

CHAPTER THREE

The Value of Life: A Biocentric Approach

Introductory

In the foregoing chapters we have discussed that the most crucial problem the world is facing today is the problem of environmental degradation which is consequential upon the unprecedented rate of technological and scientific development. The materialistic outlook of modern man giving more weight age to the instrumental value of nature rather than the intrinsic value of the natural world is primarily responsible for the present environmental crisis. In such a situation of crisis we ought to think about our attitude towards nature which obviously depends on our relationship with the natural world and the moral significance and the role it plays in our lives. Our attitude towards nature ought to be of respect and reverence instead of an attitude of mastery over nature. Yet justifiability for adopting such an attitude towards nature is the biocentric outlook which is in fact a belief system where the dignity and moral standard of all non-human species of the natural world or biosphere is uplifted and honoured. Biocentrism or biocentric ethics is therefore contrary to traditional or humanistic ethics where only human species are thought to be the object of moral consideration.

The biocentric approach which looks upon all biotic species- humans as well as non-humans as members of the biosphere enjoying equal status rest on the four key points as suggested by Paul Taylor. They are as follows:

- (a) All living species, humans as well as non-humans are members of the earth's community of life.

- (b) All living species being the members of the biotic community are integral and inevitable part of nature and their survival in the biotic community are completely interdependent.
- (c) All organisms are teleological centers of life in the sense that each is a unique individual which is flourishing in its own natural manner and pursuing its own good.
- (d) Human species are by no means inherently superior to other living organisms of the biotic community.

On careful examination of the above four key points, one can successfully draw coherent outlook on the natural world which focuses on the relationship between man and nature from moral perspective. The attitude of respect for nature by human beings is very much related and is successfully based on the biocentric outlook of nature.

According to Taylor these four beliefs as cited above are acceptable to human beings on account of their higher degree of reality awareness which they have cultivated by virtue of their rationality. Thus understanding biocentrism is nothing but the realization of reality. By virtue of this rationality and consciousness human beings can take the burden of these beliefs. Human beings, the possessors of rationality, should realize that they are the members of earth's community of life like the other non-human species. In this regard, opines Taylor, 'human life' is nothing but 'an integral part of the natural order of Earth's biosphere.'¹⁶ The relationship of oneness of the homo-sapiens with wild animals and plants forms the basis of the biocentric approach which is reflected in the following paragraphs.

In the first place one must realize that each species of the biotic community, humans as well as non-humans, enjoy equal moral dignity and thereby share a common relationship with each other. Since human beings by virtue of their rationality are fully aware of reality, they must be fully conversant of the common relationship they

¹⁶ Taylor, Paul, W.: *Respect for Nature, A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, op.cit. , p. 65.

bear with the non-human species, i.e., plants and animals. In spite of the innumerable differences existing between human and non-human entities of the biotic community, human beings ought to put aside those differences and accept the fact that they are the same biological organisms or creatures like the non-human species. Human beings ought to develop a community feeling with all other members of the biosphere which in other words mean a feeling of unity within diversity. They ought to realize themselves as one species population amongst many and thereby corroborate kinship with the non-human species as equal members of the whole biotic community. Thus by propounding the biocentric approach, Taylor pleads for a universal community of life that is ingrained in the following five realities:

(i) Every species possess certain biological and physical requirements for their own existence or survival. Moreover, the existence and survival of one species depends largely on the surrounding environment. The existence of all biotic species including human beings as 'functioning organisms' largely depend on their ability to respond to environmental changes whether drastic or slow and maintain a cordial relation amongst themselves. Certain physical and biological circumstances promote and enhance the well being of living things and hence are very much inevitable to both humans as well as non-humans. This means that in order to live and maintain a prolonged healthy life at the high level of biological flourishing, it is necessary for the human beings to maintain a peaceful ecological co-existence with the other members of the biotic world. This needs to be treated as a very necessary precondition for a biological healthy human life. Unquestionably, human beings, do, of course, possess a purposive life beyond its existence, but such purposive life can be met substantially only if they maintain a co-existential relationship with the non-human species of the natural world. The acceptability of this fact leads to pursuit other human values.

It is important to point out here that by advocating biocentric approach-an approach in which the moral dignity of all species can be

honoured, Taylor, however, does not rule out individual free will and autonomy. Arguably, humans, unlike non-humans, enjoy the freedom to decide and choose the way of their survival or existence, to set ends for themselves and take decision about their future. However, individual free will and autonomy has both its positive and negative aspects. Through utilization of this power, human beings possess the capacity to build a healthy and aesthetic environment. On the other hand through misuse of this power the homo-sapiens are capable of bringing destruction to the environment. Thus, it is up to the human beings to decide whether to care for and respect the environment and all its species and make it a healthy and peaceful abode of the biotic community or bring about termination and extinction of the non-human species which eventually threatens the survival of human beings themselves. Therefore human beings must decide whether to preserve their existence at an optimal level of well being for which one needs to make the biological requirements of survival and physical health one's normative guide.

(b) In the second respect it may be said following Taylor that every biotic species in isolation possess good of its own or in other words every life in isolation is intrinsically good. Taylor says that 'everything that is alive can be correctly said to have a good.'¹⁷ Practically one may achieve or fail to achieve one's good or one may be benefited or harmed by achieving or not achieving one's own good. All these things are relevant to the meaning of our everyday existence and this is equally true about plants and animals. The other key point to be noted is that our existence not always depends on our control since existence of all living organisms including humans depend on their adjustment to environmental changes, i.e. the lives and well being of all organisms depend on environmental accidents and contingencies. Thus, it is a great mistake on behalf of the humans to run with the conviction that it is possible for them to conquer nature and thereby manipulate or artificialise or use nature to meet their greedy ends.

¹⁷ Ibid. p.143.

Human attitude of mastery or conquest of nature is merely an illusion and a matter of self-deception. It is a matter of reality that nature existed on earth prior to the arrival of human beings and it will continue to exist even without the presence or existence of human beings. On the contrary, it is impossible for human beings to survive alone in nature. This would make sense to say that human attitude needs to change not because of the benefit of other non-human species, but because of the welfare of humans' itself.

© The third linkage between humans and non-humans is centered on the concept of free will and autonomy or more specifically in the idea of freedom. Human activities as we have seen earlier solely enjoy social and political freedom which is not enjoyed by the non-human species of the biosphere. This kind of freedom enables human beings to take proper decisions in a situation of choice. By virtue of this power human beings are capable of determining their own future and strive towards the realization of values which are set forth by them. This implies that they are free from constraint in the social and political arena.

There is another sense of freedom which is both common to humans as well as non-humans. This concept of freedom is of utmost value to all living species of the biosphere possessing good of its own and striving towards the realization of such good. Freedom in this sense implies that each living creature is able to preserve its own existence and further its own good. Thus, we may say that freedom in this sense provides bondage between the human and non-human species of the biotic world. Enjoyment of such freedom means one's enjoyment of life completely free from constraint. According to Taylor 'an organism may be said to be free if it has the activity and opportunity to promote or protect its good according to the laws of nature.'¹⁸

But in many cases it has been seen that organisms or living species- humans as well as non-humans are unable to promote or protect their good or carry out their existence due to certain internal and external,

¹⁸ , Ibid. p.109.

negative and positive constraints. Sometimes an unsuitable or in congenial environmental or even some disease may not allow a species to carry out its existence or survive properly. Animals kept in cages or the zoos or trained in the circus cannot exist or survive freely on account of the constraint imposed on them. Similarly the free growth of a plant is restricted when it is planted in a pot from the field. It has to grow in a limited area of the pot and depend on artificial supply of water and manure, the absence of which will bring about its death.

Absence of constraints is an instrumental good for all organisms as it creates an impediment for enjoying good life. That is why Taylor rightly points out that 'to be free is to have a better chance to live the best kind of life we are capable of'.¹⁹

(d) Anthropologically it may be said that human beings are relatively new comers to the order of life that had been established millions of years ago. It is a fact that the same order of evolutionary process dictated by the same laws of natural selection and genetic transmission applies to both humans and non-humans species of the biotic community. Thus it may be said that as far as the evolution of living species is concerned there is no difference between the humans and non-humans. Humans are in no way superior to non-humans in this very respect. In other words, the theory of evolution, in fact, gives a unified explanation for the existence of humans as well as non-humans.

It also needs to be pointed out that the appearance of the homo-sapiens into the biotic world is a recent phenomenon, a matter of 400,000 to 500,000 years. Even before the appearance of human beings there was life on earth and species evolved following the natural laws of selection and transmission. Human beings stepped into the already existing natural world when they were dictated by the natural laws of selection like the other organisms of the Earth's community of life.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 111.

The theory of evolution, in fact, forms the base underlying one part of the biocentric outlook on nature. To think ourselves superior to other non-human beings is simply a humanistic bias based on groundless assumption and misconception.

(e) Since a proper habitable biotic society is the outcome of coherent co-existence of all living species, it is not possible for any species to survive by forfeiting the existence of others. It is a biological truth that the survival and well being of the human community is completely and absolutely dependent on the soundness and good health of the earth's biosphere. On the contrary, since the human beings are new comers to the biotic world the existence and well being of the non-human species is by no means dependent on human existence. The demise or disappearance of humans will have absolutely no effect on the biosphere. On the contrary, the biosphere or the environment which is continuously being degraded and polluted due to anthropogenic activities will be able to restore or heal itself without the presence of human beings. Taylor thus conceives, "Our presence, in short, is not needed. And if were to take the standpoint of that life community and give voice to its true interest, the ending of the human epoch on earth would most likely be greeted with a hearty "Good riddance!"²⁰ It seems clear from the above observation that the biocentric outlook of nature anticipates the natural world as a system of interdependence of living things in which no community can be marked off as an isolated unit. Since each living entity is dependent on the other, accordingly whatever happens to one will have consequences for other. That is why, it has been rightly pointed out that the biosphere of our planet comprises a single unified whole which may be designated as the 'natural world'. Within the natural world human beings like all other non-human species is an integral part. Human beings are nothing but an active an essential part of the natural world and hence they have to play a role in the web of life. Instead of uniting with the other members of the biosphere, if we tend

²⁰ Ibid, p.115.

to disrupt the ties or bond that bind the fabric together, we will thwart our chances for pursuing our unique human values.

A Plea for Teleological Centres of life:

The biocentric approach of Taylor, so far as we have seen, exemplifies our relation with the non-human living creatures of the natural or biotic world. In fact, one of the most important aspects of this approach is to view individual organisms as teleological centres of life. To say any individual living organism of the biosphere is a teleological centre of life is to say that its internal function as well as external activities are all goal oriented or in other words it may be said that each individual seen as teleological centre of life strives to preserve itself and realize its good in its own unique manner. With the advancement of physical and biological sciences, our knowledge about internal systems and external activities of individual organisms has increased rapidly. We have come to realize how each individual exists in the biosphere as physical and biological systems. As our knowledge about their life cycles, their mutual interactions with other organisms and with the environment expands, we become increasingly aware of how each of them carries out its life functions according to the natural laws. As one becomes more and more familiar with the organism through acquisition of knowledge, one acquires or develops a sharp awareness of the individual's unique or particular way of living its life. Consequently, one appears to conceive of the organism as a teleological centre of life which strives to preserve its existence and relation and realize its own good in its own unique manner.

Thus, one's teleological centre of life, opines Taylor, is directed towards the realization of that organism's good. Does it make sense to say that the concept of teleological centre of life circles around conscious individuals or in other words is directed towards human beings who are so-called conscious living creatures? Does it mean that this concept excludes the non-human species that lack consciousness? In this context Taylor opines that all living organisms

whether conscious or unconscious are in the true sense teleological centre of life. Non-humans living things like a tree or an animal or even the simplest single celled protozoa can not think or feel, nor they are conscious about the occurrences in the world around them, yet they are conceived of a teleological centre of life since they have a good of their own around which their behaviour is organized. It is important to point out here that the teleological centers of life as echoed by Taylor does not incorporate any teleological structural mechanism, rather it is relevant only to living things which seek their own ends and also realize what is good or bad to them for their own survival.

Objectivity and wholeness of vision are the two general features or characteristics of teleological centre of life as exemplified by Taylor. With regard to our awareness of life of a particular organism seen as a teleological centre of life is objective in the sense that the individuality or uniqueness of the organism is not distorted by our likes or dislikes, hopes and fears, interests, wants and needs. This individuality of a particular organism is preserved by its own existence in itself.

In most cases human's view of plants and animals is distorted by their feelings, emotions and desires. We view certain animals like wild elephants, tigers etc with fear and therefore want them to be killed or driven away. This is, in fact, our feeling of fright which makes us think that way. But are they really harmful if we fail to harm them? Certainly it would not be the case. They live peacefully in their abode with other living organisms through prey-predator relationship. They become ferocious only when caged by humans for fulfilling their ends. More examples may be cited to exemplify our negative feelings about plants and animals. Moreover, destruction of trees and plants for fulfilling human intention reflect the negative visions of humans regarding trees and plants. Destruction of weeds and pests by farmers reflect their negativity instead of objectivity. In other words, it may be understood that human beings view animals and plants through their distorted lens of feeling and desires. Such a negative view about nature can be overcome by developing or increasing our objectivity

through acquisition of more scientific knowledge about nature. Our objective view about nature can be furthered by becoming more aware of the distortions we are prone to and making utmost efforts to free ourselves from them.

Wholeness of vision, the second main feature of reality awareness can be acquired by human beings by understanding animals and plants not only in terms of their role played by them in human life but by understanding of the whole character or 'personality' of the species. Thus, the role of wholeness of vision often rules out the relevance of instrumental value and frees humans from one-sidedness which enable them to realize what should be their mode of treatment of non-human species of the biotic community. We as humans need to view nature with its entire species as many faceted beings existing for their own good and responding to all environment changes in their own unique way.

Therefore, one can say that the objectivity and wholeness of vision, the two attributes of teleological centres of life give rise to a complete realization, both cognitively and imaginatively, of what it is to be a particular individual. It overcomes the barrier of anthropocentricity and thereby helps us to realize other members of the biotic community as ourselves.

Non-Acceptance of Human Superiority in Biocentrism:

Human superiority is a forbidden issue in biocentric approach as proposed by Taylor. Biocentric approach which vehemently rejects human superiority stands contrary to traditional or humanistic ethics which tries to hold the superiority of humans over non-humans. This approach restores the moral dignity of all living species as an integral part of nature. The power of reasoning and free will of human beings has placed them in a much higher position than the non-human species, i.e., animals and plants which are considered as 'lower form

of life'. However, this approach has been outrightly rejected by Taylor in his biocentric approach.

The reason placed in favour of human equality with the non-human species by the followers of biocentric view is that the unique traits of human beings only like rationality, creative autonomy and free will cannot make them superior than the non-human species since they also possess certain unique characteristics which humans do not possess like the speed of cheetah, photosynthesis of leaves, flying capacity of birds, etc. These characteristics can obviously be taken as signs of superiority of the nonhuman species over the humans. The point to be noted in this context is that the unique human characteristics are valuable only to the humans and the unique non-human traits are valuable only to the non-humans. So the question that human characteristics are more valuable than non-human traits is completely uncalled for. It is absolutely funny to claim that the value of mathematics is superior to the value of climbing a tree by a monkey. The relevance of superiority on the basis of merit can only find its foothold if the comparison is confined only to the same species. It is unreasonable to think about a monkey sitting in mathematics examination with an intelligent human being who will surely score higher marks. To confer superiority on the human being on this ground is surely a category mistake. Thus, it is absolutely preposterous to compare human civilization with non-humans.

Mainstream philosophers further argue that humans are superior to non-humans as they only enjoy the status of moral agents by virtue of their capacity of free will, accountability, practical reason, deliberation etc. Taylor rules out this proposal. For him the question of moral superiority comes into being only if there is a valid moral standard which can equally be applied to both types of agents under consideration. That means both types of moral agents must fall within the same range of application of moral standards. Human superiority cannot be established by means of inherent worth, nor can it be simply established on the basis of humanity. If humanity is supposed

to have inherent worth and thereby to be determined as a criterion of superiority over non-humans, then it surely opens up an opportunity that goes in favour of humans only. This means that plants and animals, although they possess certain degree of inherent worth, are considered inferior to human beings and in case of a conflict between their well being and human interest, the later would surely outweigh the former.

Taylor vehemently rejects this view. To accept the fact that humans by virtue of humanity are superior to plants and animals have no real foundation or sound logical reasons. Instead the fact that human beings as well as plants and animals or precisely all the members of the biotic community possess inherent worth and thereby are all equal and therefore should desire equal moral consideration. Such a view would change our relation towards the non-human species of the natural world. Hence it may be said that the biocentric approach rules out the doctrine of inherent human superiority and opens up a new dimension where human beings can find their proper place in the natural world.

Past philosophical background of human superiority: A reflection

The concept that human beings are inherently superior to non-human species has a prolonged philosophical background. If we look back into the history of philosophy, we can find at least three dominant trends in support of this claim, such as, (i) the view of classical Greek Humanism, (ii) the view of traditional Christian monotheism and (iii) the mind-body dualism of Rene Descartes. These three views will be discussed in turn in the following few paragraphs.

(i) The view of classical Greek Humanism:

The rationality of human beings has made him a superior animal as witnessed in the classical Greek Humanism. Barring rationality and

capacity of reason man is very much like an ordinary animal. It is rationality and the power of reasoning which has conferred nobility and dignity to human beings and has placed them on a higher platform than all other species of the natural world. In fact these two qualities enable human beings to show their mastery or superiority over other natural species. The philosophical outlook of classical Greek humanism linked up the idea of human good with the essentialist definition of humans as rational animals. The capacity of reasoning enables humans to live a rational life which brings out his essential nature. The essence of being human, therefore, endows man with a kind of moral worth and dignity that are not common to beings lacking that essence.

There is nothing wrong in claiming that reason guides our lives towards realizing the Human good. Human life by virtue of possessing rationality always pleas for worthy living and human happiness is thought to be the highest good, the supreme value which applies only to the life of human beings. Taylor himself seems to conceive that realization to supreme good is the proper culture of reason. Human beings unable to live a rational life cannot develop nobility or greatness of character. The idea of 'Human Good' of classical Greek humanism is obviously linked to rationality which is the essence of human character. The classical Greek humanists and the western philosophers, however, opine that human beings are superior to non-human non-rational beings by virtue of their rationality. In this context Taylor says that such a view does not provide any argument for human superiority over non-humans. The realization of human good by living rationally applies only to human beings and not to the other species and thereby cannot be taken as a criterion of human superiority over non-humans. Human beings exercise reason for their well being; non-human living species can achieve their well being without reason. Thus, there underlies no point of claiming, Taylor suggests, that the humanistic apprehension of classical Greek which

subscribes an objective ground for the doctrine of human superiority over non-humans.

(ii)The view of traditional Christian monotheism:

The second claim that human beings are inherently superior than other earthly species can be traced back in the concept of Great Chain of Being, a concept which formed the basis of metaphysical outlook of the Middle Age. According to this view every entity holds a particular place in the hierarchical ladder extending from the most perfect, i.e. God to the least perfect, i.e. mere matter. In between the various levels are occupied by angles, human beings, followed by animals and plants. This hierarchical order is both an ontological one and a valuational one. Each grade occupied by particular species represents particular degree of inherent worth. It may therefore be said that the world and the God together comprise the totality of existence that constitute a great hierarchy from the lowest form of life to the highest. Within the above mentioned ontological hierarchy human beings occupy a place between the angles and the beasts. Angles being immortal are spiritual and are hence closest to God. In the holy Bible, it has been mentioned that the angles acted as messengers between God and human beings. The human beings in fact have two sided existence. On the one hand they have immortal souls like angles and on the other hand they possess animal bodies like beasts. Humans are thus inferior to the Divine both in respect of their being contingent as well as limited virtue but are nonetheless superior to all other creatures God placed on Earth. By virtue of being placed on the higher scale of existence than other forms of life in the Great Chain of Being, human beings are empowered by God to dominate over all the inferior living species of the biotic community.

If we carefully notice the force of the metaphysical outlook, it appears clear that the concept of superiority of human beings over non-humans is being determined by the position that has been assigned by God. By virtue of being placed at a higher level by God, the Creator,

human beings obviously possess greater inherent worth than the other non-human forms of life on Earth. The good qualities of mercy, love, justice possessed by God himself and implanted in humans make them possess more inherent worth than the others, i.e. non-humans. This idea of God, i.e. attributing moral qualities only to humans and making them superior than non-humans is an act of partiality. It can therefore be said that God, the so-called creator of the Universe himself made the non-humans inferior by not attributing the moral qualities mentioned above to them. This clearly exposes the biased outlook of God which goes in favour of the humans alone. Arguably, this propensity of degrading animals and plants by their Creator surely casts doubt on the supposed absolute perfection of his love for all his creatures. The charge of biasness cannot be avoided by appeal to the Creator's goodness without begging question. How does the Supreme Creator allow humans to eat plants and use animals to work? Is it not the same to say that creatures were placed on the Earth for our benefit? Is it not true to say that God Himself introduces a mythological form of anthropocentrism in which humans are placed higher than non-humans? Does it not vitiate the perfection of God? Surely, God lacks mercy and justice for failing to treat all his creatures equally. That is why Taylor vehemently rejects the metaphysical picture of the Great Chain of Being in which human beings enjoy more inherent worth than others by virtue of occupying a higher order of life.

(iii) The Mind-Body Dualism of Descartes:

The metaphysical dualism of Rene Descartes, philosophically known as mind-body dualism is another philosophical doctrine in which humans are placed at a much higher level than non-humans. The basis of the theory lies in the fact that human possesses mind and body whereas animals and plants are only the possessors of body. Descartes points out that minds or souls give human beings the power of reasoning or free will without which humans would be mere

automata or physical mechanism. Hence animals and plants devoid of matter and soul be compared to an automata or physical mechanism having properties of matter, size, shape, and weight and made up of chemical components. Plants also live their life, but are incapable of conscious expressions. A human being who is the possessor of both mind and body has the power of thought, imagination and moral judgment. He can feel pleasure and pain, has emotion and desires, can perceive things and so on because he has a mind or soul. It is our mind which alienates us from the non-humans. It is the presence of mind which makes humans consciously aware about everything and hence elevates him to a higher level or grade than the automata like non-human species. Thus, it is the presence of mind which accounts for inherent superiority of humans over the non-humans.

Taylor, however, rules out the metaphysical mind-body dualism of Descartes and thereby rejects human superiority over non-humans on this ground by giving three reasons. The first point or question that searches a reasonable answer is that whether mind and body which make up the humans are two distinct and separate subjects with entirely different properties. Some other begging questions in this respect are-where does mind exist? Is it located within the body of the human beings or anywhere outside? Does it occupy any space? According to Cartesian doctrine mind is non-spatial and cannot be located anywhere, whereas the body is a three dimensional structure that is devoid of consciousness and reasoning power. The logical query which immediately crop-up is how these two objects, viz, the mind and the body, having different properties are interconnected with each other to form one individual person? In what sense a non-spatial entity, i.e. mind produce changes in the physical state of something occupying space, i.e. within the body? Descartes answer to this question seems illogical and contradictory since he says that mind directly causes changes in the body at a certain point in the brain. But such response of Descartes has been proved to be untenable and uncalled for to the contemporary philosophers.

Secondly, the Cartesian dualism creates a gulf between humans and animals which goes against the recent biological investigations. Although Descartes proposed that humans alone possess mind along with body which enables them to think, feel and reason and animals possess body but not mind, it has been recently found that even animals have the capacity to feel pleasure and pain, their brain mechanism and nervous system enable them to experience varied emotional feelings like anger, fear, anxiety and they are even capable of feeling for other members of their own kind. Certain animals are highly intelligent and even thoughtful. A gorilla or chimpanzee behaves very much like a human. They are able to master the taught sign language and communicate their demands and desires to the humans living close to them. This clearly brings out the fact that they possess a mind capable of thinking, feeling and reasoning. The investigations in the field of biochemistry reveal similarity between human and animal cell. Thus, the biological kinship between humans and non-humans cannot be ruled out, opines Taylor, if we go through the genetic make up of human life.

Finally, if we pay due respect to the Cartesian dualism, then a still more viable question can be raised against it. Why do we think that the incorporation of mind in a body makes a person or being inherently superior to the entity having a body alone? Of course, a human cannot be designated as a human without a mind. On the other hand, a wolf does not require a mind. It can realize its potentialities and capabilities and is designated as a wolf without a mind. Then why cannot a wolf or any animal possess the same inherent worth as a human?

Ironically, the Cartesian mind-body dualism is directed to the upliftment of human beings both inherently as well as instrumentally. It is a distinct form of anthropocentrism which upholds human beings over the non-humans. One may, however say, that all living organisms possess inherent worth, but the inherent worth as possessed by humans are far more superior than the inherent worth possessed by

non-humans. This point can be justified only if the concept of inherent worth is measured on the basis of capabilities of humans and non-humans. But is it not illogical to correlate wide range of capability or capacity to greater inherent worth? Unless this connection between inherent worth and range of capacities is made clear, no conclusion concerning human superiority over animals can be established without begging questions. Taylor himself conceives that the concept of human superiority is an outcome of an unfounded dogma embedded in our culture. The rejection of human superiority can be justified by taking into consideration the principle of species impartiality in which every species of the biotic community has the same value and therefore deserve equal common concern and consideration from moral agents. Every living organism has a good of its own and therefore possesses the same inherent worth. Therefore the question of superiority of one species over the other, i.e. humans over the non-humans simply appears to be otiose if we adhere to the principle of species impartiality. We may thus say that the principle of species impartiality is very much linked to the attitude of respect for nature.

From the above consideration, it may be said that the three basic principles on which the biocentric approach towards nature stands, i.e. human beings like the other living species are member's of the Earth community of life, all living things are related to each other in an order of interdependence, all living species are teleological centres of life and the principle of species impartiality which admits equal inherent value of all biotic species are strong enough to deny human superiority over non-humans.

A Comprehensive Outlook:

The biocentric outlook as propounded by Taylor exemplified in the above discussion deserves special philosophical attention as it attempts to restore the dignity and morality of all living species. It attempts to form a comprehensive view of the entire realm of life and

nature in terms of inherent worth. This approach helps us to visualize and find out our position in the world representing the totality of phenomena by repudiating the so-called traditional background. It helps us in realizing the true nature of life which has to be lived through interdependence, love, care and mutual co-operation with the other species of the biotic community.

The biocentric outlook interprets human beings as biological creatures without forfeiting their uniqueness and special capacities. It guides the rational human beings to adopt a proper and respectful attitude towards all members of the biotic community who also belongs to the category of biological creatures. Oneness or unity with all the members of the Earth's community of life is confirmed through the biocentric approach of Taylor. This outlook of Taylor reaffirms that human beings are an integral part of the biotic community where all species - humans as well as non-humans are functionally and mutually interdependent and intimately related to each other.

To accept biocentrism means to regard each biotic species, humans and non-humans, as teleological centres of life. The existence of all species is centered on the realization of their own good of humans and non-humans differ a lot, yet both are designated as teleological centres of life which signifies a fundamental reality common to all species. As all are existing in their own way realizing their own good and none can be designated as more worthy of existence than another. All species possess inherent worth and since they are all an end in themselves, all deserve equal value. Human beings as rational moral agents should therefore treat all non-humans with equal moral respect and consideration. Human beings ought to recognize and accept the fact that all living entities possess inherent worth and therefore an attitude of respect for nature ought to be their ultimate moral attitude. Taylor distinguishes between objective and subjective value concepts and admits objective value concept in explaining the biocentric approach. The recognition of all entities as teleological centres of life is a case in point. Like Aristotle, Taylor inclines to say

that every species has a distinctive nature that determines the specific good for that particular species. Every species has its specific end. The end is growth, development, sustenance and propagation. In this regard, every organism as mentioned earlier is the teleological centre of life. In this context the name of Schweitzer, a biocentric ethicist may be remembered, who says, "I am life which wills to live in the midst of life which wills to live"²¹ From this very sentence one can comprehend the similarity between Schweitzer and Taylor in this issue. Like Schweitzer, Taylor seems to conceive that each living species has its own good, because as a living organism each life has a goal has a telos. This view again recalls the remark of Regan who once says that all beings that are subjects of life have an inherent value which qualifies that being for moral standing. However, Taylor's concept of teleological centre of life is more relevant and meaningful than Regan's subject of a life in this context.

There is one important question that still remains to be answered. Why this approach is morally justified? Why does it deserve philosophical attention? In fact Taylor's biocentric approach exemplifies a set of properties that satisfies certain classical, well established criteria for judging the acceptability of philosophical world views. Since Taylor's biocentric approach focuses on the unity of diverse living species of the world, it is supposed to be comprehensive and complete. It gives rise to a total philosophical perspective on the whole realm of life and thereby draws our relationship with others as an essential part of the whole. It helps us to locate our place within the biotic community, not by isolating ourselves, not by forfeiting the existence of others but by adopting an attitude of love and respect towards others. It helps us to realize that every living species of the biotic community are just like different members of the same family where they ought to live together in co-operation with each other. Another commentary aspect of Taylor's biocentric outlook is that it is by far systematic in order. It preserves coherence and internal

²¹ Schweitzer: *Out of My Life and Thought*, p.130.

consistencies among all members of the biotic community by systematizing a set of ideas which he calls a 'belief system'. As it is both comprehensive and systematic in order, it is completely free from confusion and semantic vacuity. Although this approach deals with many abstract concepts, the concept may be exemplified with a fair degree of clarity and precision. Since this approach of Taylor is firmly rooted in the findings of physical and biological sciences, there underlies no scope of confusion and impracticability. It enhances our understanding of nature in a true sense and thereby sharpens our focus on the natural world which in turns helps us to locate our proper place within it. It therefore maintains parity with all known empirical truths which are the experimental findings of physical and biological sciences. Thus, one may say that the biological outlook deserve scientific acceptability. To be an ideal and competent evaluator of Taylor's biocentric approach the moral agents, i.e. the human beings should possess the following capabilities or satisfy certain criteria, viz, rationality of thought and judgment, future enlightenment and a developed capacity of reality awareness. Rationality, in fact, encompasses a number of interrelated capacities and dispositions which enable a moral agent to take rational decision. A rational evaluator, opines Taylor, should possess lucidity, clarity and preciseness in thinking and understanding of any world view. Rationality also focuses on the critical reflection and independence of judgment of oneself and thereby ensures full autonomy of the reasoned. Rationality further encompasses objectivity which implies consideration of the merits or advantages of any argument. In order to be a competent evaluator, to accept and justify the so-called belief system or the philosophical world view of Taylor, the moral agent should be able to take a rational and logical decision following any argument which he can take up if he has full grasp and lucid understanding of the argument in question.

Secondly, an ideal and competent evaluator must acquire well established empirical knowledge of all relevant matters as

presupposed by the system of beliefs whose acceptability is being judged.

Finally, a moral agent has to acquire the capacity of reality awareness to a great degree which will make him fully conscious and aware of the lives of all living species. As soon as the world view, i.e. biocentric approach, is accepted by an individual, who is supposed to be a competent evaluator, it comes to have a direct bearing or influence in his practical life which in turn guides the moral agent's conduct and attitude. World view has a direct consequence for the good of living things. If this is taken into account, then we have a complete argument for the justifiability of acknowledging the biocentric outlook. Thus, from a philosophical point of view, we can accept the biocentric outlook on nature as a legitimate world view. If the relation of humans with all living species of the biosphere is understood in terms of the four components of the biocentric approach as cited earlier, then surely the attitude of respect for life is seen to be the only appropriate attitude to be taken by any moral agent towards the natural world. Thus, apprehending this philosophical world view within the domain of biocentric outlook is equal to understanding the attitude of respect for life. In this respect Taylor's biocentric approach is supposed to be an outstanding philosophical contribution through which the dignity and moral identity of all living organisms can equally be protected and preserved.

Although Taylor's biocentric approach is commendable and deserves outstanding philosophical attention, still it faces some serious challenges. In one context he recognizes human beings as an integral part of nature and in another context he inclines to say that human beings ought not to interfere with nature. We think that these two standpoints are in a strict sense contradictory in nature. If human beings are supposed to be an integral part of nature, then they ought to be allowed to act with nature and if human beings are not allowed to interfere with nature then they are somewhat distinct from nature. In this context it may be said that environmental degradation due to

human interference with nature is considered to be an act of misdeed on the part of humans. The two phrases, i.e., 'act with nature' and 'interfere with nature' are undoubtedly confusing and contradictory. In order to combat with the deterioration of the environment humans may be allowed to act with the environment, but not interfere with the environment since according to Taylor human's interference with nature leads to environmental degradation.

Another environmental point of Taylor's biocentric approach is that he emphasizes on individual organisms as teleological centres of life. Here he inclines to say that the so-called inherent worth resides only in individual organisms. One may however raise a quip at this juncture by saying that although Taylor himself tries to introduce a non-anthropocentric flavour in his biocentric approach by vehemently rejecting or criticizing the so-called anthropocentric approach, he himself unknowingly introduces the flavour of anthropocentrism in his biocentric approach and thereby involves himself in a vicious circle. His biocentric outlook on nature remains an individualistic approach. By advocating the concept of teleological centre of life Taylor conceives an adversarial relationship between individuals. He appears to conceive that every individual seeks his own telos and thereby assumes a conflict and competition as a natural state of life. The great burden of Taylor's biocentric ethics is to find out a solution for resolving this conflict impartially. We think, unlike Taylor's biocentric ethics which is individualistic in nature, a holistic form of biocentric approach is more preferable and acceptable which will surely be based on mutual co-operation and dependencies rather than conflict.

Moreover, the recognition of species as teleological centres of life as mentioned earlier drives Taylor into serious dilemma. For example, an attempt to construct a concrete patio in the lawn full of grass would lead to destruction of innumerable living species ranging from individual blades of grass to millions of microbiotic organisms. Such an action would surely raise a moral conflict. We think that Taylor

cannot possibly give priority to human interest without forfeiting his biocentric egalitarianism. This means that his concept of teleological centres of life cannot possibly be accommodated within the biocentric approach. In this context he needs to rely on the distinction between basic and non-basic interest and the principle of proportionality, minimum wrong and restitutive justice in order to resolve the conflict. In this situation, Taylor ought to choose one among the two alternatives, i.e. either to build a patio or not. If one is not allowed to build a patio, Taylor's ethics may require too much for us. Taylor's biocentric approach would require a level of attention and care which is far beyond the abilities of most people. It is really difficult to see how we could ever be justified in doing much of anything if we did treat all non-human life forms as deserving moral consideration.

On the contrary, if one is allowed to build a patio, which is supposed to be non-basic, then the question which arises is-why such a non-basic interest overrides the basic interest of the grasses and millions of micro-organisms? From the environmental perspective, the mass killing of these non-human species cannot be allowed for the sake of constitution of the patio. In trying to overcome the above mentioned conflict, i.e. whether to build a patio or not, Taylor seems to conceive the principle of restitutive justice which explains that one can build the patio as long as one can restore the balance of justice between the humans and the non-humans. But one thing that has to be remembered is that no justice can be done to the living species already destroyed during the construction of the Patio. What one can do is to replant some grasses elsewhere in one's yard.

Does it then makes sense to say that Taylor's biocentric approach loses its foothold in failing to overcome the problems raised above? Certainly not. Since Taylor's biocentric approach appears as a resolution against the traditional humanistic approach, it is quite obvious that the approach will have to counter negative criticisms. It may be said that the biocentric view of Taylor is highly appreciable and very much successful in restoring the dignity of all non-human

living species of the biotic community. But his theory would be more effective and more philosophically commendable if it stands with the holistic approach rather than the individualistic one.

At this juncture, it can be said that our discussion on biocentrism shall remain incomplete if I fail to take Schweitzer's 'reverence for life' into account. Let us say once more that modern technological development has turned the world into a global village, but still life on Earth remains tremendously diverse and complex. Knowingly or unknowingly tremendous medicinal, agricultural, economic, aesthetic and scientific potential lies in the rarity and diversity of life. Unquestionably, we depend on other life forms for our existence. But the most pertinent question is: should we have any ethical relationship with the living species on the basis of the fact that they are living beings? Is it reasonable to speak of biocentric ethics at this point? Any positive answer to this question requires ethical extensionism simply because of the fact that standard or traditional ethical theories based on humanistic approach have little room for such concerns. Philosophers mainly applied ethics to solve specific problems but they made no attempt at building a coherent and comprehensive theory of environmental ethics. The extension of ethics in this direction preserves the value of good life for all biotic community. It strives to rethink about the coherent human-nature relationship as an inevitable part of human existence.

It is even important to remember here that the traditional domain of morality completely sidelines the relevance of biocentric approach. Morality has always taken human well-being and the relationship between humans as its focus. Biocentric approach deals with more legitimately ethical concerns because it raises a wide variety of value questions that establish norms how we ought to live. It deals with the nature and scope of value, tries to define what objects have moral relevance or deserve moral consideration.

The very term 'biocentric' means life centred. Accordingly, biocentric ethics deals with the value of life. It refers to any theory or approach

that views all life as possessing intrinsic value. In this context Albert Schweitzer's 'reverence for life' is an ideal approach of biocentrism. He may be called the precursor of modern or contemporary biocentric ethics. According to Schweitzer modern industrial society has ignored the true world view that once connected the goodness of life with the goodness of nature. The rapid progress of science and technology snaps or disunites the connection between ethics and nature by viewing nature as an indifferent, value free mechanical force guided by physical and mechanical laws. Naturally, it absolutely means that there is nothing intrinsically valuable in nature itself. Ethical values mean nothing more than personal opinion or sentiment.

The sole objective of Schweitzer's biocentric approach is to re-establish the bond between nature and ethics. Schweitzer apprehends nature as benign and gentle even though he was aware of the destructive and arbitrary force of nature. He holds that nature is intrinsically valuable, i.e. good in itself. Such type of understanding regarding nature actually gives rise to a basis for human ethics as captured by the phrase 'reverence for life'. He expresses this phrase by saying that 'at the very moment when, at sunset, we were making our way through a herd of hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unforeseen and unsought, the phrase 'Reverence for life'.²² What does the phrase 'reverence for life' mean? It implies an attitude of awe and wonder; it also suggests a combined attitude of honour and fear. According to Schweitzer, the most fundamental aspects of human consciousness is the realization that "I am life which wills to live, in the midst of life that wills to live"²³ He further says, "The man who has become a thinking being feels a compulsion to give to every will to live the same reverence for life that he gives to his own."²⁴ He ought to realize that every other life, be it human or non-human, is just like his own life. Even he has to comprehend that to preserve, to promote life and to realize the values of life has utmost moral worth. On the

²² Schweitzer: *Out of my Life and Thought*, P.130

²³ *Ibid*, p.130

²⁴ *ibid*. p.130

contrary, to destroy life, to injure life and to repress life is morally bad. This is mandatory and hence absolute and fundamental principle of the moral.

Schweitzer inclines to say that all living species possess intrinsic value and therefore owe respect. According to him, no life is mandatory, value free 'fact' of the universe. Every form of life is good in itself and hence deserves respect, love and care from its fellow beings. One may, however, raise a quip at this juncture by saying that in attributing life as good in itself, does Schweitzer include the life of virus or bacteria to be as worthy as human life? In establishing his approach of equal respect for all forms of life does he say that the life of ant is treated with equal respect as life of humans? In fact, then does he offer any formula for resolving the conflict between human life and the life of any virus or bacteria? Since Schweitzer is a proponent of biocentrism, he does not oppose different moral standards for different forms of life. He was against the killing of a small ant or even a mosquito. He holds that it is morally good to carry an ant out of the room rather than kill it. He was even against the usage of DDT which inevitably destroys lives of innumerable living species beyond the purpose for which it is used. However, he does not rule out the necessity of killing lives at times, especially out of reverence for other lives. He holds that at times to maintain life, other life forms must be sacrificed as food, i.e. he supported the view that life is maintained through the prey-predator cycle. He has also proposed that life of any living species may be put to an end to bring an end to its suffering (euthanasia)

It seems clear that Schweitzer does not apprehend reverence for life merely as a rule which can be applied in a specific situation; rather he undertakes it as an attitude that determines who we are rather than a rule of determining what we should do. It describes a moral virtue and not a rule of action. A morally good person naturally stands in awe of the inherent worth of each life.

If we endorse the biocentric approach of Schweitzer, then how do we justify the cases where a morally good person is bound to destroy life?

What can we say about a doctor who kills a virus, a butcher who kills a pig or a farmer who cuts down a tree? According to Schweitzer any form of killing whatsoever the situation may be is morally condemnable and one cannot deny the moral responsibility of these killings. He says that when anybody moves to kill a life, he surely moves with consciousness and responsibility. Reverence for life, says Schweitzer, being an attitude sensitizes us to the responsibility of these decisions. It guides us as well as makes us disinclined to kill life at random or callously and thereby helps us to live an authentic, true and normal life.

It has already been mentioned in the previous paragraphs that the biocentric approach of Schweitzer is absolutely different from many defenders of traditional ethical theories, viz, utilitarianism, deontology etc which are guided by rules or principles. But Schweitzer does not establish 'reverence for life' as an ethical rule. For him 'reverence for life' is a fundamental attitude towards the world. Accordingly, it focuses not on the question of what one should do, but on the question what type of person one should be. By advocating the phrase 'reverence for life' he addresses an ethics of character of morally good people in terms of their character, disposition and values rather than in terms of their action. His approach, however, does back to Plato and Aristotle who emphasized on the ethics of virtue rather than values or principles. Virtue based ethics constructs a philosophical account of a morally good person, describing and defending certain character traits of that person. Most of the virtue based ethical theories are teleological. Virtues are distinguished from vices by their connection with attainment of some human telos or goal. For Aristotle, virtue meant those character traits and dispositions that enable people to live a meaningful life.

Some environmentalists, namely, Sagoff holds that a satisfactory environmental ethics must address not only those values that determine what we want, but also those values that determine what we are. That means implicitly that our identity as a person is made up

in part by our values and attitudes what might be called 'personality'. It is not something that remains independent of that person's identity. Since it is the outcome of a person's disposition, attitude, value and belief, it is supposed to be an inherent quality of a person. But above all these things mentioned above, how do we justify the reverence for life? The only way to answer this question is to show how it is in your self interest to adopt such an attitude. Reverence for life may at times be reducible to some instrumental value, but this is exactly what biocentric ethics denies. Life has intrinsic value and therefore needs to be revered by every other form of life.

