude, he says, is typical of the Western mystical tradition. This tradition holds that man is ideally an aristocrat who is also a servant- whether of God, of the people or of the planet- authoritarianism.

ii. Nature as sacred- Western science, he suggests is the greatest of man's achievements. It converts mysteries into problems which can then be solved. Therefore treating nature as sacred would be to forgo on the whole tradition of Western science. Nature as sacred says that we cannot control or understand it but in submission we must worship it. This is not enough to save the biosphere. Even those who have regarded nature as sacred destroy their habitation. Man treats for Eg.- a stream as god and does not touch it in order to preserve it. In Japan, they worship nature but the ecological destruction is more apparent here. By treating nature as sacred, we go against the tradition of preservation because then

³² Ibid. ,173

we develop the attitude that nature can take care of itself. Passmore has constantly argued for the recognition of 'man's utter dependence on nature'³³ and on the other hand, 'nature's vulnerability to human depredations'. He emphasizes on the fragility of the balance- neither man nor nature is sacred or quasi-divine.

iii. Ignorance- this is one of the most potent obstacles to our solving our ecological problems, an ignorance only science can dispel. As much as the West still needs to cling on to its tradition of critical investigation, there also needs to be a minor revolution within science. Scientists need to pay more respect to work outside laboratories- field naturalists. To say that science has need of new directions, however, is one thing, to say that the west ought to abandon its hard-won tradition of critical investigation is quite another; that tradition it needs more than ever before.³⁴

Passmore says that the view that man is the master of the world should be abandoned. Man's dominion licenses man to sustain himself by making use of what they find around them. Man can live at all only as a predator but should in no sense attempt to master them. Regarding the lordship over nature, Passmore rejects the view that nature is wax in man's hands. Nature is not all under our mastery. Science converted into

³³ Ibid. ,p176

³⁴ Ibid. , p177

technology enables man to control nature, but there is still much man cannot do.

Man can transform the world into a civilized state. That is their major responsibility to their fellow men. Civilization is man's attempts to understand and subdue nature. As such science, philosophy, technology, architectures and countryside- are all of them founded upon his attempt to understand and subdue nature. Even if the west now wants to turn back and treat nature as sacred- it is not possible, because only by transforming nature can it continue to survive. The 'duty' to subdue arises not out of arrogance, but it is only they who can create.

Nature exists only to serve man, as Descartes subscribes, whatever exists is of some use to us. This way man does not cast anything aside as useless rubbish and discourage the destruction of it all. The West's history is one that has seen it rise to great heights, though often with a tragic twist. Take for instance the history of Florence from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. 'Everything was there, genius in arts, cruelty and violence of the lowest, least forgivable, kind'.³⁵ Other cultures have also appreciated the west's achievements.

What in general Passmore has emphasised is that if the world's ecological problems are to be solved at all, it can only be through the old fashioned procedure of thoughtful action. How and what

³⁵ 181

we think, however, is determined not only by our brain structure but by the nature of the possibilities our societies leave open to us, the forms of thinking its traditions permit and encourage. For him, although the modern west may leave more options open than most other societies, its central stoic- Christian traditions are not favourable in the solution of its ecological problems. It is one thing to suggest that western societies must learn to be more prudent in their attitude to technical innovations, less wasteful of natural resources, more conscious of their dependence on the biosphere. It is quite another thing to suggest that they can solve their ecological problems only if they abandon the analytical, critical approach which has been their peculiar glory and go in search of a new ethics, a new metaphysics, a new religion.

CHAPTER III

THE ETHICAL QUESTION

The term “ethics”, derived from the Greek word *ethos* (character), refers to the philosophical science that deals with the rightness and wrongness of human actions.¹ Going by the etymological meaning of ethics as habit, conduct, customs and usages, ethics has been understood as that branch of philosophy that deals with the moral dimension of human life. Thus over the years ethics was understood in terms of what we are or what we do or what we are disposed to be or do in the relation to other people, ourselves or to God. Ethicists have thought of it as concerning almost exclusively with human action with relation to other human beings and have generally considered non-human natural entities and nature as a whole to be mere means to human ends, not ends in themselves. For the early Greeks, the City State formed the background of moral life and the man who performed his duties as a citizen was regarded as a good man. The Sophists declared that all morality was a matter of human consequence. The morality of Socrates was that of a Universal knowledge of the Good, which is advantageous for man and contributive of happiness. The most significant enquiry of Socrates was

¹ International Encyclopedia of Ethics, Salem Press Inc., 1995, p281.

spelled out in his Oracle of Delphi—"Man! Know thyself". For Plato, the summum bonum of ethical life comes from the rational part of the soul, which is eternal. Aristotle maintains that 'nature has made all things specifically for the sake of man'² and that the value of non-human things in nature is merely instrumental. The Bible (Genesis 1:27-28) says: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female; he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living things that moves upon the earth." Thomas Aquinas argues that because nonhuman animals are 'ordered to man's use'³, he can kill them or use them in any way he wishes without any injustice.

William Lillie is of the opinion that our provisional definition has limited the conduct with which we deal in Ethics in two ways. We deal with human actions and not with the actions of the lower animals.... The other limitation is that of confining ethics to the study of the conduct of human beings with one another⁴. Most environmental ethicists believe that the contemporary environmental problems are of such magnitude, scope and complexity that we cannot depend on the western ethics to

² Aristotle, Politics, Bk.1, Ch.8

³ Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, Bk 3, Pt 2, Ch 112

⁴ William Lillie, An Introduction to Ethics, Methun and Co Ltd, London, Allied Publishers Ltd, New Delhi, 1999, p4

guide us through the troubled environmental status. Environmental philosophers have proposed a critique of traditional Western moral thought which, it is alleged, is deficient for providing a satisfactory ethic of obligation and concern for the non-human world. They claim that this concern needs to be extended, in particular, toward 'nonhuman individuals, wilderness areas, and across time and species'.⁵

Many people have now become environment watchers, looking at what we humans have done with, are doing, or seem about to do to the non-human things around us and not liking what they see. There have been a number of calls for 'new ethics' in recent times for dealing with the environment. There have been attempts to rethink moral philosophy and reformulate ethical theory so that non-human natural entities and nature as a whole be directly taken into consideration. Many agree that our prevailing treatment of nature is wrong, and that we need important changes in our actions, laws and practices. Others argue that what is wrong is not due to our ethics, but due to our failure to live by it.

Aldo Leopold is one of the first to suggest that the west now stands in need of a new ethic- "an ethic of conservation" or "land ethic". He called upon an 'ethic dealing with man's relation to land and

⁵ Grey, William, Anthropocentrism and Deep Ecology, *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 71, No 4 (1993), p463

to the animals and plants which grow upon it' ⁶ He says, 'that land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics.'⁷ This extension of ethics, for him, was an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity because a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong, he continues, when it tends otherwise. Leopold's environmental ethic is based in part on the following closely related statements. Firstly, "all ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise that the individual is member of a community of interdependent parts." Secondly, "all ethic, ecologically, is a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence. An ethic, philosophically, is a differentiation of social from antisocial conduct. These are two definitions of the same thing. The thing has its origin in the tendency of interdependent individuals or groups to evolve modes of cooperation."⁸

The vital need for a wider perspective prompted Arne Naess to write '*The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement*'⁹ The shallow response recommends that we be nice to nature so that nature will be nice to us. The deep ecological response, on the other hand,

⁶ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac with Other Essays on Conservation*, 1966, p 238

⁷ Ibid p vii-ix

⁸ Ibid , P 203

⁹ Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movement A Summary," 16 , 1973

insists that a proper appreciation of nature leads to a recognition that “the equal right to live and blossom is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom.”¹⁰ Naess’ insistence on this value axiom turned out to be ‘the Deep Ecology platform’, underpinned by a plurality of possible metaphysical commitments (from Buddhism through Christianity to the tenets of Spinoza). The principles he advocated were all of them ultimately supportive of self-realization, including simple living, avoidance of waste, recycling and, eventually, a reduction of the human population. What we need, in Naess’s view, is an attitude of ‘respect for nature’, which will not be centered on human interest alone. His platform for the deep ecology movement includes the following formulations:(i) The flourishing of nonhuman life on Earth has as much intrinsic value as the flourishing of human life; (ii) The value of non-human species is independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes; (iii) The richness and the diversity of the earth’s life-forms are valuable in themselves and contribute in any case to the flourishing of all life on Earth, including human life; (iv) Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except insofar as it is necessary to satisfy vital need.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid, p.89

¹¹ Naess, Arne, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1989, p29

In his *Respect for Nature*,¹² Paul Taylor develops the idea of what he calls a 'biocentric ethic' of respect for nature. This is contrasted with the ethic, which he calls a 'human ethic' in which concern is limited to the behavior of humans towards each other. The biocentric ethic is an ethic of respect for wild animals and plants. It sees each living thing as ~~possessor~~ of intrinsic value, indeed of equal intrinsic value, and requires of those who live by it that they attach equal importance to the achievement of what is good for it on the part of every single living thing. Taylor's biocentric ethic has at its core the belief that every living thing is 'a unified system or organized activity, the constant tendency of which is to preserve its existence by protecting and promoting its well-being'.¹³ As such, it has its own good which it is better that it should realize than fail to realize, and reflection shows that every living thing has equal, or rather an identically absolute, inherent worth. Respect for nature, in his account, is respect for the inherent worth of each individual living thing and its claim to have its pursuit of its own good respected. The equal inherent worth of all wild organisms implies that humans should stand aside impartially when they struggle with each other, and only join in the struggle for quite peculiarly strong needs of their own, making reparation, in view of their own special status as moral agents, so far as

¹² Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* Princeton, N J Princeton University Press, 1986

¹³ *Ibid* ,p45

they can, for the harm they do to wild things. Thus the biocentric ethic imposes on us to see ourselves as bearing a moral relationship to them. This would mean treating all wild living things as ends in themselves rather than as mere means to human ends. It would mean engaging in practices and policies which are aimed at specific ways of preserving ecosystems and of ensuring a physical environment that is as beneficial as possible to as many species as possible.

Respectors of nature will try to find what Taylor calls 'priority principles' for resolving conflicts between human and non-humans-principles, which do not assign greater inherent worth to humans. One such principle suggested by Taylor is the principle of proportionality. According to this principle, if there is a conflict between the interests of human beings and the interests of non-human creatures, greater weight should be given to basic than non-basic interests. A basic interest in this context is a vital interest, the denial of which leads to death or serious injury and a non-basic interest is one which may be denied without causing death, injury, or even major inconvenience.

The sorts of actions, which would be ruled out by this principle, include 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, picking of wildflowers for one private collection, capturing tropical birds, for sale as caged pets, trapping and

killing animals like alligators and turtles for their skins and shells to be used in making fashion products. All hunting and fishing which is done as an enjoyable pastime, when such activities are not necessary to meet the basic interests of human beings.¹⁴ In the above examples, the vital interests of animals or plants are sacrificed to the non-basic interests, that is recreational or 'luxury' interests- of human beings.

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Holmes Rolston III is at one with Taylor in believing that every organism has its own good which matters to it, and should be taken account of by us, whether it is sentient or not. Every organism has a good of its own, he says, because it is a system of processing information and using it to make its condition match one which is its goal or good. To suppose that the reaching of its good is of no importance in itself because it does not care what happens to it, represents only a prejudice in favor of our own form of caring, which does require sentience. In fact, it is not true that only sentient beings care what happens to them. A tree does 'care, in the only form of caring available to it; and why should I take no account of that form of caring because it is not my form of caring?'¹⁵ By this it means trees care in that

¹⁴ Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, 1986, 274

¹⁵ Holmes Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World*. Philadelphia: Temple University press, 1988, p106

they stand for themselves. It is hard on trees if we do not take their non-sentient caring seriously.

Rolston shows that environmental ethics advances beyond Kantian ethics, beyond humanistic ethics, in that it can treat as ends others besides humans. He says,

Kant knew something about others, but... the only others he could see were other humans, others who could say 'I'. Environmental ethics calls for seeing nonhumans, for seeing the biosphere, the Earth, ecosystem, communities, fauna, flora, natural kinds that cannot say 'I' but in which there is formed integrity, objective value independent of subjective value.¹⁶

The above quotation indicates that Rolston differs from Taylor in that he thinks the most important values, which an environmental ethics should teach us to recognise, do not exist at the level of individuals but at the level of species and eco-systems. Although the good of an individual matters somewhat in itself, it matters much more as a phase either in the life of the species to which it belongs or the ecosystem.

¹⁶ Ibid., p340

In his *Thinking about Nature*, Andrew Brennan attempts to provide a 'rational basis'¹⁷ for the same general type of position as that of the deep ecologists. He develops here a position called 'humanistic ecology' which is meant to fall between the extremes of merely shallow ecological ethics and deep ecological ethics. The essence of ecological humanism seems to lie in the claim that the identity of human beings, individually and as a race, is, in large part, a matter of their place in the larger bio-system. So in order to preserve and promote the goods of human life we must concern ourselves with the needs of nature as something intrinsically bound up therewith.

Richard Routley (later Sylvan) publicly argued that a completely new, non-anthropocentric ethic was needed to govern human actions affecting the environment. He argues that "the dominant Western ethical tradition" excludes an environmental ethic in principle—thereby, requiring us to develop one on a non-traditional basis. The anthropocentrism imbedded in what he called the 'dominant western view', or 'the western super ethic', is in effect 'human chauvinism'¹⁸

¹⁷ Andrew Brennan, *Thinking about Nature: An Investigation of Nature, Value and Ecology*, London/New York: Routledge, 1988, p. 28.

¹⁸ Routley, Richard, 'Is there a need for a new, an environmental ethic?' *Proceedings of the 15th World Congress of Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 205-10, Sophia: Sophia Press, 1973 (see also Sylvan, R.). Also see and Routley, V. 1980 'Human Chauvinism and Environmental Ethics' in Mannison, D., McRobbie, M. A., and Routley, R. (eds.) *Environmental Philosophy*, Canberra: Australian National University, Research School of Social Sciences, pp. 96-189.

This view, he argued, is just another form of class chauvinism, which is simply based on blind class 'loyalty' or prejudice, and unjustifiably discriminates against those outside the privileged class. In his 'last man' (and 'last person') arguments, Routley asked us to imagine the hypothetical situation in which the last person, surviving a world catastrophe, acted to ensure the elimination of all other living things and the destruction of all the landscapes after its demise. From the human-chauvinistic perspective, the last person would not do anything morally wrong since his or her destructive act in question would not cause any damage to the interest and well being of humans, who would have by then disappeared. Routley believed that the imagined last act would be morally wrong. An explanation for this judgement, he suggested, is that those nonhuman objects in the environment, whose destruction is ensured by the last person, have intrinsic value, a kind of value independent of their usefulness to humans. From his critique, Routley concluded that the main approaches in traditional western moral thinking were unable to allow the recognition that natural things have intrinsic value, and that the tradition required overhaul of a significant kind.

Bryan G. Norton assumed a less reactionary posture and argued for "weak anthropocentrism", an attitude of noblesse oblige toward nature, that would enhance and ennoble human life and character as well as

protect the environment. Robert Goodin has proposed a 'moderately deep' theory of value, according to which what imparts value to an outcome is the naturalness of the historical process through which it has come about.¹⁹

All these literatures gave impetus to the development of environmental ethics as a distinct discipline with environmental philosophers drafting and vigorously defending a variety of revolutionary theories to bring nature within the purview of ethics. These theories aim primarily at extending ethical concern beyond traditional limits- human life, health, and welfare- to include a large number of entities and collections of entities- for example, species and ecosystems that have not been given previous moral consideration.

However Passmore arguing that normal western ethics is entirely adequate mounted an anthropocentric counterattack to address the contemporary environmental malaise- since human actions that directly degrade the environment, indirectly harm human beings. He accepts that there are serious ecological problems- the problem of pollution, conservation, preservation and multiplication and that changes are required but there is no need for the rejection of the basic ethical value systems of western civilization.

¹⁹ Robert Goodin, A Great Theory of Value, in D J. Mulvaney (ed), *The Humanities and the Australian Environment*, Canberra Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1991, p 74

Ecological problems we are told are basically due to greed and shortsightedness, and what is needed, he says, is a more steadfast commitment to a 'perfectly familiar ethic'.²⁰ He argues that ethics have always taught us that greed is evil and there sure is no need of a new ethic to teach us so. For him,

We do not need the help of a 'new ethics' in order to justify our blaming those who make our rivers into sewers and our air unbreathable, who give birth to children in an over-populated world or- this is a little more disputable- who waste resources which posterity will need.²¹

He says that the alternative proposed by some of the proponents of 'new ethic' is not only not needed- it is essentially irrational, intellectually incoherent, mystical and even dangerous. It involves abandoning the hard won western tradition of critical investigation, a rejection of science, and civilization and a reversion to 'attitudes and modes of thought the west painfully shook off'.²² In short, it involves a return to the intellectual and cultural Dark Ages. He says, 'needing a new ethic' is not in the least like 'needing a new coat'.²³ These demands

²⁰ Passmore, 1974, p.187

²¹ Passmore, Attitudes to Nature, in R.S.Peters (ed), Nature and Conduct, London: Macmillan Press, 1975, p.262

²² Ibid, 177

²³ Ibid, 57

strike one as merely ridiculous. One is reminded, he says, of the exchange between Glendower and Hotspur in Henry IV Pt.I (III.i.53):

Glendower: I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

Hotspur: Why so can I, or so can any man,

But will they come when you do call for them?²⁴

A morality, a new religion, Passmore continues, is not the sort of thing one can simply conjure up. It can grow out of existing attitudes of mind, as an extension or development of them. Calling for a new morality, for the recognition of the intrinsic worth of all living things, is like calling spirits from the vasty deep. It sounds fine and worthy but ultimately it is an ineffectual gesture. New moralities cannot be conjured out of the air anymore than spirits from the vasty deep. A morality can only grow out of existing practices, values, and attitudes of mind, as an extension or development of them.

People who are concerned about the environment are therefore better off working with and within the value systems that already exist in whatever culture and ethical tradition they find themselves. For example, the idea of reverence for life, which is promoted in the writings of some environmentalists, is best understood as the development of an idea which is to be found in traditional religious and ethical thinking,

²⁴ Ibid,111

namely, the idea of reverence for human life. It can be linked most specifically to the Jewish principle that it is wrong to unnecessarily destroy:

‘Thou shalt not destroy’ was indeed converted by Rabbinical commentators into a general moral principle. The eighteenth century philosopher, Baumgarten, writing in the same tradition, condemns...what he calls ‘the spirit of destruction’ or ‘the habitual delight in the death of things’ and urges that a man possessed by it be shunned. One could go at least this far: the moral onus is on anyone who destroys. This is particularly so when, as in the case of species, the destruction is irreversible.²⁵

Passmore presents two ways of answering the question whether it constitutes a genuine problem that at ever-increasing rate men are converting wildernesses into tamed landscape and destroying the plants and animals, which once shared the earth with him. He says, we can think of wilderness and species as having an instrumental or intrinsic value. The first view sees that wilderness and species ought to be preserved for human ‘use’. The second view sees that they ought to be preserved because they have a ‘right to exist’.

²⁵ Passmore, 1974, 124

Wilderness and species are valuable not only as economic resources, actual and potential, but as providing opportunities for the pursuit of science, for recreation and retreat, as sources of moral renewal and aesthetic delight.²⁶

The argument for preservation so far presented is, for Passmore, a special case of the argument of conservation. The first of these arguments, economic resource, is a 'strong one' in so far as they allow the economic considerations, in a broad sense might outweigh the case for preservation. The only sense in which, Passmore holds the destruction of wilderness and species as 'intrinsically' wrong, is when he talks about the change in moral outlook where man have come to realize that it is wrong to cause suffering on animals unnecessarily.

There is, then such a thing as wanton destruction of nature, just as there is such a thing as wanton destruction of property or cultural artifacts. The reverence for non-human life which is demanded by deep ecologists can be seen as an extension of the sort of reverence people already feel for historical or cultural artifacts like works of art, monuments, or great buildings. This reverence is nothing radically new-

²⁶ Passmore, 1974, 101

it is embodied in the concept of 'vandalism'. Most cultures have a concept of vandalism, of wanton destructiveness of valued objects, and at the same time they cultivate attitudes of respect towards objects and places of antiquity. Such antiquities are 'time honored'- they are valued just because they are ancient and have earned the keep, as it were. It is arguable that this attitude of respect for time honored antiquities may be extended to things that are older than human time, things that are as old as the earth itself. If we can endorse a cultural taboo against the vandalizing of antiquities and works of art, we can also endorse a similar taboo against the needless destruction of nature's own antiquities, namely, wild species and wildernesses. As Passmore says, 'the man who cuts his name on a redwood is being a vandal, just as much as the man who scratches his initials on the portico of Wells Cathedral.'²⁷

Passmore's definition of conservation refers to saving of species and wilderness for future consumption. In response to the question whether we ought to pay attention to the needs of posterity, he presents two alternate views. He says, we cannot be certain that posterity will need what we save- or on the other side that it will not need what we should not think of saving. There is always the risk, too that our well intentioned sacrifices will have the long term effect of making the situation of posterity worse than it would otherwise be. That is the case

²⁷ Passmore, 1974, 125

for simply ignoring posterity, and doing what we can to repair present evils. On the other side, this is not our ordinary moral practice. We love and in virtue of that fact we are prepared to make sacrifices for the future and are not prepared to take risks, arising out of uncertainties, which would otherwise strike us as being rational. No doubt, we often make the wrong decisions; trying to protect what we love we in fact destroy it. Over-protection can be as damaging as neglect. But these uncertainties do not justify negligence. Furthermore, we now stand, if the only pessimistic scientists are right, in a special relationship to the future; unless we act, posterity will be helpless to do so. This imposes duties on us, which would not otherwise fall to our lot.²⁸

Frankena presents at least eight different types of ethics about the environment²⁹, all of which include instructions (directions, permissions, or prohibitions) about how we may or should treat the environment. It would be worthwhile to list them and see whether any of them can accommodate Passmore's views and also see to what extent they are relevant for the solution of ecological problems.

1. Ethical egoism concerns with certain facts about an agent himself, e.g., facts about what is in his own interest that determine what is

²⁸ Passmore, 1974, 98

²⁹ W.K.Frankena, *Ethics and the Environment*, in *Ethics and the Problems of the Twenty first Century*, K.E. Paster and K.M.Sayre (Eds), University of Notre Dame Press, 1979, p5

right or wrong, good or bad, in what he is or does. For it, an agent is or should be his own sole patient, perhaps not proximately but at least ultimately.

2. The second type consists of various forms of humanism or personalism; a view holding that what matters morally is finally only what happens to human beings or to persons. Kant takes such a view when he maintains, "Our duties toward animals are merely indirect duties toward humanity." These views are not in any proper sense egoistic, since they insist that all persons or all human beings are to be considered in morality, but they also insist, ultimately, only persons or only humans are to be considered.
3. The third type of ethics contends that the class of moral patients must be extended to include human beings and/or persons, but all consciously sentient beings. This is Warnock's position when he answers the question, "How far down the scale, so to speak, of the brute creation should moral relevance be taken to extend?" by saying that "it extends just as far as does the capacity to suffer.
4. The next type of ethics maintains that the range of moral patiency or relevance should be taken to extend even farther, namely, to include whatever is alive, flora as well as fauna. An example is Albert Schweitzer's well-known ethics of "reverence for life."

A man is truly ethical only when he obeys the compulsion to help all life, which he is able to assist, and shrinks from injuring anything that lives. He does not ask how far this or that life deserves one's sympathy as being valuable, not... whether and to what degree it is capable of feeling. Life as such is sacred to him. He tears no leaf from a tree, plucks no flower, and takes care to crush no insect.

5. Another type of ethics goes even further, holding that in some sense everything is to be considered as morally relevant, directly and not just indirectly. What matters ultimately is everything, not just what is personal, human, conscious, or alive.
6. The sixth type of ethics is theistic ethics where God is conceived of as transcendent (and not just as immanent) and then is held to be, ultimately, the one and only moral patient, the only being that finally matters morally.
7. It is also possible to combine two or more of the above types of ethics.
8. The last type of ethics include views that tell us to let nature alone, not to interfere with it, to cooperate with it, to follow or imitate it, etc. For all such views there is such a thing as nature and its ways, and the natural is the right and the virtuous both in general and in ecological matters.

Passmore's fit into the ethics of types 1 and 2 as in his ethical arguments, he treats human interest as paramount. He says, '... an ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the plants and animals growing on it would not only be about the behavior of human beings, as is sufficiently obvious, but would have to be justified by reference to human interests. The land, which a bad farmer allows to slip into a river, did not have a 'right' to stay where it was. The supposition that anything but a human being has 'rights' is, or so I have suggested, quite untenable'³⁰.

Passmore presents us two alternatives- (in the Western Civilization), the Dominion thesis, and (in the New Ethic), the challenger, consisting of the extreme view that nature is sacred, that man is never entitled to interfere with it or manipulate it in any way, and that the land, the earth, and all its occupants, have rights in exactly the same way as humans.³¹ The two varieties of the Dominion thesis Passmore distinguishes are the Despotic view (as he calls it) and the Responsible view. He says that the ecological problems can be solved (and can only be solved) within the fundamental Western ethical and metaphysical tradition, if not the central tradition then through a minor one, or by

³⁰ Passmore, John, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, London, Duckworth, 1974, p 187

³¹ Val Routley, *Critical Notice*, 1975, p172

encouraging 'seeds'. He argued that the Judeo-Christian tradition of thought about nature, despite being predominantly 'despotic', contained resources or 'seeds' for regarding humans as 'stewards' or 'perfectors' of God's creation. He identifies two non-despotic traditions that he believes to be rooted in Old Testament writings:

Two other (Western) traditions are also of considerable importance, in so far as they both deny that man, in relation to nature, is essentially a despot: the tradition that sees man as a 'steward', a farm-manager, actively responsible as God's deputy for the care of the world, and the tradition that sees him as co-operating with nature in an attempt to perfect it.³²

The Despotic view holds that the earth and its contents are created for, or exist entirely for, the benefit of man who can control its systems with very little effort or need for skill or understanding. 'Nature is wax in man's hands' and there are virtually no constraints on man's relations with nature. The Responsible or the non-despotic view holds that while it is permissible for man to manipulate the entire earth exclusively for human benefit, it is usually difficult for humans to do so successfully

³² Passmore, 1974, p28

and without unwanted ill consequences for themselves. Natural processes exist independently of humans and do not serve them. Successful manipulation requires skill, knowledge and understanding of natural processes, and taking careful account of the likely consequences of actions on other humans. To this extent, nature must be 'respected' while being made to serve human interests. These factors impose substantial constraints on man's permissible actions with respect to nature. Both these views however agree that humans are entitled to manipulate the earth, its ecosystems and all its non-human inhabitants for human benefit.

The Despotic view adopts an over-confident, arrogant attitude towards nature and the ease of manipulating it. It allows human-centeredness to become a delusion of absolute or nearly absolute power. In contrast the Responsible view holds a more modest position, which attempts to take account of man's limited ability to control nature, and his need for skill, knowledge and care. Passmore, as will anyone to whom the alternatives are so presented, adopts the Responsible view and agrees that the west needs a 'new ethic' insofar as Western ethics and traditions have encouraged the Despotic view. He argues that a historical basis for the Responsible exists in the Western traditions through the traditions of 'Stewardship' and cooperation with nature, and denies that

it is a real departure from the Western ethic. They both agree that natural items have a value only insofar as they serve human interests, and that all constraints on human action with respect to nature arise from and can be reduced to questions of obligations concerning other humans. The characteristics of these views make the critics conclude that they are both anthropocentric, as both agree and take as self-evident that it is permissible to manipulate the whole earth and what it contains exclusively in the human interest, that the value of a natural item is entirely a matter of its value for human interests, and that all constraints on behavior with respect to nature derive from responsibilities to other humans. Passmore sees no alternative to this human-centered view (with both the Dominion views taken together). Because:

An 'ethic dealing with man's relation to the land and the plants and animals that grow upon it' would not only be about the behaviour of human beings, as is sufficiently obvious, but would have to be justified by reference to human interest.³³

While Passmore identifies these alternative non-despotic Western traditions in order to show that orthodox Hebrew teaching did not

³³ Ibid. p187

support a despotic attitude toward nature, his aim was not merely apologetic. On the contrary, Passmore's larger purpose is to argue, in opposition to writers such as Lynn White, that our present ecological crisis does not require radical changes in our way of thinking about the natural world. Skeptical of the prospects for any radically new ethic, Passmore cautioned that the traditions of thought could not be abruptly overhauled. Any change in attitudes to our natural surroundings, which stood the chance of widespread acceptance, he argued, would have to resonate and have some continuity with the very tradition, which had legitimized our destructive practices. As Passmore puts it:

It is one thing to suggest that Western societies must learn to be more prudent in their attitude to technological innovation, less wasteful of natural resources, more conscious of their dependence on the biosphere. It is quite another thing to suggest that they can solve their ecological problems only if they abandon the analytical, critical approach which has been their peculiar glory and go in search of a new ethics, a new metaphysics, a new religion.³⁴

What Passmore has formulated in the preceding passage is the opposition of two types of ecological thinking: one that maintains that

³⁴ Ibid, p.3

our present ecological crisis can be resolved within the slightly altered horizon of traditional Western thinking, another that holds that the traditional Western thinking is intimately linked to the development of the ecological crisis itself, and thus cannot provide the solution for it. Passmore defends the former position, a position that has been labeled “reformist environmentalism” or “shallow ecology,” and disagrees with the latter, a position that its defenders have called “deep ecology”. While Passmore argues that the predominant Christian attitude toward nature, the “man-as-despot” tradition, is incompatible with both types of ecological thinking, he believes that the alternative Western traditions of “man-as-steward” and “man-as-creator” are compatible with reformist environmentalism. Moreover, since Passmore himself believes that our present ecological crisis can be resolved within the framework of reformist environmentalism, he concludes that these alternative Western traditions can provide the basis for the resolution of this crisis.

The only alternative to this position (despotic) and the only possibility for an new ethic, is the untenable suggestion that non-humans have rights or what Passmore takes it to be its equivalent, that we should think of nature a sacred, and hence totally inviolable and unalterable. He holds that, regarding nature as sacred is to think of it as having a mysterious life and that the attempts to ‘understand and control, a life

which we should submit to and worship' would be improper and sacrilegious. Such view is neither necessary nor sufficient as he thinks it cannot save the biosphere. He instead opts for science, which can 'convert mysteries into problems, to which we can hope to find solutions'.³⁵ To show that societies for whom nature is sacred have nevertheless destroyed their natural habitation, he takes a passage from Plato's *Critias* in which Plato describes Attica:

There are remaining only the bones of the wasted body, as they may be called.... All the richer and softer parts of the soil having fallen away, and the mere skeleton of the land being left. But in the primitive state of the country, its mountains were high hills covered with soil, and the plains... were full of rich earth, and there was abundance of wood in the mountains.³⁶

This decline, we are told, is testified to by the fact that 'sacred memorials' remain at points where once flowed rivers and streams but has gone dry by Plato's time. Passmore tries to show that man does not necessarily preserve, that is, the stream he has dedicated to a god; simple ignorance or greed can be as damaging as a technological know-how. He says that Japan does not escape ecological destruction despite

³⁵ Passmore, 1974, p175

³⁶ *Ibid*

its traditions of nature worship. That nature is in no sense sacred was a point on which Christian theology and Greek cosmology agreed. God, no doubt, he continues, could make particular places or objects sacred by choosing to take up residence in them, as in Roman Christianity he made sacred the sacrificial bread and wine. But no natural object was sacred in itself; there was no risk of sacrilege in felling a tree, or killing an animal.³⁷ He further adds, Christianity taught men that there was nothing sacrilegious either in analyzing or in modifying nature.³⁸

Deep ecologists, such as Arne Naess, Bill Devall, and George Sessions have disagreed with Passmore's assessment of the severity of our current ecological crisis, as well as with his suggestions concerning the manner in which this crisis is to be resolved. What these diverse thinkers have in common is the belief that the severity of our current ecological crisis precludes easy solution. Indeed, each of them argues that this crisis is so severe that reformist environmentalism will have only limited success, and that what is ultimately needed is a radically new way of thinking, a new way of thinking that rejects many of the basic presuppositions of traditional Western philosophical and religious writing. According to Naess, "ecologically responsible policies are concerned only in part with pollution and resource depletion. There are

³⁷ Passmore, *Attitudes To Nature*, 1975, p254

³⁸ *Ibid*

deeper concerns, which touch upon principles of diversity, complexity, autonomy, decentralization, symbiosis, egalitarianism, classlessness.”³⁹ Sessions adds that while Passmore has performed an invaluable service in “articulating the dominant Western paradigms of the man/nature relationship,” his endorsement of the “man-as-steward” and “man-as-creator” traditions, traditions that Sessions sees as “unjustifiably anthropocentric and ecologically unrealistic”-must be rejected. ⁴⁰ Rather, what is needed, according to Sessions, is a radical change in our dominant social paradigm, a change that will require “ a total reorientation of the thrust of Western culture.”⁴¹

As we see it, the recent discussion involves two contestants namely “old” type of ethics and some “new” proposed ecological ethics. Holmes Rolston III takes the issue to between a humanistic or anthropological ethics and a planetary or ecosystemic one,⁴² also called biocentric approach. According to what is often called ‘anthropocentric’ approach, human beings (or rational agents) have a unique, ultimate moral status, such that all moral claims must terminate in statements concerning human goods, rights or virtues. Going by this view, natural

³⁹ Naess, 1973, p.95

⁴⁰ Sessions, p.515

⁴¹ George Sessions 1985 p.30

⁴² Rolston, Ethics 85, 1975, p103ff

entities can enter into moral calculation only indirectly to the degree that they are useful in satisfying human needs or desires. On the other hand, according to the 'biocentric' approach, at least some natural entities have an ultimate moral status similar to that of humans. Here, it is possible that at least some justifications of moral claims can terminate in statements about the goods, rights or virtues of these natural entities. Arne Naess takes the tension as two responses to ecological degradation-shallow and deep.⁴³ The shallow response recommends that we be nice to nature so that nature will be nice for us. The deep ecological response, on the other hand, insists that a proper appreciation of nature leads to a recognition that "the equal right to live and blossom is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom". Whichever way the ethicists uphold their views and argue, it came about as an awareness of the present environmental crisis, as responses in dealing with the problem. Working within a traditional western ethical system and extending its base class to include non human beings is a direct and conservative approach to a non-anthropocentric theory of environmental ethics. Peter Singer pioneered this approach by extending classical utilitarianism. Jeremy Bentham specifically averred that their capacity to suffer should entitle animals to moral standing. Singer accordingly, insists that all "sentient" beings should be accorded moral consideration.

⁴³ Naess, 1973,p96

One would agree with Frankena's view that 'our old ethics or at least its best parts are entirely satisfactory as a basis for our lives in the world.'⁴⁴ What we need, he continues, is not a new ethics but a new "moral rearmament," a revival of moral dedication. We do act out of thoughtlessness, self-interest, or disregard for the requirements or ideals of morality, and that the present status of environment matters may reflect an inadequacy, not in our ethics but in our morals.

⁴⁴Frankena, 1979, p3

CHAPTER IV

THE RELIGIOUS APPROACH

The human community is in search of new and sustaining relationships to the earth amidst an environmental crisis that threatens the very existence of all life forms on the planet. While scientists, economists, and policymakers are debating the causes and solutions of this crisis, the facts of widespread destruction are causing alarm in many quarters. Indeed, from some perspectives the future of human life itself appears to be threatened. From resource depletion and species extinction to pollution overload and toxic surplus, the planet is struggling against unprecedented assaults. This is aggravated by population explosion, industrial growth, technological manipulation, and military proliferation heretofore unknown by the human community. From many accounts the basic elements that sustain life sufficient water, clean air, and cultivatable land are at risk. The role of religion in the solution of the existing crisis between man and nature is crucial.

For many people, an environmental crisis of this complexity and scope is not only the result of certain economic, political, and social factors. It is also a moral and spiritual crisis which, in order to be addressed, will require broader understanding of ourselves as creatures of nature, embedded in life cycles and dependent on ecosystems. Very often

the argument is that a spiritual revolution, a new religion is needed which will teach men to regard all nature as divine and man as only one of God's creatures.

Here 'religion' is understood as those systems of belief, ritual, institutional life, spiritual aspiration, and ethical orientation. Teachings can be marked as 'religious' in the way they assert that people are essentially connected to a Supreme Being whose authority is distinct from worldly powers. Some religions, for example, Buddhism spell it as an achievement of a state of consciousness that transcends the attachments and passions of our ordinary social egos. Religious attitudes thus turn on a sense of what Paul Tillich calls 'ultimate concern'.

Spiritual teachings have celebrated and linked us to the non-human world, reminding us of our relation with air, water, and fellow living beings, that we are part of nature. Many people agree that religious beliefs provide primary values concerning our place in the universe, our obligation to other people and other forms, and what makes up a truly 'good' life. As the historian Lynn White observed,

"What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is, by religion."¹

¹ Lynn White, Jr, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (March 1967) 1204

On the question as to whether 'we ought to pay any attention for the needs of posterity'², Passmore argues that 'men do not need religion to justify their concern for the future'³. That concern, he says, arises out of their character as loving human beings. "Religion, indeed, tell its adherents-whether in the accents of the East or of the West- to set such concern aside; 'to take no thought for the morrow'. In short, the faithful cannot hope by recourse to Revelation, Christian or Muslim, to solve the problems which now confront them"⁴

Religion ^{it} has a part to play too in tackling the environmental crisis and this, I show from a quick survey into some of the world's religions. However, I wish to carry out a lengthy discussion of Christianity. It by no means follow that this religion provides better guidance in our relation with nature^a. It is rather a direct continuity from Passmore's understanding of the 'Western traditions'. The threat of global ecological collapse need not lead us to abandon our religions or our religious traditions. Rather it could be a major stimulus to their revitalization. For many, an important component of the current environmental crisis is spiritual and ethical. It is here that the religions of the world may have a role to play in cooperation with other individuals, institutions, and initiatives that have been engaged with environmental

² Passmore, John, *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions*, London: Duckworth, 1974 p75

³ *Ibid*, p100

⁴ *Ibid*, 1974, p 110

issues for a considerable period of time. Religions are beginning to respond in remarkably creative ways. They are not only rethinking their theologies but are also reorienting their sustainable practices and long-term environmental commitments. In so doing, the very nature of religion and of ethics is being challenged and changed

When the Parliament of the World's Religions convened in Chicago in 1993 and formulated its consensual "Declaration toward a Global Ethic," it included in its commitment to "a culture of non-violence, respect, justice, and peace"⁵ It affirmed those 'ancient guide lines for human behaviors which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world and which are the conditions for a sustainable world order' It spoke of the 'interdependent' nature on the 'whole' of life and emphasized 'respect for the community of living beings' and 'preservation of Earth, the air, water and soil '⁶

A look into some of the teachings of the religions, though in passing, reveals diverse views towards nature In Hinduism, the Vedas and the universal laws of nature which control the universe and govern the cycles of creation and dissolution were made

⁵ Pamela Smith, What Are They Saying About Environmental Ethics?, Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah, N J ,p67

⁶ Hans Kung and Karl-Josef Kuschel, eds , A Global Ethic The Declaration fo the Parliament of the World's Religions(New York Continuum, 1993),14-15

manifest by the All-knowing One. By His great power were produced the clouds and the vapors. After the production of the vapors, there intervened a period of darkness after which the Great Lord and Controller of the universe arranged the motions which produce days, nights, and other duration of time. The Great One then produced the sun, the moon, the earth, and all other regions as He did in previous cycles of creation. (*Rigveda* 10:190-1-3)

The Hindus accept the whole creation as the unfolding of the supreme one into many. To them, the worlds in the heaven, all the planets and stars, and the sun and the moon were created by Visvakarman, who also made earth with its animals, birds, trees, flowers, rivers, mountains and, of course, man and left them all to interact, develop and evolve. This perception of man is represented in Vedas:

Born to Thee, on Thee move mortal creatures;
Thou bearest them- the biped and the quadruped;
Thine, O Earth, are the five races of men, for whom,
Surya (Sun) as he rises spreads with his rays
The light that is immortal.

(*Atharvaveda*, 12.1.15)⁷

⁷ O. P Dwivedi, B N Tiwari, Environmental Crisis and Hindu Religion, Gitanjali Publishing House, New Delhi, 1987, p 43

This verse in *Atharvaveda* establishes that the earth is not only for human beings to enjoy but also for all other creatures. This view is further substantiated by *Upanishadic* ideology:

From Him, too, gods are manifoldly produced,
The celestials (sadhya), men, cattle, birds,
The in-breath and the out-breath, rice and barley austerly,
Faith, truth, chastity, and the law.

(*Mundakoppanishad*, 2.2)⁸

The most important aspect of Hindu theology, though, is the association accorded to different species with deities. Most importantly, it is believed that Supreme Being is actually incarnated in various species.

This form is the source and indestructible seed of multifarious incarnations within the universe, and from the particle and portion of this form, different living entities, like demi-gods, animals, human beings and others, are created.

(*Srimad-Bhagavatam*, 1.3.5)⁹

Traditionally Hindus have not only considered the whole of the animal world as God's creation, but they have been advised by the seers to treat all other species as their own children. The following verse illustrates:

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

One should look upon deers, camels, monkeys, donkeys, rats, reptiles, birds, and flies as though they were their own children, what is that which distinguishes from those (children).

*(Srimad-Bhagavatam, 7.14.9)*¹⁰

There are numerous traditions in Hinduism, which affirm particular rivers, mountains, or forests as sacred. 'Brahman, the ultimate reality is understood as the 'soul', or inner essence, of all things'.¹¹ The basic recurring theme in Hindu mythology is the creation of the world by the self-sacrifice of God—'sacrifice' in the original sense of 'making sacred'—whereby God becomes the world, which, in the end, becomes again God. This creative activity of the Divine is called 'lila', the play of God, and the world is seen as the stage of the divine play. Like most of Hindu mythology, the myth of lila has a strong magical flavour. Brahman is the great magician who transforms himself into the world and he performs this feat with his 'magic creative power', which is the original meaning of maya in the Rig Veda.¹² It is in the concept of lila, the creative play of the gods, Hindu theology engages the world as a creative manifestation of the divine.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*, Great Britain, Flamingo, 1983, p. 99.

¹² Ibid, p.100

The Buddhist religion revolves around compassion, respect and tolerance for every human being and all other creatures that share this planet. This is exemplified in a Metta-Suttam prayer:

As the mother protects her child even at the risk of her own life, so there should be mutual protection and goodwill, which is limitless among all beings. Let limitless goodwill prevail in the whole world-below, all around, untarnished with any feeling of disharmony and discord.¹³

Buddhists regard survival of all species as an undeniable right because as co-inhabitants of this planet, other species have the same right for survival that human beings enjoy. On the other hand, a positive attitude causes happiness and peace. Buddhism is a religion of love, understanding, and compassion, and is committed to the ideal of nonviolence. As such, the religion attaches great importance to conservation and protection of the environment of the environment.

Buddhists avoid cruelty to other living things and exploitation of nature beyond the limit of one's survival. They demonstrate that unmindful negligence of these principles of right living may lead to chaos resulting in environmental crisis.

Islam holds that humanity does have a choice in our interaction with nature. If they choose to pollute the environment and do harm to living creatures for earthly comforts, the believers in the holy Qu'ran will

¹³ Dwivedi, O.P., Environmental Ethics, Delhi: Sanchar Publishing House, 1994, p.57

face an obvious truth. Islam permits the use of the natural environment, but this utilization should not involve unnecessary destruction, Humans are not the owners, but the maintainers of the due balance and measure which God provided for them and for the animals that live with them. In Islam, the Holy Qu'ran and the divinely inspired work of Prophet Muhammad establish the foundation and rules for the conservation of nature.¹⁴

The East Asian traditions of Confucianism and Taoism, founded by Kung Fu Tzu or Confucius and Lao Tzu respectively remain, in certain ways, some of the most life affirming in the spectrum of world religions. They have been treated as ideal for its ecological sympathies. Mary Evelyn Tucker has asserted that: "While Taoism and Confucianism are quite different in their specific teachings, they share a worldview that might be described as organic, vitalistic and holistic"¹⁵. Confucianism was the philosophy of social organization, of common sense and practical knowledge. It provided Chinese society with a system of education and with strict conventions of social etiquette. One of its main purposes was to form an ethical basis for the traditional Chinese family system with its complex structure and its rituals of ancestor worship. Taoism, on the other hand, was concerned primarily with the observation of nature and the

¹⁴ Ibid, p48

¹⁵ Mary Evelyn Tucker, Ecological Themes in Taoism and Confucianism" in Tucker and Grim, Eds , P 151

discovery of its Way, or Tao. Human happiness, according to the Taoists, is achieved when one follows the natural order, acting spontaneously and trusting one's intuitive knowledge. The movements of the Tao are not forced upon , , but occur naturally and spontaneously. Spontaneity is the Tao's principle of action, and since human conduct should be modelled on the operation of the Tao, spontaneity should also be characteristic of all human actions. Acting in harmony with nature thus means for the Taoists, acting spontaneously and according to one's true nature. It means trusting one's intuitive intelligence, which is innate in the human mind just as the laws of change are innate in all things around us.

Taoism is primarily a cosmic religion, the study of the universe and the place and function of man and all creatures and phenomena in it.¹⁶ Nature is regarded as possessing worth or value 'for its own sake', and human interference should be minimal, if not nil in Taoist thinking.¹⁷ In Taoism the central idea is relationship. We cannot approach nature as a thing to be mastered but as a partner in a relationship. The goal is to become natural part of the original order. The way to discover that original order is to turn to nature. Early Taoist philosophers left the cities to learn from nature and primitive people living in remote mountain villages. They hoped to eventually bring human civilization into the natural order

¹⁶ Cooper, J.C., Taoism: The way of the mystic, Northamptonshire: The Aquarian Press,

¹⁷ Tucker, P154-155

In Taoism, Nature is taken to be infinitely wise, infinitely complex, and infinitely irrational. One must take a yielding stance and abandon all intellectual preconceptions. The goal is *wu wei*, doing nothing contrary to nature. Nature does not need to be perfected or improved. It is we who need to change; we need to come into accord.¹⁸

Confucianism emphasizes the interrelationship of the 'human order' and the natural order and strives for a balanced reciprocal ideal.¹⁹ The seamless interconnection between the divine, human, and natural worlds that characterizes these traditions has been described as an anthropo-cosmic worldview. There is no emphasis on radical transcendence as there is in the Western traditions. Rather, there is a cosmology of a continuity of creation stressing the dynamic movements of nature through the seasons and the agricultural cycles. This organic cosmology is grounded in the philosophy of *ch'i* (material force), which provides a basis for appreciating the profound interconnection of matter and spirit. To be in harmony with nature and with other humans while being attentive to the movements of the *Tao* (Way) is the aim of personal cultivation in both Confucianism and Taoism. (It should be noted, however, that this positive worldview has not prevented environmental degradation (such as

¹⁸ Internet source

¹⁹ Ibid. p158

deforestation) in parts of East Asia in both the pre-modern and modern period.)

Most indigenous peoples have environmental ethics embedded in their worldviews. Native religions or tribal religions de-center the human beings from the scheme of things called nature. They believe that spiritual forces permeate the things they see around them- stones, trees, rivers, etc. and living peacefully and even at times, appeasing among these inspired beings is part of the wisdom of life. Although today, with the advent of Christianity, the belief is slowly diminishing, the people of Longkhum village in Nagaland (North East India) used to worship nature. There is a place called the “Longnangba”, literally meaning- “piling up of stones”. Here they worship the stones and the trees. Anyone walking through that place must take care not to fall down or else a bad omen befalls on that person. If trees are cut down, it angers the deity and as such he causes big thunderstorms. Whenever there was a thunderstorm, the people would say, “today somebody has displeased the god.” People give life offerings like fowls, eggs etc.

The religious views at the basis of indigenous life-ways involve respect for the sources of food, clothing, and shelter that nature provides. Gratitude to the creator and to the spiritual forces in creation is at the

heart of most indigenous traditions. The ritual calendars of many indigenous peoples are carefully coordinated with seasonal events such as the sound of returning birds, the blooming of certain plants, the movements of the sun, and the changes of the moon.

For instance, the Akas of Arunachal Pradesh (of North- East India) identify the higher gods with the four major forces of nature: the Sky, the Mountain, the Earth and Water. These four control a hierarchy of deities under them. Each deity performs his well-defined role and ensures protection to his devotees. Earth is hard yet bountiful and gives them food. The sky above is the great protector who, when necessary, sends thunder and rains. The mountains around fill the people with deep feelings of awe and reverence, the waters of the rivers, similarly, appears so powerful that man can hardly challenge them. The mountain and sky are the man-gods while earth and river are woman-goddesses. Each of these gods and goddesses has a qualifying term of address of 'father' (Au) and 'mother' (Ain).²⁰

Many writers have attributed the origin of caring about nature to Mysticism. It is commonly defined as the doctrine or belief that through contemplation and love man can achieve a direct and immediate consciousness of God or of divine truth without the use of reason or of the ordinary senses. Mysticism is understood as a method of realization of the Ultimate Reality. It is defined as the habit or tendency of religious

²⁰ Sujata Miri, *Ethics and Environment: Theory and the Adi and Khasi Practice*, Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 2001, p.56

thought and feeling of those who seek direct communion with God or the divine.²¹ It is concerned with the nature of reality, the individual's struggle to attain a clear vision of reality, and the transformation of consciousness that accompanies such vision. Mysticism is found in all great religions of the world. According to the Upanishads, Knowledge is an enquiry into of the mystery of the 'ultimate reality' and it cannot be fully described in language. This reality, called Brahman, is the unifying concept, which gives Hinduism its essentially monistic character in spite of the worship of numerous gods and goddesses.²² According to Plotinus, mysticism is 'a flight of the alone to the alone'. This shows that in mystical method the individual establishes personal relation with the Ultimate Reality. He forgets the world and even himself in the devotion to God.

It is also the characteristic of mysticism that after its experience the individual feels complete satisfaction. In the words of J.H. Leuba, 'To realize the presence of the God of love is the mystic's method of security of the essential wants'.²³

Passmore admits that although 'nature-mysticism, with its veneration of nature as sacred or divine, is incompatible with the central,

²¹ Chambers 20th Century Dictionary

²² Fritjof Capra, The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism, Flamingo, Great Britain, 1983, p 99

²³ Leuba, J.H., The Psychology of Religious Mysticism, p120

Christian or scientific, Western tradition, it had nevertheless had a 'continuing importance'.²⁴ Mysticism, he continues, has helped in establishing the value of contemplative enjoyment of nature and has insisted on the unifying links between human life, on the one hand, and the life of nature on the other. On the contrary, in his chapter 'Removing the Rubbish', Passmore includes spiritual conceptions of nature, such as 'nature mysticism', among the (intellectual) 'rubbish' that needs removing if we are to address environmental issues rationally and practically. He argues:

"In so far as ecological problems can be solved only with the help of scientific discovery and technological invention, they can be solved only within the Western rational tradition. Mystical contemplation will not reveal to the chemist the origins of the Los Angeles smog nor enable the engineer to design an effective device for reducing its intensity.... Mystical contemplation will not clean our stream or feed our peoples'.²⁵

To a Christian, the world in which we live in belongs to God. God is revealed as moral in character, and humans are created in a relationship with God where they must give account to him. People are not autonomous but accountable to the Maker of all things. They are the ones

²⁴ Passmore, p28

²⁵ Ibid. p194

to whom this world has been given as a gift and humankind must care for this gift. This care can be referred to as stewardship. The manner in which we treat the gift expresses our attitude toward the one who gave it. Mankind is placed into a garden, which can be described as a web of life. They are dependent upon the web for their survival; if humans violate the moral and natural laws of the web of life they do so at their peril. As a result human beings are to treat the gift of creation in a morally responsible manner. In fact, it is believed that a time will come for “destroying those who destroy the earth” (Rev 11:18).

At the very beginning God gives to the man the task of naming the animals. This demonstrates God’s desire to challenge the man’s understanding of the world around him. Prehistoric record of the Creator’s activity describes an event referred to by the theologians as the Fall. This event is absolutely essential to our understanding of nature as we find it around us today. Because of man's sin in the garden everything has changed for the worse. Life is now marred and scarred. The burden of sin and death now ruin a formerly perfect world.

The Christian view and attitude has been blamed for the ecological crises. In the year 1966, the historian Lynn White addressed the American Association for the Advancement of Science on 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis' and laid the blame squarely at the feet of

Christianity. The population explosion, pollution and 'the now geological deposits of sewage and garbage' are 'at least partly to be explained as a realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature'²⁶ Although several scholars have exposed weaknesses of White's position, elements of his argument still prevail in discussions about the environment and Christianity For White, Christianity accepted this biblical view of creation, fostering the attitude that human beings transcend nature and may exploit it He argues that this attitude has shaped the development of modern Western science and technology, which have posed threats to our environment

The rejection of pantheism is seen as one of the greatest factors in Christians' treatment of the earth. Pantheistic, or pagan, religions worshipped many gods instead of one omnipotent deity Many of these gods were associated with nature, which sacrilized nature Animism believed that everything on Earth, such as animals, rocks, plants, rivers, and people, was invested with a spirit. It stated that all must live in harmony and be treated with equal respect. Animists communicated with the spiritual beings through prayer. Some tribes made offerings to the spirits. Animists are also opposed to wasting any element of a spirit, which has been sacrificed.

²⁶ Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" Science March 10, 1967 Vol 155, Number 3767, p 1205

Polytheism was replaced by monotheism. The specific deities, with their sprites and nymphs, were removed; in their place was one God, transcendent over everything. This God created nature; He also gave Him power over nature. Because of this, Christians refused to identify God with nature, which in turn made nature less sacred.

White comments on the differences between pantheism and monotheism:

“In Antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own *genius loci*, its guardian spirit. These spirits were accessible to men, but were very unlike men; centaurs, fauns, and mermaids show their ambivalence. Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it appeased. By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.”²⁷

This view has been disputed. Scholarly analysis say that the author of Genesis 1:26 did not have abuse of nature in mind when he wrote this section. The sections of Genesis, which some people claim are the basis for a bad ethos of nature, can be read otherwise. It can be interpreted as telling humans to manage the land so that they may sustain themselves

²⁷ *ibid.* p.1206

and pass an intact ecosystem to their children ²⁸ However, the reader does not always perceive the author's original meaning. What the author *meant* might be different than what the reader *interprets* the author to mean.

Charles M. Murphy asks his readers, "Is the Bible perpetuating a misguided Anthropocentrism as well as encouraging the continued exploitation of the planet?"²⁹ His answer relates God's intention in giving humanity dominion over nature: dominion means, "to care for" in this context, not to exploit. Would it make sense for the Bible to advocate the exploitation of nature? Humans may have dominion over the earth, but as any leader or king knows, dominion requires responsible treatment of subjects, or else the dominion cannot exist.

Some people believe that while Christianity may be monotheistic, it has a God, which is panentheistic. Panentheism is the belief that God is in everything, and everything is in God. God can be seen in nature because He made everything that is natural. Therefore, it makes no sense to separate God from nature, or to harm nature, since doing so would indirectly harm God.

Another argument against positive Christian attitudes towards nature is Eschatology. The early Christians strongly felt that Jesus'

²⁸ Eileen P. Flynn, *Cradled in Human Hands*, Kansas City, Missouri: Sheed & Ward, 1991, p. 79.

²⁹ Charles Murphy, *At Home on Earth*, New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1989, p. 92.

second coming was imminent. They did not pay attention to earthly things because they were more concerned with preparing for Jesus' second coming. The counter-argument states that eschatology is not responsible for a weak ethic towards the earth. In fact, since God created the earth, then it should be given as much attention as anything else, which God has created. Although it is true that the earth is a creation of God, and it would make sense that nature should be treated well by a person who is preparing for the second coming of Jesus, this was not a concern for the early Christians, who were more occupied with spiritual matters.

Dualism is another barrier between the Christian and reverence towards nature. Dualism is the thought that things can be divided into two parts, one of which is always inferior to the other: evil and good, time and eternity, matter and spirit, non-human and human. With each pair, the first notion is devalued, while the second is held in high regard. Indeed, it is hard to give equal thought to two opposites. In this respect, the dualism is between God and earthly concerns. However, if one considers the previous notion that God is connected to the earth and its creatures because God made them, and then there should be no duality between God and nature. Nevertheless, things of the mind and spirit are frequently separated from things of the earth and life without spirit (i.e., plants and animals). The interpretation of the biblical texts is up to the reader's

religion. In Catholicism and some Protestant religions, the Bible's meaning is interpreted by a particular figure, such as the Pope. In other Christian religions, the reader interprets the Bible. Either way, if the interpretation supports stewardship of the earth, then there is no conflict between environmental interests and religious thought. However, if the interpretation views the texts as supporting man's exploitation of nature, then there is a problem between the Bible and the planet. The dilemma lies in the interpretation.

Modern Biblical scholarship, however, have come up with two traditions- the P and J traditions that can be used to explain the two creation stories contained in the book of Genesis (1-2:4, 2:5-25). Philosophers, ecologists, scientists need to be aware of this view- also known as the "Wellhausen hypothesis". The J: Yahwist tradition is the earliest tradition and it belongs to the southern kingdom of Judah and is generally characterized by an elegant style for the colorful presentation of scenes and dialogues, deep psychological and theological insights and also an unabashed use of anthropomorphism.

When it looks back at the relevance of the creation of man, an item in proto-history, and the election of the patriarchs and the event of the Exodus, items in history, all history is interpreted by it as serving God's specific plan for man through the chosen people.³⁰

³⁰ Agera, C.R., Two Biblical Myths of Creation: An Exploration in Ecological Philosophy, *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, vol.13, no.3, 1996, p.115

The P: Priestly source is attributed to the priests of Jerusalem, hence its concern is largely liturgical; its themes center on the cultic life of Israel.

It is fond of genealogies, chronological precisions and minute descriptions of ritual elements. It is also careful to avoid the anthropomorphisms of the J source....Hence there are a host of prescriptions for ritual and legal cleanliness.³¹

Both the viewpoints are two separate, powerful and distinctive approaches but somewhere down the line they got mixed up which is responsible for the misinterpretation of the creation stories.

Passmore has based a number of arguments and defenses on the accusation of Lynn White too. According to Lynn White the roots of our ecological crisis lie in the 'Judaeo-Christian' belief that man, being made in God's image, is set apart from nature, and that the entire physical creation was brought into being for human benefit and rule. The immediate roots of the crisis are to be found in the 19th century coalition of science and technology. Pagan animism involved respect for the guardian spirits of trees, streams, and hills; Christianity allowed its adherents to disregard the feelings of natural objects, and with Christianity-

³¹ Ibid

“The spirits in natural objects, which formerly had protected nature from man, evaporated. Man’s effective monopoly on spirit in this world was confirmed and the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature crumbled.”³²

He says that we cannot solve our problems with more science and technology. At the end of his article, Lynn White suggests two things we can do to help resolve the environmental crisis through religion: find a new religion, or rethink our old one³³. He hints at adopting Zen Buddhism, saying that its thoughts on nature are opposite those of Christianity, but he says that this religious philosophy is deeply rooted and conditioned in Asian tradition. He is therefore doubtful of its validity in the Western world. He then suggests that we look at Saint Francis of Assisi, who tried to dethrone man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God’s creatures.³⁴

What if we took Francis’s thought and reconsidered it? White states “we shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man”.³⁵ While Christianity might not actually or explicitly state that nature serves man, many people understand Genesis to mean that humanity has dominion over the Earth. More specifically, this is often

³² *ibid.* p.190

³³ Lynn white, P. 1206

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

interpreted as the right to exploit the Earth. Even if the author of Genesis didn't mean for the account of creation to suggest exploitation, this notion is often read into it.

Passmore rejects White's view that the Old Testament must be interpreted as exploitative, though he holds that it does not forbid despotic attitudes, and that the laws requiring various forms of consideration for animals are either responses to heathen rituals or motivated by concern for property. He also refutes the view that this Christian attitude is rooted in Judaeo-Christianity.

“If then one can speak of ‘Christian arrogance’ in supposing that all things are made for men, it must be with the proviso that it is not Hebraic-Christian but Graeco-Christian ‘arrogance’; its roots do not lie, as Origen and many others after him have supposed, in teachings which derive from Judaism and are taken over from the source by Christianity. It is one thing to say, following Genesis, that man has dominion over nature in the sense that he has the right to make use of it: quite another to say, following the Stoics, that nature exists only in order to serve his interests.”³⁶

In the article, “The Judaeo-Christian tradition” Arthur Peacocke and Peter Hodgson have summarized the fundamental Judaeo-Christian beliefs about God, humanity and nature that are relevant to the environmental debate. They say that the material world is essentially

³⁶ Passmore, John, 1974, p17

good, ordered and of value to God. Nature is desacralised, revalued and historicized. It is not to be worshipped for itself but valued as God's creation. God created human beings in His own image and likeness, free beings responsible for their actions. He appointed them stewards over the earth and gave him the fruits of the earth for their own use. God's cares for the world and cares for it through the agency of humanity. Human beings have fallen from God's grace and are prone to evil.

Passmore sets out to argue the fact that the Hebraic Christianity is all right and rather blames the Greek influence. To drive his point home, he gives a step-by-step progression of different ideologies of philosophers with Greek influence. He says that Genesis has often been blamed as the source and origin of the West's ecological troubles. He observes that the accusation made against the Western attitudes to nature is that it is infected with arrogance. Genesis, Passmore admits, tells man not only what they can do but also what they should do. God creates man and tells him: "To have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over the earth and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth' (Genesis 1:26) He also issues a mandate to mankind to "be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28)

Passmore points out the first creation story as telling us that man was given dominion over the animals. On the other hand the second story says that they were created as man's auxiliaries, as 'helpmeet for them', where Adam is represented as giving *names* to the animals. He then points out that in primitive thought to have possession of a thing's name is to have power over it.³⁷ Here Passmore tries to show that despite the fact that the Old Testament (O.T.) insists man's dominion over nature, God did not leave the fate of the animals entirely in man's hands. There is evidence that God gave 'every green herb' as food to 'every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air and to everything that creepeth upon the earth.' Even when God flooded the earth, God took pains to ensure the preservation of the beasts as much as men. Proverbs 12:10 teach men to care for their sheep and cattle. The image of the good shepherd whose flocks 'will not want' comes as naturally to the lips of the psalmist as it does to Ezekiel.³⁸

Passmore presents two possible interpretations to this Old Testament (O.T.) view about man's dominion -

1. Man as an absolute ruler takes care of the world as far as he benefits.
2. Man as a good shepherd takes care of the living things over which he rules for their own sake, governing them not with force but in the manner

³⁷ Passmore, p8

³⁸ Passmore, p8

of a good shepherd anxious to preserve them in the best condition for his master.

Though the second one, he says, has recently come into favour, earlier the first one was more predominant. The first view is the critics' base for their accusations. Going by the first view, Passmore claims that,

“Although the Old Testament, I have said, by no means suggest that whatever exists was created for man's sake, there is one point on which it is absolutely clear: nature is not sacred.”³⁹

For Passmore, nature in itself is not divine because man rules over it. Unlike Eastern religions, he says, the religion of the Hebrews recognizes a sharp distinction between God and nature. Man's dealings with nature are sharply separated from his dealings with God. It is his relationship with God, which really matters. The Hebrew God is transcendent not immanent: he creates and rules nature but is not to be identified with it. The Hebrews did not consider nature as having a 'mysterious life' and this certainly left man free to exploit it without any qualms like other societies.

Passmore insists, “Nothing is sacred in this tradition except God and what, like Sinai, is specifically dedicated to God.”⁴⁰ God owns

³⁹ Ibid. p9



everything but 'man is at liberty, under a special charter from God, to exploit it as he wills' unless God puts certain restrictions to some.

'Nature was something, and God quite another.'⁴¹ This was a point on which both the Jews and Christians agreed, and this agreement, Passmore says, was of fundamental importance in determining the attitudes of the West

Understandings of nature in the western world can roughly be divided (with some inevitable overlap) into five historically important categories: Nature as a physical place; nature as the collective phenomena of the world or universe; nature as an essence, quality and/or principle that informs the workings of the world or universe, nature as an inspiration and guide for people and source of authority governing human affairs, and, finally, nature as the conceptual opposite of culture.⁴²

Passmore emphasizes two points on which the Jews and Christians differed. First, the Old Testament, unlike so many Christian theologians, does not set up an unbridgeable gap between man and nature. Secondly, it is uncompromisingly theocentric: nature exists not for man's sake but for the greater glory of God. It is here, Passmore points out-

"the Christian separation of man from the animals and the Christian view that nature was made for man, lies the seed of an attitude to

⁴⁰ *ibid* p 10

⁴¹ *Ibid* p11

⁴² Peter Coates, *Nature: Western Attitudes*, Polity Press, U.K., 1998, p 3

nature far more properly describable as 'arrogant' than the purely O.T. conception of man's dominion"⁴³

Christianity, says Passmore, with its God who took human shape is or tends to be anthropocentric. He is confident to say that the peculiarities of Christian attitudes to nature derive in large part from its man-centeredness. Passmore agrees with the critics of Christianity when they say that Christianity has encouraged man to think of himself as nature's absolute master, for whom everything that exists was designed. He does not agree however when they suppose that this is Hebrew teaching. He rather believes that it originates with the Greeks.

Traditional Greek religion does not encourage the view that man either was, or should seek to become, master of the world. Seeking mastery would "be *hubris*, an attempt on man's part to set himself up as a god: such presumption would undoubtedly bring calamities about his head."⁴⁴ The Greek Enlightenment however rejected this concept of *hubris* and so they maintained that animal life exists purely and simply for man's sake. To strengthen this point, Passmore brings in Aristotle as arguing in his *Politics* that 'plants are created for the sake of animals, and the animals for the sake of men; the tame for our use and provision; the wild, at least for the greater part, for our provision also, or for some other

⁴³ Ibid. p12

⁴⁴ Ibid. , P13

advantageous purposes, as furnishing us with clothes, and the like'.⁴⁵ Aristotle takes this conclusion, we are told, to follow from the premise that 'nature makes nothing either imperfect or in vain'.

Man's place in nature was a major point of dispute between the Epicureans and Stoics. The Epicureans are shown as saying that it is quite absurd to suppose that the world- 'so foolish the design, contrived so ill'- was created by a God for human use.⁴⁶ The Stoics, on the other hand, hold the view that all creatures are designed to serve man. Man is the only one who can make advantageous use of nature so they were created for them. The universe, as they saw it, is a vast body, providentially governed to serve the interests of only its rational members- men and gods, and as such free from moral censure.⁴⁷

Passmore admits that even the Graeco-Christian doctrine of nature does have practical guidance in two ways- conservative and radical. First, the conservative interpretation is that since God has designed everything for man's use, it is impious for man to change it. Men were free to use nature as they chose- provided they did not worship it as sacred- but otherwise it was best left alone, created as it was in the form most

⁴⁵ Aristotle: *Politics*, trans. W.Ellis (London, 1912), bk.1, ch 8,1256b.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* , P14

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* , p15

suitable for their needs. As for the radical interpretation, which he takes to be the crucial one, it understands that everything on earth is for man's use and this gives him the liberty to modify nature, as he will. Cicero's Balbus is referred to here saying that,

“we alone have the power of controlling the most violent of nature's offspring, the sea and the winds, thanks to the service of navigation.... the rivers and lakes are ours...we give fertility to the soil by irrigating it, we confine the rivers and strengthen or divert their courses... by means of our hands we try to create as it were a second nature within the world of nature.”⁴⁸ Cicero foresaw man as a demi-god, constructing with his hands a new nature. Robert Jungk is also shown as presenting a similar attitude in the modern times that man is trying to take God's place by recreating and creating a 'man-made cosmos according to man-made laws of reason'.⁴⁹

Passmore, however points out that when Cicero talked of man taking control of nature, he (Cicero) did not see it leading to the creation of a science based-technology with its potential benefits as well as its potential dangers. In the 17th century, Passmore adds, Bacon and Descartes could see that this 'second nature' was not going to be all good only and that it had its potential dangers. Bacon started emphasizing that 'knowledge itself is power'. He argued that learning should be referred to use and action, which he said, is true not only in the case of practical

⁴⁸ Ibid. ,p18

⁴⁹ Ibid

philosophy' as navigation, but also in the case of what Bacon called 'philosophy of universality'. Man would gain mastery over things only through intellectual knowledge and "overcoming her resistance not by force but by his intimate knowledge of her secrets". The dominion that was symbolized when God called upon Adam to give names to the animals was in the back of Bacon's mind when he thought of his projects for the advancement of science as restoring to man his original dominion over the animals.

Like Bacon, Descartes looked forward to new techniques, as successful as the old crafts, but based on science. What Descartes rejected, says Passmore, was the pious thought that God made everything for man.

'an infinititude of things exist, or did exist...which have never been beheld or comprehended by man and which have never been of any use to him'. He commits himself only to the much weaker position that 'there is nothing created from which we cannot derive some use'.⁵⁰

At this point Passmore says that Descartes inherits the Stoic ingredients in Christianity rather than its more distinctive teachings; man is lord of nature in virtue of his rationality, and that rationality has not been irremediably perverted by the Fall. From the beginning there were

⁵⁰ Descartes: *The Principles of Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, in *Works*, vol. 1, p 271 as quoted in Passmore

objectors but their views did not prevail. The Baconian-Cartesian approach to nature dominated the West, at first merely as an aspiration, eventually as an achievement.

G.P. Marsh was the first to describe man's destructiveness as arising out of his ignorant disregard of the laws of nature. He said that nature in its original state was not adapted to supporting a civilization but man in order to civilize it was forced to transform it without any sense of guilt. Marsh and other ecologists saw that when man attempted to transform nature, they never do what they want to do, because nature is not a soft piece of wax. When man is trying to adjust one thing, many other harmful adjustments are taking place in nature.

Nature, in other words does not simply 'give way' to their efforts; adjustments occur in its modes of operation, and as a result their actions have consequences which may be as harmful as they are unexpected.⁵¹

Engels also wrote that for every victory man has over nature, it takes its revenge on man. He understands that, in the process man by no means rule over nature like conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature- but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong

⁵¹ Passmore, p24

to nature, and exist in the midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to know and correctly apply its laws.' To Engels, ignorance and greed are characteristic of capitalism for it is not at all concerned about the consequences of its actions. He argues,

“Communism alone can save nature, through its destruction both of capitalism and of Christianity- from the greater profits demanded by the former, the ‘senseless and unnatural’ contrast between man and nature typical of the latter.”⁵²

However, the Soviet Union, has shared the ideology of capitalism as is evident in the attitude of the Soviet historian Pokrovskiy who says that,

“It is easy to foresee that in the future, when science and technique have attained to a perfection which we are as yet unable to visualize, nature will become soft wax in his [man’s] hands which he will be able to cast into whatever form he chooses.”⁵³

In the East, Japan regards nature as sacred and worships it directly. Yet, this has not prevented Japan from developing an industrial civilization. China was technologically inventive, yet the ideal of conforming to nature has been very powerful in Chinese thought affecting even everyday actions. The only startling exception being Hsun Tsu who argues that it is not enough to let nature develop, conforming to it as it does so; it will go astray unless man corrects it by acting upon it, just as human beings will go astray unless they are educated.

⁵² Ibid, 25

⁵³ Ibid

Passmore commends the critics of Western civilization on their historical diagnosis about a strong Western tradition that man is free to deal with nature as he pleases, since it exists only for his sake. He says they are wrong in tracing this back to Genesis because Genesis and the Old Testament generally, tells man that he is, or has the right to be the master of the earth and all it contains. But it also insists that the world was good before man was created, and that it exists to glorify God rather than to serve man. Only with the influence of the Greek, Christian theology was led to think of nature as nothing but a system of resources, man's relationship with which are in no respect subject to moral censure.

God had made nature for man's use and it would be presumptuous to improvise on that. But a radical interpretation was that nature was there for man to modify and transform as he pleases. This was an interpretation of Bacon and Descartes, which was absorbed into the ideology of modern western societies, communist as well as capitalist and has been exported to the East.

The metaphysics that this thinking brought about considers man to be the soul agent and nature 'a vast system of machines' for man to use and mould as he pleases. Passmore states that this metaphysics in

particular is what the ecologists are rightly rejecting. But he clarifies that this metaphysics alone cannot represent the entire western tradition.

CHAPTER V
PASSMORE ON ANIMAL RIGHTS

Traditional discussions on 'rights' have usually been confined to the rights of humans but an area that has gained considerable momentum in recent years in the field of ethics is the 'animal rights' debate or simply the debate about human beings' treatment of animals. Rights or deontological theory is a non-consequentialist moral theory, which holds that whether an act is right or wrong, is inherent in the act itself. Supporters of this view believe that individuals can never be treated as means - they are ends in themselves. Most of the participants in the animal rights debate agree that it is wrong to treat animals cruelly, to inflict needless pain and suffering, and to kill for no good reason. They also agree that pain and suffering should be eliminated from the process of rearing and killing animals for food as far as possible. They agree that some people do treat animals cruelly, and many animals do suffer a great deal, sometimes needlessly, in meeting the demands for human beings for food and as subjects to experiment on. Many argue that what makes the human practice wrong is the fact that animals' right is violated.

Animal rights refers specifically to the extension of rights-based theories to non-human animals and generally to a political movement

with the philosophical foundations in both the Utilitarian and rights-based traditions in ethical theory. A great many philosophers, scientists and laymen alike are now championing the cause of animal rights by examining the claims of sentience, interests, desires, consciousness, etc. The questions often raised range from whether or not the animals have moral standing to whether or not humans have an obligation to animals and sometimes to whether or not humans owe respect for them.

People who support animal rights believe that animals are not ours to use for food, clothing, entertainment, experimentation, or any other purpose and that animals deserve consideration of their best interests regardless of whether they are cute, useful to humans, or endangered and regardless of whether any human cares about them at all. They argue animals should have the right to equal consideration of their interests.

Tom Regan in his *The Case for Animal Rights*¹ most eloquently articulated the view that 'animals have rights'. He believes that there is no moral justification for denying moral consideration to beings that cannot bear moral responsibility. Moral agents, he says, have direct duties to other individuals who are not moral agents - they are called

¹ Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* University of California Press, 1983.

moral patients. Moral agents have a responsibility to treat moral patients with respect by refraining from harming them. He explicitly rejects rationality as the basis for the right to life and argues that the right to life is based upon inherent value. For Regan, only beings with inherent values have rights. He says 'if we postulate inherent value in the case of moral agents, then we cannot nonarbitrarily deny it of moral patients'.² Inherent value is the value that individuals have independent of their goodness or usefulness to others. Rights are the things that protect this value. In order to possess moral rights, he argues, an individual must not be merely sentient but also a "subject-of-a-life".³ Only self-conscious beings capable of having beliefs and desires, which can conceive of a future and entertain goals, are subjects-of-a-life. He believes that basically all mentally normal mammals of a year or more are subjects-of-a-life and thus have inherent value, which allows them to have rights.

Another rights theorist who advocates the extension of moral consideration beyond the human community is Gary Francione, who rose to prominence in the animals rights debate since the publication of his groundbreaking work, *Introduction to Animal Rights: Your child or the*

² *ibid.* , p.240

³ *ibid.* ,p. 243

dog?⁴ He argues that we have a moral intuition that "it is wrong to inflict unnecessary suffering on animals", yet our actions fall well short of our moral wisdom.⁵ The routine suffering we inflict on animals is unnecessary in every sense of the word. The reason he gives for the disparity between our intuitions and our actions is that animals are considered property. Francione argues that there is no moral justification for attributing to all humans, from infants to the severely retarded, the basic right not to be treated as property whilst simultaneously denying the same right to animals. He believes that the only requirement for entry into the moral community is sentience.

Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals*⁶ challenged the attitude that animals are ours to use in whatever way we see fit and offered a 'new ethic' for our treatment of animals. This book also provided the moral foundation for animal liberation movement, and at the same time paved a way for philosophers to begin addressing the moral status of animals. He says:

My aim is to advocate that we make this 'mental switch in respect of our attitudes and practices towards a very large group of beings: members of species other than our own- or, as we

⁴ Gary Francione, *Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or the dog?*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000

⁵ Ibid. , xxii, xxiv

⁶ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals*, New York Review, 1975

popularly though misleadingly call them, animals. In other words, I am urging that we extend to other species the basic principle of equality that most of us recognize should be extended to all members of our own species.⁷

Singer argues that the principle of equal consideration applies not only to humans but also to all sentient beings (beings capable of experiencing pain and pleasure). He illustrates this with Jeremy Bentham's famous testimony of animal's rightful place in the moral community:

"A full grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would avail? The question is not, Can they reason? Nor can they talk? but, can they suffer?"⁸

Singer holds that without the capacity to suffer or to experience pleasure, without sentience, a being has no interests. He says there is no moral reason for denying moral consideration to a being that suffers. Equal consideration, he adds, demands that the suffering of one being be counted equally with the like suffering of another being.⁹ To deny equal consideration to a being on the basis of species alone is guilty of

⁷ Peter Singer, *All Animals Are Equal*, in Hugh La Follete (ed), *Ethics in Practice*, Blackwell Publishers 1997, p116

⁸ Bentham in Singer, *Ibid* 119-120

⁹ *Ibid*, p120

speciesism. For Singer, speciesists violate the principle of equal consideration by giving greater weightage to the interests of their own species than the interests of other species and that just as someone who discriminates on the basis of race is racist; someone who discriminates on the basis of species is speciesist.¹⁰

For Singer Utilitarianism in its classic form, aims at minimizing pain and maximizing pleasure. Many non-human animals can experience pain and pleasure. They are morally significant entities, therefore having moral standing.¹¹ The only right he attributes to animals is the right to equal consideration of interests, and anything that is expressed by talking of such a right could equally well be expressed by the assertion that animals' interest ought to be given equal consideration with the like interest of humans¹²- the equal consideration of interest being the avoidance of suffering. He says, "If a being suffers, there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering- in so far as rough comparisons can be made- of any other beings.

¹⁰ Ibid. ,

¹¹ Singer, Utilitarianism & vegetarianism, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1980 vol 9,no.4, p307)

¹² Singer, The Fable of the Fox, *Ethics*, vol88, 1978,p112

One enormously influential position on this issue is that which links the possession of rights to the possession of interests. Leonard Nelson is among the first to propound the view that all and only beings which have interests can have rights.¹³ He is emphatic that animals as well as humans are carriers of interests. Following Nelson, Mc Closkey embraced this view that the beings having interests have rights but denied that animals have interests.¹⁴ For him, a being needs two requirements in order to possess rights. Firstly a being should be able to possess things¹⁵ Secondly, a being should have interests. Animals have neither of these so they cannot be possible possessors of rights. He explains thus-

“The concept of interests which is so important here is an obscure and an elusive one. Interests are distinct from welfare, and are more inclusive in certain respects- usually what is dictated by a man’s welfare is in his interests. However, interests suggest much more than that which is indicated by a person’s welfare. They suggest that which is or ought to be or which would be of concern to the person/being. It is partly for this reason-because the concept of interest has this evaluative-prescriptive overtone- that we

¹³ Leonard Nelson, *A System of Ethics*, trans. Norbert Guterman, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956

¹⁴ Mc.Closkey, *Rights*, 1965 115-27)

¹⁵ *Ibid*

decline to speak of the interest of animals, and speak rather than of their welfare¹⁶

Feinberg links the possession of rights to the possession of interests by affirming that animals have interests. He reaches this conclusion for two reasons. Firstly, a holder of rights must be capable of either claiming his rights or having its rights represented; secondly, a rights holder must be capable of being a beneficiary in its own person. But a being or thing cannot be represented and cannot be a beneficiary if it has no interest because (a) a being without interest has no 'behalf' on which others might act and (b) a being that is incapable of being benefited or harmed, since it has no good or 'sake' of its own. Interests presuppose awareness, expectation, belief, desire, aim and purpose. Without them a being can have no rights; without interest, it cannot be benefited; without the capacity to be a beneficiary it can have no rights.¹⁷ The only part of non-human world, he says, that can be said to have rights is the animal world. Animals especially the higher animals have appetites, needs, sentience, awareness and the capacity to feel pain, frustration, or deprivation. They have interests, the rights which can be represented by human beings; they can be beneficiaries of rights. He does not fully say that all animals have rights but he does hold that

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Feinberg, reprint 1991, p.264

“animals are among the sorts of beings of whom rights can meaningfully be predicated or denied.¹⁸ Kenneth E. Goodpaster backs Feinberg by arguing that plants and even bio-systems have genuine interests, too, and thus should be accorded rights.¹⁹

Passmore also holds that only the beings capable of having interests can have rights but denies at the same time, like Mc Closkey, that animal can have rights. But I am convinced, he says, that it is appropriate to speak of animals as having ‘interests’ unless ‘interests’ are identified with needs- and to have needs, as a plant, too, has needs, is by no means the same thing as to have rights. It is one thing to say that it is wrong to treat plants and animals in a certain manner, quite another thing to say that they have a right to be treated differently.²⁰ For him, ‘the idea of ‘rights’ is simply not applicable to what is non-human’.²¹ He echoes D.G.Ritchie by saying that animals cannot have rights, by not being members of the human society. Animals are viewed, thus, as means to our ends, as instruments for our development, our interests, our quality of life.

¹⁸ Ibid 264

¹⁹ Kenneth E Goodpaster, On Being Morally Considerable, The Journal of Philosophy, Vol.75, No. 6 (June, 1978), p308-325

²⁰ Passmore, Attitudes, 1975,p 262).

²¹ Passmore1974,116

Passmore's attitude conforms to the views of many natural rights theorists, who no doubt recognize that there is an environmental crisis but claim that to solve it we need only reform current practices. No radical shift in our moral or metaphysical self-conception is needed. For example, we need to pay more heed to the rights of people than to clean air and water. Industries that infringe on such rights must be encouraged and if necessary, forced to clean up wastes. According to this humanistic viewpoint, it is morally acceptable to kill off millions of species, drastically alter the biosphere, and treat animals and plants like machines, so long as these activities do not interfere with human 'rights. To those who regard such treatment of non-humans as callous and even immoral, natural rights theorists reply that we can do moral evil only to beings that have rights, against us as moral agents. And non-humans allegedly have no such rights.

Following the same vein, for Passmore, the core concept of morality, such as the concept of rights, does not apply to something called nature. Animals and plants either individually or collectively, do not recognize mutual obligation, do not participate in moral community. Nature should be respected not because it has rights, or has inherent worth, interests or a good of its own, but because such an attitude of respect is consistent with living a rational, moral, and humane life. By destroying aspects of nature we risk our health and the health of our

future generations, and also debase ourselves by being destructive, cruel or simply insensitive. He argues at length the attitudes that have influenced man's relationship with nature, to be concluded with the same and simple view that 'animals do not have rights'.

Sometimes we are met with the suggestion that animals form with men a single community and so can be said to have rights. Aldo Leopold includes 'soils, waters plants and animals' in his community of ethical beneficiaries, i.e., in his 'land ethic'. Yet nothing is to be gained, in Passmore's view, in holding that human beings share a moral community with the rest of nature. It is because human beings differ from the rest of nature in the following ways- different mutual obligations, different interests and different community. He however admits:

“....ecologically men form a community with plants, animals, soil in the sense that a particular life-cycle will involve all four of them. But if it is essential to a community that the members of it have common interests and recognize mutual obligation, then men, plants, animals and soil do not form a community”²²

Men, plants, animals, the biosphere form parts of a single community only in the ecological sense of the word, each dependent

²² Passmore 1974 p 116

upon the others for its continued existence. But this is not the sense of community, which generates rights, duties, and obligations. Men and animals, he argues, are not involved in a network of responsibilities or a network of mutual concessions. He further writes

Bacteria and human beings do not recognize mutual obligation, nor do they have common interest. In the only sense in which belonging to a community generates ethical obligation, they do not belong to the same community”²³

Michael Allen Fox also argues that the question of rights and obligations arise only on the context of moral community.²⁴ What characterizes beings to belong to moral community, he says, are critical self-awareness; the ability to manipulate complex concepts and to use a sophisticated language and the capacity to reflect, plan, deliberate, choose and accept responsibility for acting. These characteristics are possessed by autonomous beings, persons or moral agents who are said to have ‘basic moral rights’. He claims that the attributes of humans that explain why they have developed the concepts of rights and obligations and the institutions associated with them are human’s possession of a particular kind of reflexive consciousness, unique cognitive and linguistic abilities, and the capacity to comprehend, undertake, and carry

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Fox 1997,p.129

out obligations and to expect the same of similarly constituted beings. He further gives two reasons to show that only autonomous beings have rights. Firstly, autonomous beings are capable of free (self-determining, voluntary), deliberative, responsible action and have the sort of awareness necessary to seek this kind of action as essential to nature, well-being and development as individuals. Secondly, autonomous beings are capable of recognizing autonomy in others and of full participation in the moral community. Fox's conclusion is that animals cannot be qualified for having rights as they fail to meet the conditions specified for full membership in the moral community. He also adds that animals fail to function as equals in a society of autonomous beings and cannot be counted within the bond of association that makes morality and its institutions viable. Animals are therefore denied full and equal moral status (and hence full membership in the moral community) for reasons that are morally relevant, namely their lack of autonomy and moral agency. Richard Watson argues that possessing rights presupposes that one had duties as well. Since non-humans cannot perform duties, non-humans lack rights.²⁵

Passmore's view that rights cannot be applied to what is not human speaks for itself that it makes sense to speak of rights only on the

²⁵ Richard A. Watson, Self-Consciousness and the Rights of Non-human Animals, *Environmental Ethics*, Vol.1 (Summer, 1979) p.99-129

context of human beings or human society. This argument that the concept of rights derive exclusively from human society presumably rests on a social contract account of rights.²⁶ Passmore's account of animal rights fits well into the "Social contract theory" or "contractualism", a theory, which has been 'unfriendly towards animals'.²⁷ Under contractualism, morality consists of a set of rules that individuals voluntarily agree to abide by, as we do when we sign a contract. Those who understand and accept the terms of the contract are covered directly; they have rights created and recognised by and protected in the contract.

Let me refer here to John Rawls, who in his "A Theory of Justice,"²⁸ sets forth a version of contractualism. According to Rawls, we are to think of morality as a set of principles or rules for establishing social arrangements that would be devised by rational agents from behind a veil of ignorance. While the agents or contractors are supposed to have knowledge of all general truths of psychology, economics and so on, they are to be ignorant of their own particular qualities like their intelligence, physical strength, projects and desires as well as the position they will occupy in the resulting society. Their choice of moral principles are to be made in the light of broadly self-interested desires

²⁶ Val Routley, 1975, p 175

²⁷ Mark Bernstein, 1997, p 49

²⁸ John Rawls, 1971

(such as those of happiness, freedom, power, etc.) and that the agents know they will possess whatever particular desires and interests they subsequently come to have.²⁹

Morality is here pictured as a system of rules to govern the interaction of rational agents within society. It therefore seems inevitable, *prima facie*, that only rational agents will be assigned direct rights on this approach. Since it is rational agents who are to choose the system of rules, and choose self-interestedly, it is only rational agents who will have their position protected under the rules. There seems no reason why rights should be assigned to non-rational agents. Animals will, therefore, have no moral standing under Rawlsian contractualism, in so far as they do not count as rational agents.

In his article, "The Treatment of Animals,"³⁰ Passmore provides a well researched and eye opening study of the historical ideas about the moral status of animals in western thought. Throughout his discussion of man's treatment of animals, he dwells on that attitude of man, which does not allow animals into the morality parameters. Passmore however admits a change of attitude over the last century and a half, where man

²⁹ Carruthers 1992,p98

³⁰ John Passmore, The Treatment of Animals, Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 36, 1975

has begun to recognize that he ought not unnecessarily to inflict pain on animals. This means that man recognize at least one point at which the relationships with nature are governed by moral principles.³¹ But in his attempt to show that man's attitude has changed in his 'treatment of animals', his emphasis is on the reluctance of the western man to accept any restriction on his supposed right to deal as he pleases in nature and on what pattern changes in his moral outlook has come about. This change, he says, has been a movement based on the growing recognition that not only positive delight in suffering but even callousness, an indifference is a moral defect in human beings.³² Here too Passmore falls back to the western traditions to search for grounds for a more radical assessment of man's relationship for nature.

He points out that the Stoic teaching.... that the Universe exists only for the sake of its rational members carried with it the conclusion that between man and animals –to say nothing of the plants- there was no sort of legal tie'³³ Christianity, like Stoicism, he says, has not thought of man as being bound by moral consideration in his dealings with animals. To strengthen this position, he mentions Augustine's understanding that God 'is quite unconcerned about man's treatment of nature; all God

³¹ Passmore, 1974, p111

³² Ibid

³³ Passmore, 1974, p111

cares about is man's relation to God and his Church'.³⁴ Christ himself, Augustine writes, shows that to refrain from killing of animals and the destruction of plants is the height of superstition for, judging that there are no common rights between us and the beasts and trees, he sent the devils into a herd of swine and with a curse withered the tree on which he found no fruit." Augustine continues, "Surely the swine had not sinned, nor had the tree". Animals, that is, have no rights. Christ, who might simply have destroyed the possessing devils, chose rather to transfer them to swine in order to make that fact perfectly clear to men. At another point, Passmore shows Augustine as saying that animal suffering means little or nothing to human beings. "We can perceive by their cries", he writes, "that animals die in pain although we make little of this since the beast lacking of rational soul is not related to us by a common nature."³⁵ Passmore sums up Augustine's view by saying that we need not concern ourselves with the suffering of the animals since they lack reason and because they have no rights. He finds the source of Augustine's teaching in the stoics who thought it obvious that animals are devoid of reason. He says that the stoics, like Augustine, were ready to conclude that animals lack reason and thus lacking rights. He parallels Christianity with stoicism saying that it has not thought of man as being bound by moral considerations in its dealings with animals.

³⁴ Passmore John, *The Treatment of Animals*, *Journal of The History of Ideas*, vol 36, 1975, p196

³⁵ Passmore, 1995 p191

In order to show that the rational creatures have the right to govern the irrational, Passmore quotes Aquinas thus: 'If any passages of Holy Scripture seem to forbid us to be cruel to brute animals, for instance to kill a bird with its young, that is either to remove men's thoughts from being cruel to other men, or lest through being cruel to animals one becomes cruel to other human beings, or because injury of an animal leads to the temporal hurt of man, either of the doer of the deed, or of another; or because of some signification...'³⁶

Passmore also shows Kant as denying any duties both towards animals and landscapes.³⁷ For Kant, animals are not self-conscious and are there merely as a means to an end, the end being man. Considerate treatment of animals was nothing but man's indirect duty to humanity. According to Kant, a legal relationship including direct mutual obligations could exist only between rational beings. Anyone who is cruel or callous in regard to animal suffering was regarded as being callous in his dealings with mankind. Inversely, 'tender feelings towards dumb animals develop humane feelings towards animals'. Kant cannot see how man can be said to have a duty to animals as distinct from a duty relating 'to or concerning' animals. What he talks about is our duty

³⁶ Passmore 1995 p201

³⁷ Ibid 202

towards other men or a duty towards ourselves. Passmore concludes the discussion on Kant's view by saying that it is a matter of common observation that kindness to animals is often substituted for kindness to human beings.

Passmore's intention here is to show that behind this attitude to animals lays a theology that insists that there is an absolute barrier between man and beast. He brings in an instance to show that man owes his duties to his fellowmen, but not to the animal kingdom. Passmore takes side with Aquinas and Kant, in arguing that 'in so far as cruelty to animals was wrong, this was only because it might induce a callousness toward human suffering. There was nothing wrong with cruelty to animals in itself.'³⁸ What Passmore emphasizes, following the Stoics is on the fact that animals cannot reason and therefore have no rights.

Passmore shows Descartes and Malebranche as having held the view that 'it is impossible to be cruel to animals, since animals are incapable of feeling'. In his "Attitudes to Nature," Passmore informs us of Descartes denying, 'that animals can so much as feel, let alone exercise intelligence'.³⁹ In other words animals not only cannot reason but also

³⁸ Passmore 1974 p113

³⁹ Passmore John, 'Attitudes to Nature', in R.S.Peters (ed), *Nature and Conduct*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures, Vol. 8 (London and Basing stoke 1975), p255

cannot feel. Malbranche view was such that all suffering is the result of Adam's sin: animals, as not implicated in that sin, cannot suffer.

Andreas-Holger Maehle has a point to make in regard to the view that 'animal cannot feel'. He points out that the crucial point in the Cartesian 'beast-machine' theory was the question of pain.⁴⁰ But, he argues, Descartes himself had not held the view that animals were absolutely insensitive to pain but it was some of his followers who had propagated this view. Maehle informs us that, on the French writer Bernard La Borrier de Fontenelle's visit to Malebranche, the later kicked a pregnant bitch that had rolled at his feet and had coolly responded to Fontenelle's cry of compassion with the laconic words: "so what? Don't you know that it has no feeling at all?"⁴¹

John Cottingham has also denied Descartes to holding the thesis that animals are without feeling. He says that the strongest evidence comes from the letters written by Descartes himself where he denies speech to animals. In his writing to More, Descartes says that the sounds made by horses, dogs etc... are not genuine language, but are ways of 'communicating to us ...their natural impulses of anger, fear, hunger and

⁴⁰ Andreas-Holger Maehle, 'Cruety And Kindness To The Brute Creation', in Aubrey Manning and James Serpell (eds), *Animal and Human Society*, Routledge, London, 1994, p87

⁴¹ Ibid

so on'. Cottingham also shows another letter of Descartes written to Newcastle thus:

"I f you teach a magpie to say good-day to its mistress when it sees her coming, all you can possibly have done is to make the emitting of this word the expression of one of its feelings. For instance it will be an expression of the hope of eating, if you have habitually given it a tit-bit when it says the word. Similarly, all the things which dogs, horses, and monkeys are made to do are merely expressions of their fear, their hope, or their joy; and consequently, they can do these things without any thought...."⁴²

Cottingham further points out that that the phrases like 'impulses or anger, fear, hunger'; 'expression of one of these feelings'; 'expression of fear, hope and joy' are quite extraordinary phrases to use for a man who is supposed to believe animals are 'without feeling or awareness of any kind'. This instances gives us the pointer that Descartes did not actually hold the view that animals have no feelings in the way Passmore has spelled out.

These teachings, says Passmore, were more than 'metaphysical speculations'. 'They had a direct effect on seventeenth century behavior

⁴² Cottingham, John, " 'A Brute to the Brutes?': Descartes' Treatment of Animals' *Philosophy* 53, 1978, p556

as manifested, for example, in the popularity of public vivisections, not as an aid to scientific discovery but simply as technological display'.⁴³

Plutarch attacked the sharp contrast between man and animals, which has been typical of stoics, in order to show 'that animals were quite capable of reasoning'. To the stoic view "we shall be living the life of beasts once we give up the use of beasts" or the view that 'civilized men simply cannot afford to allow that animals are rational', Plutarch suggests a reply. He presents in the form of a reply, that there is no injustice in punishing and slaying such animals as are vicious, "anti-social and merely injurious". Nor is there any injustice in taming those animals which lend themselves to domestication, "making them our helpers in the tasks for which they are fitted by nature", training dogs as sentinels, or keeping herds of goat and sheep to be milked and shorn. For men, too are punished or put to death if they are vicious and men too are trained for particular tasks for which they are by conduct suited. If men are to deal justly to animals, they need to alter their conduct by giving up slaughtering them for the table and give up such sports involving cruelty to or the death of animals. His argument that sport should be joyful and between playmates who are merry on both sides reconciles being just to animals while sustaining civilization at the same time. For

⁴³ Passmore, treatment, p204

civilization does not depend, Plutarch is confident, either on the eating of the meat or on blood sports. Porphyry agrees with Plutarch in saying that animals 'are not entirely alienated from our nature' but went further by writing:

He who does not confine harmless conduct to men alone but extends it to other animals, most closely approaches to divinity and if it were possible to extend it to plants, he would preserve this image in a still greater value degree.⁴⁴

Passmore shows that the view that animals have rights came to the forefront in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as a result of that same reforming zeal which led to the abolition of slavery and underlay the Reform Bills. Skeptics attacked the Stoic presumption that man and man alone, is endowed with a rational soul, and, along with this, the Stoic conclusion that men had no duties to animals. Montaign, in his *Apology for Raimond Sebond* states that it is absurdly presumptuous of men to set themselves above animals as its absolute ruler or to suppose that animals lack rationality. In his 'Essay on Cruelty' he ended up saying that we have a general duty to be humane, not only to animals as possess life and feeling but even to trees and plants. David Hume devoted a chapter of his 'Enquiry' to the reasoning of animals, arguing

⁴⁴ as quoted in Passmore, 1975, p207

that in respect of everyday reasoning, the minds of men and animals work in exactly the same way. But he admitted that men are not restrained in his dealings with nature by “the cautious, jealous virtue of justice.” He argued that ‘we should be bound by the laws of humanity to give gentle usage to these creatures’⁴⁵.

Poets and novelists, as well as moral philosophers are shown to have prepared their way for a new attitude to animals, as indeed to Nature as a whole. This has been, Passmore admits, a characteristic of a moral change. But he insists that ‘what has happened over the last century and a half in the West is not that animals have been given more power, more freedom, or anything else which might be accounted as a right’. Rather what has happened, in his opinion, is that men have lost rights: they no longer have the same power over animals, they no longer treat them as they choose. He further adds, ‘but that men have lost rights over them does nothing to convert animals into bearers of rights, any more than we give rights to a river by withdrawing somebody’s right to pollute it.’⁴⁶

By tracing the process by which Western men have divested themselves of certain rights to treat animals as they pleased, Passmore

⁴⁵ Passmore, *Treatment of Animals*, 209

⁴⁶ Passmore, *Treatment*, 1975, 212

has tried to show that through out the intellectual history of the Western world there have been occasional philosophers or theologians who have condemned such cruelty as intrinsically wrong. Other moralists, however have sought to show that it is wrong only indirectly, in so far as cruelty to animals encourages cruelty to man. In arguing so, Passmore comes up with two points- one, the history we have been tracing is at once discouraging, in so far as it took two thousand years for western man to agree that that it is wrong to treat animals and, two, that man's opinion on such matters can change with considerable rapidity. The change in moral attitude, he says, is a restriction of rights rather than an extension of them.

I conclude with some observations Passmore made in regard to the change of attitude in man's treatment of animals. These observations, he says, were 'in passing', 'straws in the wind', 'personal reactions of unusual sensibility.'⁴⁷ Yet it would not be appropriate to interpret them as mere expressions of individual over-sensibility. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the ground was evidently prepared for the rise of the humane movement of the nineteenth century. In the 1820s and 1830s, the first important animal protection societies were founded. In 1824 the society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was

⁴⁷ Passmore, 1975, p209

established in London, known since 1940 as the Royal SPCA. In Germany the pioneer animal protection societies were those of Stuttgart, founded in 1837, Dresden and Nuremberg, both founded in 1839. The programmes of these societies included enforcement of the animal protection laws and education of the general public.⁴⁸ As a consequence of the latter aim, a new genre of literature emerged in the first decades of the 19th century comprising rather popularly written, sometimes inflammatory treatises against cruelty to animals. The successes of the humane movement in Britain are well known: after the Act of 1822 to “prevent cruel and improper treatment of cattle”, in 1835 a Cruelty to Animals Act established the illegality of blood sport involving the baiting of animals, the keeping of cock-pits and of places for dog-fights. Cock-fighting as such was prohibited by an Act of 1849 ‘for the more effectual Prevention of Cruelty to Animals’.⁴⁹ In 1876 Britain enacted the world’s first law regulating experiments on living animals.⁵⁰

Modern historians of the animal protection and anti-vivisection movements in the 19th century convincingly argued that the former was also directed against elements of social disorder, particularly disorder

⁴⁸ Harrison 1982, Ritvo1987, Troler and Maehle 1990

⁴⁹ Malcolmson 1973; Ritvo1987

⁵⁰ French 1975

associated with blood sports⁵¹ and that the latter actually fought against a scientocratic and materialistic view of the world.⁵² Yet the continuity of the modern humane movement with 17th and 18th century thought in the ethics of humane relationships with animals should not be forgotten. Henry S. Salt, for example, who in 1891 founded the Humanitarian League in London⁵³ where he explicitly took up again the late 18th century concept of animal rights, quoting directly from the writings of Primatt, Bentham and Lawrence.⁵⁴ Primatt argued that the suffering of animals was worse than that of human beings, because animals had no hope for future life. Moreover, as speechless creatures they were unable to accuse their tormentors, and as irrational beings, they could not act morally and therefore could not endure pain as punishment. For animals, Primatt concluded, present pain was the only evil and present happiness the only good. Because of this an animal, as long as it lived, had a 'right to happiness'.⁵⁵

There are already some hints in Primatt's thoughts indicating that the faculty to suffer pain was to become the new criterion for the concession of rights. He attacked indeed the old criterion of rationality. Primatt regarded the mental powers of a being as God-given just as its

⁵¹ Malcolmson 1973; Turner 1980; Ritvo 1987

⁵² French 1975; Rupke 1990

⁵³ Hendrick 1977

⁵⁴ Salt, 1894

⁵⁵ Primatt, 1779, p39-40

physical characteristics were. Just as the white man had no right to treat the black man as a slave and in a tyrannical way because of the God-given color of his skin, so an intelligent man was not allowed to oppress a fool. This meant, in Primatt's view, that man did not have a natural right to abuse or torture an animal, just because it did not possess mental powers of a human being. The qualities of both human beings and animals come from God.⁵⁶

Jeremy Bentham's often quoted statement on animals 'the question is not, can they reason? Nor can they talk? But, can they suffer?' not only included the same essential message, but was formulated in a very similar context. He compared the status of animals in England with that of human slaves in other countries and argued for the existence of animal rights just as for the abolition of slavery. He pointed to the French Code Noir of 1685, which regulated the status of slaves in the West Indies, forbidding the killing of slaves by their masters and entitling the royal authorities to protect slaves from maltreatment. According to Bentham 'the French had already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may come one day to be recognized that the number of legs, the villosity of the

⁵⁶ Primatt, 1778

skin or the termination of the os sacrum are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same plight'. Bentham's utilitarianism looks not to the rationality of the agent or the patient. If all pain is evil, as Bentham thought, then the pain of animals ought not to be ignored in man's moral decisions. For Bentham it is irrelevant whether or not they are rational and to what degree. It is enough that they are capable of suffering.

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, even in current philosophical debates on the treatment of animals a remarkable revival of historical concepts can be observed. Peter Singer and Tom Regan have followed in Primatt's and Bentham's footsteps by making sentience the criterion which gives a moral status to animals. On this ground they condemn animal experimentation as well as 'factory farming' as an expression of unwarranted 'speciesism' and a violation of animal rights respectively. Both Singer and Regan assert that animal's painful and pleasurable experiences are qualitatively and quantitatively the same as those of humans and that, hence, animals have a capacity to enjoy life equal to that of humans.⁵⁷ While Singer is the pioneer of 'animal liberation movement' the latter is of 'animal right movement'. Singer asserts in so far as animals can suffer equally with humans, they have

⁵⁷ Michael Fox, *Ethics*, 1978 p107

equal claim to relief, since pain is pain to whomever it is inflicted. Regan contends that animals have a natural right to life, in addition to the right to equal consideration of interests with humans in the matter of treatment, which cannot be overridden except by the most stringent utilitarian considerations. He maintains that just as no amount of human pleasure equal to or greater than a given amount of 'non-trivial'⁵⁸ animal suffering caused by man can even neutralize the moral condemnation engendered by the infliction of that suffering, so too, the death of animal cannot, in general be justified by the amount of human pleasure which is consequent upon it. His reason for saying this is that any argument which purports to show that animals have a right not to be maltreated or unjustly caused to suffer to a degree equal to or greater than the level of someone else's gain in pleasure, or that human beings have a right to life, will also hold in the case of animals (at least higher sentient beings).

Following Singer and Regan, a number of professional philosophers began devoting serious attention to the ethics of the treatment of nonhuman animals. The new animal rights groups, such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), The Fund For

⁵⁸ Regan, 1975, *Canadian JI of Philo*, p198)

Animals, and the Farm Animal Reform Movement (FARM), Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF), Animal Liberation Fund (ALF) etc. emerged in the forefront. They not only used ideas that emerged from the philosophical debate to question the very use of animals, especially in agriculture and science but also emphasized direct action by devoting to illegal actions such as stealing ('liberation') lab animals in order to prevent the animals from the hands of experimenters. The International Vegetarian Union (IVU) was founded in 1908 when the first World Vegetarian Congress was held in Dresden, Germany with the aim to promote vegetarianism throughout the world. The knowledge that other creatures other than humans have feelings, and that their feelings are similar to ours encourages one to extend personal awareness to encompass the suffering of others. More and more people are now opting for vegetarianism that understand that to contribute towards a more peaceful society we must first solve the problem of violence in our own hearts. In a thousand ways, the revolution is gaining ground. From the near nation-wide ban on cockfighting to making animal abuse a felony crime in 37 states, from eliminating the use of animals to train doctors in two thirds of U.S. medical schools to teaching animal rights and the law seminars at over two dozen universities, from increasing media coverage of animal welfare/rights issues to a 2003 Gallup Poll finding that 96% of Americans say that animals deserve some protection from abuse and 25%

say that animals deserve “the exact same rights as people to be free from harm and exploitation” it is clear that human beings are beginning to change their views about other species.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, while summarizing the result of this study, I attempt a critique of Passmore's use of the word 'responsibility' in his thesis of "Man's Responsibility for Nature." This book, despite its title, is not primarily concerned with philosophical discussion of man's responsibility 'for' nature (as opposed to his obligations to other humans), but rather with some philosophical aspects of a set of contemporary problems, which can be loosely classified as 'environmental' (or perhaps, less accurately 'ecological'). The notion of 'Responsibility' is nowhere explicitly analyzed therein. This draws us to the question - does it then make sense to speak of taking 'responsibility for nature', or being responsible for nature, or to appeal to nature as any basis for justifying environmental responsibilities? Passmore thinks that our primary, essentially our only, responsibilities are to humans and directly only for humans, not directly to or for nature at all. Nature only enters as the indirect object of the responsibilities. Thus Passmore's position is that of 'to ourselves' or 'for ourselves' and not for nature.

Many of Passmore's main arguments for pollution control measures; population control and conservation are based on man's own self-interests, on the damage we will inflict on ourselves unless we take measures to protect the environment. This attitude is taking responsibility for man's own actions, not for the environment. Pollution produces poisoned drinking water and food, damages recreational forests and so on. Tropical forest destruction removes opportunities for new medicines and improved food crops, increases the pace of greenhouse warming and so on. These are all very good reasons for considering action to protect the environment, perhaps the only effective reasons for doing so. In any event they play a leading role in current environmental concern; they are leading us to develop a very important set of environmental mitigation policies.

But they do not stem from, nor lead to, any intrinsic concern for the environment as such, whether ethically based or otherwise. Instead, these considerations are what C.A. Hooker calls 'prudentially' based.¹ This position, he claims, is in fact the commonest position and it provides the minimal basis from which we might try to justify taking some (indirect) responsibility for nature. And in justifying reasons, he continues, we can cite all of the widespread environmental damage and

¹ C.A. Hooker, Responsibility, ethics and nature, in David E Cooper and Joy A. Palmer (eds), *The Environment in Question*, London/New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 150

ecological destruction with which we currently threaten the biosphere and, through that, threaten ourselves and our children. Against this backdrop, I have tried to show what ethical basis there is for an environmental responsibility. The environmental crisis raises certain *ethical questions. It poses radical questions regarding our relationship to* and responsibility to the environment. This demands an equally radical response. There is an urgent need for a radical commitment to the earth and the development of an ecological ethic that is capable of protecting the earth and everything in it. Thus the environmental crisis as such becomes a problem in ethics.

The rejection of classical understanding of ethics is a move that has currently come about as a way of extending ethics to the non-human world. In most traditional ethical systems human beings have been given the central position assuming that the non-human world- the environment- is material to be used by humans as they see fit. Environmentally concerned critics argue that this framework, by overestimating the importance of human beings, fails to show the appropriate limits of human behavior toward non-human beings. Lacking such a sense of limits, man is destroying the biosphere needed to sustain both human and non human-life.

Different views have been generated as displeasure with the classical traditional system of ethics thus giving birth to environmental ethics² as a distinct discipline with environmental philosophers drafting and vigorously defending a variety of revolutionary theories to bring nature within the purview of ethics. These theories aim primarily at extending ethical concern beyond traditional limits- human life, health, and welfare- to include a large number of entities and collections of entities- for example, species and ecosystems that have not been given moral consideration previously. J.Baird Callicott says that an environmental ethic is supposed to govern human relations with non-human natural entities. It would, for e.g., prohibit or censure as wrong, certain modes of conduct affecting animals and plants. According to an environmental ethic, he adds, it may be wrong to mutilate a tree, or pollute a river or develop a wilderness. Passmore provides no room for a 'new', environmental ethic as such. There is no need, for him, for the rejection of the basic ethical value systems of western civilization.

There are stark inconsistencies in his handling of the concepts of 'conservation' and 'preservation'. Passmore devotes consecutive chapters to 'conservation' and 'preservation'. He starts the former with the definitions: "To conserve is to save....I shall use the word to cover

² Refer chapter III

only the saving of natural resources for later consumption.”³ He continues: “Where the saving is primarily a saving from rather than a saving for, the saving of species and wilderness from damage and destruction, I shall speak rather of ‘preservation’.”⁴

Passmore notes that conservationists and preservationists often work together on particular issues, but “their motives are quite different: the conserver of forest has his eye on the fact that posterity, too, will need timber, the preserver hopes to keep large areas of forest forever untouched by human hands.”⁵ Thus the key to Passmore’s definitions of conservation and preservation is the motive of the environmentalist.

Passmore asserts that we have seriously to ask ourselves whether it constitutes a genuine problem that at an ever-increasing rate men are converting wildernesses into tamed landscape- into farms, towns, suburbs, tourist resorts- and destroying the plants and animals which once shared the earth with him. There are two ways, he says, of trying to answer these questions i.e. by assigning instrumental and intrinsic values. One set of answers is couched in terms of instrumental values to humans of preserved ecosystems and species, the second in terms

³ Passmore, p 73

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid

independent of human interests: "As it is sometimes put, they have a 'right to exist'. The first view can easily be incorporated within the traditional Graeco-Christian picture of the world, the second view presents greater difficulties."⁶

Passmore notes the "usefulness" in fulfilling human interests need not be construed narrowly,⁷ and mentions the value of wilderness for protecting biological diversity, for science, recreation, human solitude, moral uplift, and aesthetic experience. At the crucial juncture of the chapter, he however notes that these arguments "would not be considered adequate by the more uncompromising preservationists," because, as Fraser Darling says, "the essential attitude (in such arguments) is not far in advance of that of a timber merchant."⁸ Passmore calls these arguments "essentially conservationist in character," and moves directly to a discussion of saving for nature's sake:

It is at this point, indeed, that the cry grows loudest for an new morality, a new religion, which would transform man's attitude,

⁶ Ibid 101

⁷ Ibid 101-102

⁸ Ibid, 110, Passmore quotes Darling from 'Man's Responsibility for the Environment,' in Francis Ebling, ed., *Biology and Ethics, Symposia of the Institute of Biology*, no 18 (London and New York Academic Press, 1969), P 119

which would lead him to believe that it is intrinsically wrong to destroy a species, cut down a tree, clear a wilderness.⁹

His analysis of arguments for preservation is summed up by referring again to the first group as “primarily conservationist in spirit,” and implies that the only true preservationist arguments are ones that rest on the premise that “destruction of species and wildernesses (is) intrinsically wrong.”¹⁰

It now becomes very clear why environmental ethicists, to the extent that they accept Passmore’s conceptions of conservation and preservation, find these terms of little use. If the conservation-preservation distinction is a distinction in motives, which reflect a difference in theory of value, and if conservation motives derive from concern for sustaining the availability of future human resources, preservationists must be attributed opposed motives- they hope to save nature because of its intrinsic value.

Passmore does admit that the West needs, to some extent, “a new concept of nature” and “a new set of moral principles to act as a guide in its relationships” to nature. The West must learn an “active cherishing”

⁹ Ibid, 111

¹⁰ Ibid, 125.

of nature¹¹ However, while Passmore grants these points, he places a stronger emphasis on the sufficiency of traditional Western concepts, and he clearly implies that this sufficiency rests upon the strengths of anthropocentric principles:

The traditional moral teaching of the West, Christian or utilitarian, has always taught men, however, that they ought not so to act as to injure their neighbors. And we have now discovered that the disposal of wastes into sea or air, the destruction of ecosystems, the procreation of large families, the depletion of resources, constitute injury to our fellow men, present and future. To that extent, conventional morality, without any supplementation whatsoever, suffices to justify our ecological concern our demand for action against the polluter, the depleter of natural resources, the destroyer of species and wildernesses.¹²

Bryan G Norton has put an alternative definition of conservation and preservation forward.¹³ Bryan thinks Passmore could have defined conserving and preserving as motive –neutral activities: to conserve a resource or the productive potential of a resource-generating system is to use it wisely, with the goal of maintaining its future availability or productivity. To preserve is to protect an ecosystem or a

¹¹ Ibid, 186

¹² Ibid 186-87

¹³ Bryan G Norton, Conservation and Preservation: A Conceptual Rehabilitation, *Environmental Ethics*, Vol 8, Fall 1986, p200

species, to the extent possible, from the disruptions attendant upon it from human use. Armed with these definitions of activities, he suggests, one could define a conservationist policy as one that recommends conserving the resources and productive potentials of ecosystems in all *or most cases for future consumption*. A preservationist policy would recommend that most ecosystems not yet seriously altered by human management should be maintained in their unaltered state by excluding disruptive human activities from them. A conservationist would thus be an individual, who, faced with concrete choices regarding resource use, usually advocates a conservationist approach. A preservationist is someone who, faced with concrete choices regarding what to do with a pristine ecosystem or area, usually advocates preservation of it. Bryan claims that these definitions make the classification of individuals as conservationists or preservationists a 'matter of degree'. The designation generalizes over their policy recommendations for concrete choices.

Continuing further, throughout his book, Passmore characterizes Eastern thought as mystical, and warns that it will undermine Western science and technology – and thus endanger the future of Western civilization as a whole. To permit Eastern influence on Western environmental philosophy, Passmore claims in the final chapter, would expose Westerners once again to “one of the most dangerous illusions to

which [Western civilization] has been subject, the mystical, totalistic illusion ” According to Passmore the German Idealism and American Transcendentalism of the nineteenth century were only a small step away from “the truth of Zoroastrianism ” And in the twentieth century, the West is in equal peril from ecology, as exemplified by the views of Fraser Darling and Aldo Leopold – which Passmore believes, can most properly be thought of “as being in essence mystical, as anti-scientific, or as entailing ‘a philosophy of wholeness ’”

Like Cobb¹⁴, Passmore argues that there is no point in turning to Eastern philosophies and religions because, even if they do putatively endorse ecologically congenial attitudes and values, they were ineffective in preventing environmental degradation in the East Eastern reverence for nature, he notes, ‘has not prevented Japan from developing an industrial civilization second to none in its offensiveness to ear, eye and nose ’ He goes beyond Cobb, however, in recommending that we not tamper at all with our inherited Western ethical and religious framework – doubting, on the one that it is possible deliberately to change the direction of Western traditions in any significant way, but expressing

¹⁴ John B. Cobb, Jr. in his *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology*, published in 1972 examines the possibility that non-Western views of nature be adopted by the West. He argues that the Chinese worldview, (represented by Taoism) has many of the environmental assets but he contends that they were not able to prevent deforestation and other ecologically destructive practices in ancient China. Given the historically demonstrated ineffectiveness of these worldviews, he concludes that it is more prudent to fix the Western tradition than to try to graft on to an alien one.

concern, on the other hand, that a successful change in direction of any kind could mean the demise of Western civilization as we know it. With regard to the former he writes, “ ‘needing a new ethic’ is not in the least like ‘needing a new coat.’ A ‘new ethic’ will arise out of existing attitudes, or not at all.” And with regard to the latter, he argues that taking environmentalists’ concerns seriously will inevitably bring an end, among other things, to Western-style political freedoms; and he concludes, “better a polluted world than this!”

It is in man’s own very self-interest, either as individuals or as a community of species, to take these actions. There is no ethical obligation to the environment as such. Rather Passmore offers some ethical basis for assuming general environmental responsibilities, which derive from obligations to our future selves or our future children. He says out of justice and out of love, we should hand over to our next generation a world whose condition makes it impossible for them to fulfill themselves as human beings. But though these are clearly ethical responsibilities, they are not necessarily intrinsically responsible ones.

To the question of religious influence on the way we treat nature, he raises three criticisms. Firstly, for him, it is not necessary to cultivate spirituality in order to address our treatment of nature. We need only apply, in a new context, moral principles that have long served

successfully to regulate our behavior towards one another - e.g. tolerance, concern for suffering.

Secondly, it is spiritual and religious ideas that, historically, have been the problem, not the cure. While Passmore rejects Lynn White's claim that Judeo-Christianity, with its doctrine of man's 'domination' of nature, is the culprit, he himself pins the blame on another religious/philosophical tradition - Stoicism - that got grafted onto Christianity. It was the Stoics, says Passmore, who were responsible for the idea that nature is created by God for man, to do with as he will.

Thirdly, spiritual traditions that are free from the Stoic, anthropocentric attitude, tend to be 'quietist', that attitude that preaches a contemplative relation to nature. He suggests an 'activist' one when he says, 'if the world's environmental problems are to be solved at all, it can only be by that old-fashioned procedure, thoughtful action'¹⁵. For him, the 'Hands off', 'Let Nature be!' attitude will not do in an era when the environment has been severely degraded. He takes it as a derogation of our 'responsibility for nature' and our responsibility to our fellow human beings, present and future.

¹⁵ Ibid p 194

Retrieval of a spiritual sensibility towards nature may not be necessary for dealing with greenhouse effects and the like, but those who advocate this retrieval do not primarily have such particular, practical problems in mind. They are also concerned with retrieving the conditions for a more fulfilling human life. It should be stressed that by no means all advocates of a spiritual sensibility towards nature have in mind 'nature mysticism' or passive, aesthetic contemplation of mountains etc. For example, in the Zen Buddhist tradition, meditation and contemplation are not disjoint from, and indeed are primarily conducted in and through, one's everyday practical life.

Passmore's thesis that our only responsibilities are to humans and directly only for humans, and not to or for nature at all is evident in his 'treatment of animals'. This brings me to the discussion of Chapter V, which is the 'Animal Rights' debate that centers on arguments for and against the view that 'animals have rights for the same reasons that humans do'. Some say moral significance lies not in our differences as species but rather our commonalities as subjects of a life. The animal rights movement poses a fundamental evolutionary challenge to human beings in the midst of severe crises in the social and natural worlds. It is an assault on human species identity. It smashes the compass of

'speciesism'¹⁶ and calls into question the cosmological maps whereby humans define their place in the world. Animal rights demand that human beings give up their sense of superiority over other animals. It challenges people to realize that power demands responsibility, that might is not right.

People who support animal rights advance the most radical idea to ever land on human ears: animals are not food, clothing, resources, or objects of entertainment, experimentation. They believe that animals deserve consideration of their best interests regardless of whether they are cute to be kept as pets, useful to humans, or endangered and regardless of whether any human cares about them at all. They argue animals should have the right to equal consideration of their interests.

But I am not convinced, says Passmore, that it is appropriate to speak of animals as having 'interests' unless 'interests' are identified with needs- and to have needs, as a plant, too, has needs, is by no means the same thing as to have rights. It is one thing to say that it is wrong to treat plants and animals in a certain manner, quite another thing to say that they have a right to be treated differently.¹⁷ For him, "the idea of 'rights' is simply not applicable to what is non-human".¹⁸ He echoes

¹⁶ Peter Singer's usage.

¹⁷ Passmore, *Attitudes*, 1975, p 262).

¹⁸ Passmore 1974, 116

D.G.Ritchie by saying that animals cannot have rights, by not being members of the human society. Animals are viewed, thus, as means to our ends, as instruments for our development, our interests, our quality of life.

Passmore's attitude conforms to the views of many natural rights theorists, who no doubt recognize that there is an environmental crisis but claim that to solve it we need only reform current practices. No radical shift in our moral or metaphysical self-conception is needed. For example, we need to pay more heed to the rights of people than to clean air and water. Industries that infringe on such rights must be encouraged and if necessary, forced to clean up wastes. According to this humanistic viewpoint, it is morally acceptable to kill off millions of species, drastically alter the biosphere, and treat animals and plants like machines, so long as these activities do not interfere with human 'rights. To those who regard such treatment of non-humans as callous and even immoral, natural rights theorists reply that we can do moral evil only to beings that have rights against us as moral agents. And non-humans allegedly have no such rights.

Here I have shown that Passmore's view that rights cannot be applied to what is not human speaks for itself that it makes sense to

speak of rights only on the context of human beings or human society. This argument that the concept of rights derive exclusively from human society presumably rests on a social contract account of rights.¹⁹ Passmore's account of animal rights comes close to the Social contract theory or contractualism, a theory, which has been 'unfriendly towards animals'.²⁰ Passmore would not allow animals into the morality parameters.

It is without doubt that animals and humans are different but what we can do is, at the least, transcend the comfortable boundaries of humanism and urge a qualitative leap in moral consideration. We should not only change our views of or towards one another within the species we share, but also realize that species boundaries are as arbitrary as those of race and sex. Our task is to provoke humanity to move the moral bar from reason and language to sentience and subjectivity. The distorted conceptions of humans as demigods who command the planet must be replaced with the far more humble and holistic notion that we belong to and are dependent upon vast networks of living relationships. If humanity and the living world as a whole is to have a future, human beings must embrace a 'universal ethics of respects all life'.

¹⁹ Val Routley, 1975, p 175

²⁰ Mark Bernstein, 1997, p 49

If we examine the human history and its religions we see that religiously and culturally evolved environmental ethics existed even in the past. This is evident if we see the place of nature in many indigenous cultures. In some cultures nature was represented as divine and therefore the direct object of reverence. In some traditional cultures and religions, nature was the creation of God and thus should be used with care and passed on intact to the future generations. This is explicitly presented in the Vedic concept of 'r̥na'²¹ or the concept of 'indebtedness'. We take from nature and it is our duty and responsibility to repay nature. We cannot take more than what we can repay. This debt is to God and the repayment requires regular prayers and worship, and selfless service to all of God's creatures. Perhaps this is the reason why Indians regard the river Ganges to be sacred and likewise worship her (although it by no means follow that Ganges is left untouched). The sacredness of the river is believed to manifest in various physical forms. It not only provides means of livelihood to the immediate inhabitants but also people from far off places come on pilgrimage to the holy water for physical healing, spiritual cleansing and renewal. Thus, mainly because of its providence, they revere it as sacred and they take care of it to show gratitude and indebtedness to it.

²¹ According to the Hindu concept, every individual is expected to pay three debts during his lifetime. (See Morgan, Kenneth, *The Religion of the Hindus*, Delhi: Motilal Benarsidass, 1953, p.135-36. The Taittirīya Samhita (6.3) of the Vedas outlines three types of debts- r̥si-r̥na, deva-r̥na and pitr-r̥na.

In other cultures too, man is thought to be a part and parcel of nature, and thus is in harmony with nature. In still others a oneness of all life is envisioned together with an attitude of respect to all living things. 'All entities, man and even the rock included were joined together in a single animated whole.'²²

With the emergence of the industrial culture nature no longer enjoys the earlier status. The object of reverence has turned into an object of exploitation. The emergence of secularism, humanism and materialism of industrial culture has demystified and undermined the pre-industrial environment ethics, aggravating the destructive impact of the industrial technology. The irony is that just when we need environmental ethics most, global industrial civilization has, with its infinitely greater power for environmental destruction, eclipsed the environmental ethics that prevailed in the past and that served to restrain traditional human patterns of resource depletion.

The need of the hour is a global environmental consciousness that spans national and cultural boundaries. Solidarity of an international eco-centric environmental ethic with many and diverse traditional environmental ethics should include the realization that we inhabit one

²² Sujata Miri, *Ethics and Environment Theory and the Adi and Khasi Practice*, Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 2001, p 55

planet with the other non human beings in nature. Man also needs to realize that other plants and animals of this planet, if left alone by humans follow a natural order of things and remain one with, and a part of the environment. They do what evolution has programmed them to do and live in balance with the rest of the environment.

The discussion different religions and their attitude towards nature shows that religions help make human beings aware that there are limits to their control over the animate world and that their arrogance and manipulative power over nature can backfire. Religion instills the recognition that human life cannot be measured by material possessions and that the ends of life go beyond conspicuous consumption. It helps the individual to recognition of human infallibility. While technology gives the individual the physical power to create or to destroy the world, religion gives the moral strength to grow in virtue by nurturing restraint, humility, and liberation from self-centeredness.

Summing up, Passmore's thesis as a whole does not offer a concrete model for sustainable development. Unless we give weight to non-human world and to future interests we are not giving full consideration to human needs of both the present and the future. His views are inimical to environmental values, arbitrary and morally

impoverished, because while exacting the value of human, rational beings, they deny moral consideration to non-human or non-rational beings. Passmore, in dismissing religion as a basis for rectifying the environmental problems, fails to grasp the significance of different religions in the treatment of nature. Thus in essence, Passmore's thinking does not bring much difference to what has already been man's essential attitude concerning nature. His thesis, emphasizing on the virtues of western science and its advances, instead gives a somewhat subtle blessing to existing human-centered relationships with nature with its component exploitation and destruction. To put it simply, the status quo has been upheld by Passmore's thesis of Man's Responsibility for Nature.

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