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Ecocentric Ethics and Deep Ecology: Towards Ecological Integrity by Redefining Environmental Stewardship

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Introduction

Over the past six decades, scientists and philosophers alike have called for transformative socioecological changes as response to the increasing environmental crises that have arisen. Even though multitudinous international conferences, meetings and documents have been initiated, the anthropogenic negative effect on our biosphere remains substantial. What then, is the reason that politics and firms continue with their business as usual? Why does the anthropocentric ethical framework that values nature primarily for its utility to humans continue to dominate conservation efforts? Although many conservationists argue that the acknowledgment of value of ecosystems and species beyond their utility to humans is an obligatory component for genuine ecological sustainability, it remains misinterpreted, sidelined, or overlooked in debates, which has resulted in policies that fail to address the non-anthropocentric ethical concerns that are necessary for long-term ecological health. In this thesis, I argue that the current anthropocentric framework with which we address the environmental crises of our time should be fundamentally altered to include more ecocentric and deep ecological principles. To support my argument, I first explore the theoretical foundations of ecocentrism and deep ecology, and supplement this with a historical overview to demonstrate the philosophical pillars upon which these environmentalist theories rest. In the subsequent section, I shall point out the ethical shortcomings of anthropocentrism and pragmatic environmentalism in offering solutions to the environmental crises. In response, I argue demonstrate how ecocentric and deep ecology principles offer a more morally sound framework for achieving ecological sustainability. Consequently, in the third section I address the policy implications of anthropocentric views and their shortcomings in achieving ecological sustainability. I shall discuss how these views dominate contemporary environmental legislation and business strategies and argue that the shift from human-centered to a nature-centered paradigms is not only a moral imperative but a practical necessity. I will end this thesis with the central argument that through incorporating ecocentric and deep ecological principles in our social, political, and corporate frameworks, a broader sustainable moral rationale in sustainability can be achieved. Through a shift in our ethical reasoning about nature, where we move away from anthropocentric motivations towards a just valuation of our entire biosphere, we can develop more effective conservation strategies that ensure the long-term health and sustainability of our planet.

1. Theoretical Foundations of Deep Ecology and Ecocentrism

Understanding the theoretical foundations of ecocentrism is essential for addressing the environmental crises of our time. This section provides the ethical groundwork for my argument that a shift from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism is necessary to develop sustainable environmental practices. Ecocentrism, which values nature primarily for its own sake, and therefore assigns inherent worth independent of human values, offers an ethical framework that challenges the limitations of anthropocentric thought, which values nature as utilitarian value to humans (Purser et al., 1995; Thompson & Barton, 1994). Instead, according to the ecocentrist, a deeper appreciation of nature is fostered through the emancipation of ecosystems in our ethical consideration and the protection of all biotic and abiotic communities in our biosphere (Purser et al., 1995). Additionally, ecocentrism is mostly characterized as being distinct from anthropocentrism, which places humans at the center of moral consideration, as it seeks to broaden the ethical scope to include all living and non-living elements of nature (Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2020; Washington et al., 2017). These characteristics are reflected in the core tenets below, and function as foundation for the ethical comparison that I shall make in the subsequent section. As I will show, the ecocentric principles of valuing nature in itself, thus acknowledging its inherent worth, and recognizing that humanity should not be considered as having superior moral value to nature are crucial ethical considerations that are required to sustain Earth's biosphere.

1.1 Historical overview of ecocentric thought

Ecocentric principles have been present within humanity as we evolved, with examples tracing back to indigenous cultures that regard nature as having rights in itself. However, official early signs of the non-anthropocentric emerged in literature in the works of Romantic poets like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, who emphasized the intrinsic value of nature and the interconnectedness of all living things.

With the rise of new movements such as transcendentalism in 19th century New England, novel philosophical ideas came to the fore. Being led by philosophical influences such as Henry David Thoreau, a philosophical and spiritual appreciation of the natural world was promoted, and appreciation for the fundamental connection between humans and nature emerged (Oxford Reference, 2008). In his seminal work *Walden* (1854), Thoreau expressed an early form of ecocentrism, in which he promoted a lifestyle that respects and learns from the natural

environment (Garvey, 2009). At the same time, George Perkins Marsh, who was often regarded as America's first environmentalist, argued in *Man and Nature* (1864) that human actions against nature, if unchecked, would lead to environmental degradation, advocating for sustainable land management practices (Bunkse & Buell, 1997). These ideas prognosticated the conservation efforts that would gain momentum in the early 20th century, when the rise of the conservation movement kickstarted.

During this time, influential thinkers such as Gifford Pinchot shaped conservational thought by focusing on the careful utilization of natural resources and wilderness areas for public use and indicating an increasing recognition of the importance for sustainable environmental measures (Balogh, 2002). Ecocentrism's philosophy began to take shape in a more formal form due to the writings and advocacy of Aldo Leopold. His pioneering notion of the 'Land Ethic', introduced in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), became a fundamental aspect of ecocentric philosophy (Meine, 2013). Leopold stated that "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals […] A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these 'resources,' but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state" (Leopold, 1949, pp.2-3). Leopold hereby recognized nature's "right to continued existence" and aimed to change to "the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land to plain member and citizen of it" (Leopold, 1949, p.2).

By the mid-20th century, Rachel Carson's publication of Silent Spring (1962) catalyzed the contemporary environmental movement by bringing attention to the ecological effects of human activities, with particular emphasis on the use of pesticides (Kroll, 2001). Carson had significant impact on the environmental movement, and her work ultimately became a starting point for the activist- and deep ecology movements and their success since the 1960s (Hynes, 1989). During this time period, Deep Ecology, devised by Arne Naess in the 1970s, arose and emphasized the importance of all life forms having inherent worth, while advocating for significant shifts in human behavior to better align with natural processes. As I will show in the subsequent section, Naess' deep ecology principles shaped modern environmental ethics, resulting in the ongoing ethical discussion whether moral values should be extended to non-human life in the quest for a sustainable environment. Together, these actions represented a notable change from simply preserving nature to promoting a fundamental philosophical reassessment of humanity's role in the biosphere.

Entering the 21st century, globally known environmental studies such as those by Olsson et al. (2004) or Folke et al. (2002) have revealed the interdependence between ecosystems and

human actions, advocating for policies and actions that support ecological systems that are both sustainable and resilient. These modern advancements demonstrate a continuous progression of ecocentric ideologies, which still impact environmental regulations and moral discussions globally.

Tracing the origins of these ethical perspectives allows us to better appreciate the evolution of environmental ethics and their impact on contemporary policy and practice. Shifting from Pinchot's resource-focused conservation efforts to Leopold's holistic Land Ethic shows us the growing recognition of intrinsic value in nature, with Naess' deep ecology movement marking the departure from anthropocentric paradigms towards advocating for a deeper respect for all forms of life. Modern studies, influenced by these earlier works, further emphasize the interconnectedness of human and ecological systems and advocate for sustainable policies that reflect such ecocentric principles. This continuity points to the necessity of a paradigm shift in our ethical approach to the environment, moving from a human-centered to a nature-centered perspective that truly respects the intrinsic value of all life.

1.2 Core Tenets

Intrinsic value

The first foundational tenet of ecocentrism that I shall discuss is intrinsic value, which posits that nature has value that is independent of human interests and beyond its utilitarian use to humans (Purser et al., 1995). As a result, all lifeforms, ranging from individual organisms to entire ecosystems should have inherent worth that demands recognition and moral consideration. (Washington et al., 2017). In the literature (e.g., Thompson & Barton, 1994; Francuz, 2020; Washington et al., 2017) this perspective challenges traditional anthropocentrism, which states that value in nature is primarily instrumental (such as its usefulness to humans for resources or recreation) and regards human species as more valuable than other organisms. Instead, ecocentric thought involves respectfully interacting with nature, and stresses the conservation and protection of natural environments for their own sake, rather than solely for what they can provide. According to ecocentric thought, human-centered views are subject to criticism, as they can be ethically flawed and constitutively unsustainable (e.g., Taylor et al., 2019; Washington et al., 2017). As a result, ecocentrism seeks to address the ethical shortcomings of anthropocentrism and promote a more just treatment of the natural world through shifting the focus from human-centered interests to a broader ecological perspective (Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018; Washington et al., 2017). This

however, would require that man acknowledges the boundaries of its control, and instead embraces more sustainable mutual interactions with the environment (Salman, 2019). In the following sections, I shall demonstrate how ecocentrism aims to provide solutions to anthropocentric shortcomings through leveraging intrinsic value in ethical discussions.

Closely related to this concept of intrinsic value is biocentric equality, which extends ethical consideration exclusively to all living organisms, and which, according to Rottman (2014), argues that all forms of life have moral standing and that there should be a more equitable consideration of non-human interests in ethical discussions. In addition, biocentric equality challenges the anthropocentric assumption that human interests always override those of non-human nature (ten Have & Patrão Neves, 2021). Instead, a balance is promoted in which the rights and needs of all life forms are considered when making decisions that (in)directly impact the environment (Humaida, 2019). As I will show in the comparative ethical analysis, granting inherent value that should be acknowledged and respected to all components of nature, including the non-living elements, has implications for one's ethical and political decision-making processes (Vilkka, 1997; Baxter, 1996). Based on Pires et al. (2014), ecocentrism proposes a change in how societies value, engage with, and oversee cultural resources, and supports social structures that give precedence to ecological well-being and sustainability. These systems evolve into a justice system that integrates eco-justice principles, which takes into account the rights of non-human elements in addition to human rights, and hence, provides moral foundation for opposing activities that lead to environmental degradation, even if these may bring social or economic benefits to humans (White, 2018).

One influential contributor to the discussion regarding intrinsic value is Arne Naess, in his 1973 *The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement*. Naess introduced the idea of deep ecology to emphasize his view about nature, stating that "The well-being of non-human life on Earth has value in itself. This value is independent of any instrumental usefulness for limited human purposes", which he articulated in Principle 1 of the Deep Ecology Platform (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p.69). He hereby shifted the focus away from human-centered values to promoting a respect for life that supports sustainable and equitable policies for environmental management. Instead, Naess advocates for the preservation of non-human entities like forests, rivers, and animals, not merely for their utility to humans but because they have inherent worth and encourages a reverence for nature irrespective of direct human benefit. Naess (1973) placed the values of ecocentric thought on a spectrum, typologizing the two extremes of this spectrum as "shallow" or "deep" ecology. In this thesis, I shall echo the typology of Eckersley (2002),

who framed environmental issues into two approaches: ecocentric principles aligning with deep green ecology principles as argued by Naess, and environmental pragmatism, which sympathizes with the shallow ecology approach. Consequently, I shall argue that anthropocentric values can be placed on a similar spectrum, extending from weak to strong anthropocentrism. Advocates of shallow ecology are primarily concerned with the health and well-being of humans and seek to mitigate environmental degradation solely based on ensuring continued human prosperity (Kopnina, 2012b). It is based on the "the tendency to look at nonhumans and the biosphere in general from the point of view of narrow utilitarianism, a devaluation of anything but humans and a focus on their narrow, shallow interests, not their deep ones" (Naess, 1999, p.231). Contrary to this, deep ecology concerns itself with the value and rights of the environment and all its living and non-living parts (Devall and Sessions, 1985). This distinction is important, as it is the basis for how ecocentric or anthropocentric viewpoints are employed either to argue for conserving the environment for humanity's sake, or for the environment in itself. The ethical comparison in this thesis will show how deep ecology offers a paradigm that allows for sustaining long-term ecological flourishment, and should serve as addition, if not replacement of the sustainable growth ideology that dominates our world.

The ethical debate within Eco-philosophy regarding what intrinsic value should entail is ongoing, with theories of non-anthropocentricity falling along a spectrum of inclusivity, and different theories ascribing various levels of intrinsic value to circles of beings. As a result, referring to what entities have intrinsic value has implications for the moral consequences of this typology. Whereas Regan, (1983/2004) argued that intrinsic value should be attributed to individuals within species, Taylor (1991) and Ferry (1995) argue that it should be ascribed to entire species, and Singer (1975) and DesJardins (2005) hold that whole ecosystems should be entitled to intrinsic value. Since the ethical discussion about what intrinsic value should entail is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will simplify the concept of intrinsic value as entailing everything that is non-human nature, and adopt the holistic perspective of ecocentric philosophy, which ascribes intrinsic value primarily to whole ecosystems rather than focusing exclusively on individuals within species or entire species alone. This focus is significant for the ethical analysis that will follow, as it stresses the importance of preserving entire ecosystems rather than just individual species or organisms. In this analysis, I shall illustrate how shallow ecology is typologized as environmental pragmatism and is used as argument for 'sustainable development', thereby directly opposing deep ecological principles. This clearly articulated distinction is relevant to allow for the discussion between different stakeholders and to

formulate solutions for sustainability challenges. However, it is important to note that this thesis shall follow the non-anthropocentric conceptualization of intrinsic value as noted by Batavia & Nelson (2017), who acknowledge that the guidance of non-anthropocentric theories of intrinsic value might present ethical challenges for conservation, since the welfare of the overall ecosystem might not always be beneficial for the welfare of individuals or species. For example, eradicating invasive species like feral cats or rabbits might be necessary for preserving native biodiversity and ecosystem balance. However, a zoocentrist might oppose such measures, and argue that the lives and well-being of the individual invasive animals should be prioritized over the health of the ecosystem as a whole. This example signals the tension between protecting individual animal rights and achieving broader conservation goals. As a response, I shall demonstrate that recognizing the intrinsic value of nature based on non-anthropocentric theories is a prerequisite in ethical discussions about ecological preservation, as it fosters a deeper respect for the natural world and supports the development of sustainable practices that benefit the entire biosphere, not just humanity.

Holism and interconnectedness

Another core principle of ecocentrism is ecological holism, which views ecological systems as integrated wholes whose value and functionality cannot be reduced to their individual parts. As stated by McShane (2014, p.132), holists argue that "ecological wholes (biomes, species, ecosystems) should also be deemed morally considerable," and thus recognize the interdependencies between all actors within the biosphere. Furthermore, ecocentrism, as described by Leopold (1970, p.239) "simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively, the land." With this, Leopold emphasizes that the health and viability of individual species, including humans, depend on the health of the entire system, in which we are not "conquerors" of the land, bure merely "plain members" without any higher status (Leopold, 1970, p.240). This interconnectedness thus directs a certain stewardship approach to environmental policies and practices to ensure that actions taken in one part of an ecosystem do not cause adverse effects somewhere else (Baxter, 1996). The idea of ecological holism is also present in Naess' deep ecology movement, in which he implies that all parts of the ecosystem are interconnected, and states that the quality of human life "depends in part upon the deep pleasure and satisfaction we receive from close partnership with other forms of life. The attempt to ignore our dependence and to establish a master-slave role has contributed to the alienation of man from himself" (Naess, 1973).

Driven by the recognition of nature's intrinsic value and the interdependence of all life forms, ecocentrism supports sustainable and conservation-oriented practices, since the flourishing of human communities is contingent on the health of the ecosystems they inhabit, suggesting a direct link between nature's intrinsic values and human prosperity (Baxter, 1996; Kagan, 1998). The idea of this interaction with nature aligning with the notion that human well-being is deeply interconnected with the health of ecosystems, since preserving natural ecosystems in their own right is essential for sustainable human development, is central in ecocentric philosophical thought (Callicott, 2005; Olmedo & Ceberio de León, 2023). Acknowledging the intrinsic value of nature supports efforts to protect endangered species and habitats that might not have obvious economic value (Pearson, 2016). As a result, the integrity and diversity and thus sustainability of ecosystems can be preserved through the mitigation of human impact on the environment. Furthermore, I concur with Washington et al. (2017) amongst others that supporting a broader biodiversity conservation ethic is required to maintain an ecological balance and protect the integrity of the biosphere upon which all life, including that of humans themselves ultimately depends.

Through these principles, we can see that ecocentrism and Naess's deep ecology principles advocate for a paradigm shift in human perceptions and interactions with the natural world. They urge us to move from superficial environmentalism concerned only with pollution and resource depletion to the extent that it influences human life, to a deeper, more holistic environmentalism that embraces the complexity and interconnectedness of life. However, in practice, these principles are often applied otherwise. In the ethical comparison, I will show that interconnectivity is often used as argument for sustainable development, thereby defending the position that components of nature can be seen as instrumental means to human ends, instead of ends in themselves. This stance dominates academic discourse and the political and social landscape, resulting in practices that focus on human progress at the expense of the biosphere.

2. Comparative ethical analysis

I outlined the theoretical foundations of deep ecology and ecocentrism to establish the philosophical and ethical structures on which these philosophies stand. The subsequent section will enrich the theoretical foundations with a critical analysis of these theories in juxtaposition with anthropocentrism, which has traditionally dominated environmental and business

practices. In contrast, I argue that a shift towards ecocentric principles, thereby acknowledging the interconnectedness and intrinsic value of nature, can better address contemporary environmental crises. Hence, in this section, I will focus on illuminating the contrasting values and ethical orientations towards the environment by providing a comparative analysis of deep ecology and ecocentrism against anthropocentrism, and with that, exhibit the philosophical arguments in favor of ecocentric approaches over anthropocentric ones.

2.1 Anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism follows the philosophy of or human-centeredness and refers to the ethical belief that only humans possess intrinsic value and are seen as separate from nature and superior to it, which often comes at the expense of non-human entities, who in contrast, hold value primarily as a means to fulfill human needs (Goralnik & Nelson, 2012). It finds its roots in traditional western ethics, led by thinkers such as Aristotle, Mill and Kant, where the basis for ethics was found in one's ability to reason by using its cognitive abilities. Although this line of thought traces back to classical antiquity, it gained momentum during the Renaissance and Enlightenment when faith in human reason and science began to be the center of philosophical thought. During these periods, nature was increasingly viewed as resource to be controlled for human benefit (Plumwood, 2005).

Although anthropocentrism has taken on various forms throughout the history of philosophy, this thesis will particularly focus on its basic form, which emphasizes the centrality of human beings, and is used reciprocally with humanocentrism or human exceptionalism (Boslaugh, 2019). The presence of this form of anthropocentric thought is prevalent in modern politics, business practices, and social structures, but calls for a re-evaluation from an ecocentric position to mitigate ecological distress and secure the well-being of all entities. To address this, tracing the historical development of anthropocentrism that reveals its influence on contemporary attitudes toward nature is required. This historical context will aid in understanding the recurring themes and limitations of anthropocentric thought by encapsulating the necessity throughout history of shifting towards more inclusive, ecocentric perspectives for our biosphere.

Anthropocentrism is a concept that, although not specifically defined in this term, has been prevalent throughout human history. For many ethical philosophers, anthropocentrism is entrenched in Judeo-Christian traditions, where in the book of Genesis the biblical assertion is made that humans are made in God's image and given dominion over other forms of life

(Genesis 1:26). This assertion has been interpreted as humanity being superior to nature, and can be found throughout philosophical history, among which in Aristotle's *Politics*, in which he maintains that "all animals must have been made by nature for the sake of man" (Aristotle, 2009, Book 1, Chapter 8). This influence was reinforced in the modern period by thinkers such as René Descartes and Francis Bacon, who advocated for a mechanistic view of nature. Descartes assigned a unique role to humans in relationship to nature in his *Discourse on Method*, and later established human cognition as the foundation of all else in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. By setting humans apart from non-thinking entities, Descartes facilitated a view of the environment as devoid of moral worth, valuable only insofar as it serves human purposes. This idea of human supremacy over nature is the condition that has shaped modern thinking, which can be seen in for example Kant's work, who reinforced these views by proposing that moral value is inherently related to rationality (Kant, 2006). Kant (2000, p.298) stated that "As the sole being on earth who has reason, and thus a capacity to set voluntary ends for himself, [man] is certainly the titular lord of nature, and, if nature is regarded as a teleological system, then it is his vocation to be the ultimate end of nature" and hereby reinforced the assumptions that humans have some absolute superior value, placing them in a privileged position above nature and justifying its exploitation of nature. Regarding humans as privileged above nature gave rise to the idea that all of non-human nature could be used for human purposes, resulting in debates about how these resources could be used most efficiently, and whether humans should have the right to claim these resources (Rae, 2014). As a result, anthropocentrism, although dominant, has been under scrutiny throughout history. Sigmund Freud subdivided the main criticisms into three challenges for anthropocentrism: the Copernican revolution that challenged Earth's centrality in the universe, the Darwinian notion that undermined the divide between animals and humans as privileged, and finally Freudian psychoanalysis, which contested that humans are rational and in control of themselves (Rae, 2014, p.3).

However, proponents of anthropocentrism argue that in a sense, all ethics are based on anthropocentric thought, as only humans have the cognitive ability to assign and recognize moral value. As a result, anthropocentrism is the presumption on which other ethical theories are based. For example, the three main ethical theories, virtue ethics, deontology, and utilitarianism, all reason on the same premises: either the character of an agent is required to define what is good or bad, that human judgment is required to calculate consequences of an action, or the reflection and intention of the human is necessary to decide whether an action is ethical or not. This line of reasoning results in an automatic anthropocentric view, since these

ethical analyses are always defined by humans themselves (Rae, 2014). Nevertheless, this human-centric premise on which ethical debates are based is an uninteresting philosophical debate, since it does not limit us in the type of ethical system we apply to determine good and bad, is based on the mistaken belief that humans, because they experience and understand nature through their own senses and perspectives, are unable to recognize that nature has intrinsic value (Goralnik & Nelson, 2012). In other words, it wrongly assumes that since our perception of nature is inherently human, we cannot attribute inherent worth to nature itself, independent of its usefulness to humans. However, this view is flawed (Fox, 1990; Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018; Washington, 2015). Even though our understanding of nature is filtered through a human lens, we can still acknowledge and respect the intrinsic value of nature, appreciating it as valuable in its own right, not just for what it can provide for us. Instead, humans should recognize objective good without any relation to human existence (Rolston, 2002). Acknowledging our human perspective does not limit our ethical choices but rather enables us to decide where we ascribe value in the world. This cognitive capability not only allows us to assess the world from our human viewpoint but also empowers us to respect and value other entities as ends in themselves. In contrast to this, anthropocentric thinking solely assigns moral value to human beings in their own right, meaning that moral obligations, including those of the environment, are only considered from the inherent rights we possess as humans. Indeed, anthropocentric ethics addresses issues such as pollution, resource depletion, climate change, or biodiversity loss, but only insofar as it does not come at the expense of human well-being. However, by isolating human interests from ecological contexts, these complex and interconnected issues cannot be addressed on a long-term scale. Thus, a holistic view of nature and human interaction is required, which encourages solutions that are motivated by the recognition of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all beings on earth, and which is designed to benefit the entire ecosystem and sustain its long-term health.

2.2 An ethical comparison of ecocentrism, deep ecology, and anthropocentrism

As seen in chapter one, ecocentrism differs from anthropocentrism in the sense that it deems all components of the ecosystem – both living and non-living – as inherently valuable, and thus warrants ethical and political considerations beyond human utility. Intrinsic value, biocentric equality, and holism are foundational tenets upon which universal moral value is appropriated. Hence, the question becomes: how do these ecocentric and deep ecology principles differ from anthropocentric thought, and can they successfully overcome the shortcomings of

anthropocentrism while withstanding the philosophical criticism related to its ethical reasoning and implementation?

Anthropocentric thought has often been deemed as the cause for environmental degradation. Indeed, Lynn White Jr. amongst others, published influential works on non-anthropocentric thought that would give rise to attempts to establish ecocentric ethics in the subsequent decades. In one of his works, White (1967, p.1205) argued that the ecological challenges we face are rooted in Western's Christianity's anthropocentric views of nature, stating that "Christianity (…) not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends", resulting in our exploitation of the natural world, overpopulation, loss of species and pollution. In response to these challenges, White suggests that we "rethink our axioms" and promotes an alternative Christian view exemplified by Saint Francis of Assisi, who "tried to depose man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures". He proposed that humanity should not see itself as having limitless rule over creation, but rather embrace the "spiritual autonomy of all parts of nature" (White, 1967, pp.1204-1207). He therefore called for a reevaluation of our anthropocentric ethos and promoted an approach that respects and integrates the interdependence of all life forms. White's argument highlights the need for a more inclusive view in order to create a long-lasting and sustainable world. Research by many others support this claim, arguing that all life within the biosphere is interdependent, and that therefore holding an anthropocentric view is inadequate for conserving biodiversity and world's ecosystems (e.g., Cafaro & Primack, 2014; Kopnina, Washington, Gray, et al., 2018; Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018; Noss & Cooperrider, 1994; Rolston, 2012; Shoreman-Ouimet & Kopnina, 2015; Singer, 1977; Soulé, 1985; Washington, 2013; Washington et al., 2017). However, critics argue that anthropocentrism is an inevitable ethical standing, and does no harm in the challenges of protecting the environment. Prominent critics, such as Hayward (1997) and Norton (1984), hold that anthropocentric views are wrongly defined as criticism of humanity, and that his misuse is counterproductive, and even misanthropic for environmental protection (Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018, p.110).

Humanism

Ecocentrism and deep ecology principles have often been labeled as non-human by proponents of anthropocentrism. Indeed, Hayward (1997) states that anthropocentrism is not objectionable if defined correctly, as opposed to human chauvinism and speciesm, where

“humans give preference to interests of members of their own species over the interests of members of other species for morally arbitrary reasons” (Hayward, 1997, p.59). Proponents of ecocentric beliefs define anthropocentrism as acting in the interests of humans at the expense of the environment’s well-being, which, according to Hayward, equates anthropocentrism to speciesm and human chauvinism. Caring for one’s own species is not a moral wrongdoing according to Hayward; doing so by privileging one’s interests above those of other species is. However, Hayward also contends that anthropocentric axiologies value humanity in itself, and thus it seems illogical to allow for human behavior to negatively impact the long-term well-being of human interests, such as overpopulation and exploitation of nature. As a result, anthropocentrism in Haywards view, “is not adequate to describe human agency in environmental damage” (Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018, p.113). By redefining anthropocentrism and addressing its critiques by separating it from speciesm and human chauvinism, Hayward claims that true anthropocentrism is about a legitimate concern for human well-being.

Formulating humans as the arbiters of what are legitimate concerns for well-being however, results in overlooking the legitimate concerns for the well-being of non-humans (Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018). This way of thinking consequently results in the notion that value lies solely in humans, and consequently fails to value nature intrinsically. Granting moral standing towards other humans by acknowledging the need to eat, drink, and reproduce, or being moved more by human suffering than the suffering of non-human beings is not inherently ‘bad’. However, granting moral standing to solely humans, and thus refusing to recognize the inherent value of other beings with the result of allowing to exploit these beings for the sake of human prosperity fails to acknowledge that humans are in fact part of these living beings, as they are part of us (Drengson, 1995). It can be argued that humans are inherently self-centered, in the sense that we perceive the world through our own perspectives. However, this does not mean that we must be morally self-centered, where our thoughts and concerns revolve solely around ourselves. This can be extended to anthropocentrism, since it focuses on humans because it assigns intrinsic value exclusively to humans, not because humans are the only beings capable of assigning intrinsic value (Batavia & Nelson, 2017). By situating humans as the only being with inherent value, regardless of the consequences to other beings, anthropocentrism is objectionable, because such human-centeredness has potential to undermine the conditions for the existence and flourishing of humanity (Samways, 2018, p.16).

Ecocentric and deep ecological thought do not rule out the notion that humans must grant moral standing towards other humans, and caring about human well-being can co-exist with principles from deep ecology and ecocentric thought. However, interpreting anthropocentrism in the way Hayward does as being compassionate and caring for other humans, does not take away the fact that its meaning in- and outside the literature ascribes ethical considerations exclusively to humans, and therefore regards other beings as utility to humanity (Callicott, 2006). It is therefore important to acknowledge the formal definition of anthropocentrism in valuation theory, which posits that humans are the only entities worthy of ethical consideration and that other things exist merely to serve human purposes. This should not be confused with the interpretation that anthropocentrism means simply caring for and being compassionate toward people. Such erosion of meaning is problematic because it conflates "a formal description of valuation theory with one legitimate aspect of that theory" (Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018, p.115). As a result of this human-centered valuation, anthropocentrism is indeed vulnerable to critique regarding its unsustainable worldview and unethical valuation of non-humans.

As argued by Rolston (2002), Earth itself should be the fundamental unit of intrinsic value. Rather than being able to be *valued by humans*, it is able to generate values *recognized by humans*. Rolston (2012) argued that intrinsic value is inherent in living beings due to the fact that its good lies in its value. This value is an end that it pursues in and for itself (Batavia & Nelson, 2017). As Rolston (1994, p.176) stated: "We do not look for a valuer, but rather for the ability to form value. We look for a matrix, for interconnections between centers of value (individual plants and animals, dynamic lines of speciation), for creative stimulus and open-ended potential. We look for a system able to produce and support value, and ask whether that ability is a value in itself, and also a value for those it produces and supports." As such, the physical form of a being is the representation of its good, its ability to produce value. Burchett (2014) echoed Rolston's argument of intrinsic value being independent of human valuation, stating that long after our extinction, Earth will continue to generate non-instrumental value by providing the environmental conditions that bring forth intrinsically valuable organisms and ecosystems. However, as Batavia and Nelson (2017) point out, in Rolston's conceptualization of intrinsic value as an "observable property of nonhuman nature", observable is not the same as being "objective". For instance, the warmth of sunlight can easily be felt, but this does not prove that warmth is not a construct or projection of the observer. Thus, according to Callicott (1992), Rolston's argument did not suffice, since he did not exemplify how value can exist independent of human valuation. He goes further to show how, through a subjectivist account

of intrinsic value, it is indeed possible for an entity to possess intrinsic value due to its extrinsic properties, meaning that it can be valuable as an end in itself due to its connections to other things. According to Callicott (1992), intrinsic value is therefore not a non-relational attribute of the entity, but rather a result of its relationship with a human valuer (Batavia & Nelson, 2017). However, even though Batavia and Nelson (2017) state that the "source" of value is always human, since value is fundamentally a human concept, a human can still regard a nonhuman entity as value for its own sake. With this, Callicott (1992) distinguishes between the value something has for another purpose (instrumental value), the value it has "in itself" (being an intrinsic property), and the value it has for itself (final value). As a result of this distinction, intrinsic value is necessarily anthropogenic as being attributed by humans, but it does not have to be anthropocentric, as being attributed only to humans (Batavia & Nelson, 2012).

Self-interest

Building on the argument that ecocentrism and deep ecology are labeled as anti-human, proponents of anthropocentrism argue that humanity's self-interest will lead to the same outcomes of preserving nature as other ethical theories (Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018). The reason for this is that anthropocentric thought acknowledges that ecosystems are preserved through the realization that they are the life-support system for humans (Hayward, 1997, p.60). Norton (1984) confirms this and suggests in his convergence theory that human self-interest naturally aligns with the goals of conservation because maintaining healthy ecosystems is essential for human survival and well-being. With this, he posits that recognizing the critical role ecosystems play in supporting human life will motivate actions to protect and sustain these environments, thereby achieving the same preservation outcomes as ecocentric and deep ecology perspectives. In such kind of pragmatic ethics, it is assumed that anthropocentric and ecocentric or deep ecology achieve similar results, such as with issues like fighting pollution in order to sustain human health (Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018).

Although philosophical and scientific literature agrees with the fact that anthropocentric views can indeed produce environmentally justified outcomes, it is argued that it does so based on utilitarian principles that are constructed on human terms (Katz, 2011). Proponents of anthropocentric ethics therefore establish their philosophy based on rejecting intrinsic value so that humans must only protect non-human nature for the sake of their own well-being (Katz, 2011; Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018; Mathews, 2016). As a result of this ethical position, all values and needs of any non-human are subjugated to those of humanity (Borràs,

2016). As I will show in the subsequent section, this type of ecological pragmatism is grounded on the underlying assumption that nonhuman intrinsic value is dismissed as unpractical, and therefore not evaluated by its justification, but rather by its effectiveness in altering environmental policies (Batavia & Nelson, 2017). However, evaluating moral propositions based on their practical applications does not mean that such theories are morally unjust, and thus philosophers state that non-anthropocentric paradigms must emerge that act as countermeasures for the increasing threats that do not directly benefit human well-being (Quinn et al., 2016). Even though ecologically influenced self-interest is employed as an argument to defend anthropocentrism as the best option for maintaining the sustainability of our biosphere, it has proven to fail as value system when there are risks involved, or when exclusive self-interest has better payoffs (Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018). Actions that are based on exclusive self-interest tend to prioritize short-term gains for human society, even if these actions are detrimental to the environment it lives in. Indeed, Stevenson (2006, p.280) argued that even when environmental challenges such as climate change have evidently increased, "environmental considerations continue to be subordinated to economic ones." It is therefore timely that a shift takes place to more ecocentric values, thereby acknowledging the intrinsic value of nature (as being a relational attribute of the entity) and promoting actions that benefit both humans and the natural world by recognizing the importance of preserving ecosystems. This shift would ensure the survival of both human and non-human entities, while preserving the ecosystems that humanity depends on (Washington, 2015).

The comparative analysis of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism illustrates the need for a paradigm shift in our ethical approach to the environment. Anthropocentrism has historically dominated Western thought and has shaped modern environmental and business practices. I argue that the prioritization of human needs and interests has contributed to environmental degradation and unsustainable practices, since its ethical framework fails to account for the long-term health of ecosystems and the intrinsic value of non-human entities. Focusing on ecocentrism allows for a clear and direct examination of its principles and how they contrast with the dominant anthropocentric views that have contributed to ecological crises. However, it is important to notice that alternative varieties of anthropocentrism exist and are still emerging, such as Norton's enlightened anthropocentrism or Pinchot's enlightened self-interest. While acknowledging these varieties is important, it is not the primary focus or scope of this thesis. The objective here is to emphasize the necessity of adopting ecocentric frameworks that fundamentally challenge the traditional anthropocentric paradigm that has

aided in the emergence of theories that fundamentally value non-human entities as exploitable for human benefit. Exploring the finer distinctions of different forms of anthropocentrism would indeed provide a richer understanding of potential paths toward sustainability. However, the scope of this thesis is not to cover all forms of anthropocentric thought but illustrate the transformative potential of ecocentric ethics in fostering long-term ecological integrity.

3. Policy Implications and Recommendations

The previous section provided a foundational understanding of anthropocentrism and its prevailing influence on modern environmental ethics. By juxtaposing anthropocentrism with ecocentric and deep ecological principles, I highlighted the limitations of human-centered approaches in addressing environmental challenges. This ethical comparison provides the theoretical groundwork for the following section, in which I will outline concrete examples and scenarios that illustrate the presence of anthropocentric views in contemporary culture, environmental legislation, and business strategies. This exploration is consequential, as it underscores the necessity for a paradigm shift towards ecocentrism and deep ecology. By examining how ecocentric principles can lead to more sustainable and inclusive outcomes, I will demonstrate the practical implications of these ethical frameworks and their potential to transform environmental policies and practices.

3.1 Modern application of anthropocentrism and its flaws in ecological sustainability

Anthropocentric views, although employed in an environmentally pragmatist manner, are embedded in our contemporary culture, ranging from being the prevalent ideology in academia to dominating international governance. For example, Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al. (2018) point out that the World Charter for Nature of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is an illustration of the anthropocentric argument that its incentives ultimately converge on the same practical outcome as ecocentric positions. The World Charter for Nature proclaims five “principles of conservation by which all human conduct affecting nature is to be guided and judged” (UN General Assembly, 1982). However, this charter, which is seen as an important step towards promoting ecological conservation, is inherently anthropocentric. It observes that humanity benefits from healthy ecological processes and biological diversity, and states that “civilization is rooted in nature” (Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018; UN General Assembly, 1982). This suggests that nature’s value is acknowledged partly because of its importance to human civilization, implying a degree of instrumental value. Protection of

nature extends merely to the natural resources needed for humans in order to function as what is often called “Ecosystem Services”, instead of for the benefit of the biosphere.

Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al. (2018) observe that this argument is the foundation for the concept of ecosystem services in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA). Indeed, the MEA considers the ecosystem as something that is to be regulated in order to function as factor to improve human well-being, as it typologizes ecosystem services as “the benefits people obtain from ecosystems. These include provisioning services such as food, water, timber, and fiber; regulating services such as the regulation of climate, floods, disease, wastes and water quality; cultural services such as recreation, aesthetic enjoyment, and spiritual fulfillment; and supporting services such as soil formation, photosynthesis, and nutrient cycling” (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005, p.1). However, this focus on benefiting society remains anthropocentric, which is alarming, since the MEA has become a prevailing paradigm in ecological and conservation literature, and a motivator for international and national government land use policies and NGO conservation efforts (Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018; Washington, 2015). For example, the MEA has been a foundation for one of the most prominent frameworks about ecological preservation existing today: the planetary boundaries, research that focuses on environments impact on ‘safe operating spaces’ for humans to continue to exist (Steffen et al., 2015). Besides this, the MEA has been inspiration for literature that aimed at quantifying the potential advantages that nature has to offer, resulting in the integration of ecological conservation programs in mainstream economic institutions (Batavia & Nelson, 2017). This instrumental use of ecosystems has however been met with critique, based on the grounds that deploying ecological conservation efforts solely for the purpose of human progress is in conflict with the acknowledgment that there is intrinsic value in nonhuman nature (Cafaro and Primack, 2014; Miller et al., 2014).

Besides the UNGA and MEA, environmental pragmatists views are seen in many aspects of modern society, even in policies, organizations, or businesses that specifically have ecological sustainability as their objective. Similarly to the World Charter for Nature, the Brundtland Report (1987) famously sought to achieve sustainable development with homo sapiens as main priority, addressing environmental challenges through the formal political development sphere. This report again illustrates anthropocentric priorities, as its main target was to promote sustainable development, defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p.16).

However, as noted by Akamani (2020, p.7), literature has questioned whether Earth's ecosystem capacity can "support the rate of economic growth recommended in the Brundtland Report", and that this "over-emphasis on economic growth could (…) potentially result in the countering of sustainability objectives." Moreover, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is UNESCO's attempt to face the challenges that faces the planet. To do so, it produces and shares knowledge about sustainability, and provides policy guidance and technical support to its member states (UNESCO, 2014). It is argued however, that UN frameworks, such as UNESCO's Roadmap for ESD, prioritize human rights over non-human rights, and that environmental ethics are mitigated (Kopnina, 2012a). As a result, this anthropocentric approach has come at the expense of ecocentric views, resulting in the enactment of an industrial worldview that is directly opposed to a holistic understanding of nature (Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018; Spring, 2014). Ecological conservationist literature therefore maintains that ESD has adverse results, as it undermines the efforts to educate citizens about the importance of valuing the environment and is instead a distinct turn towards anthropocentrically biased education due to its focus on human welfare and distribution of resources (Kopnina, 2012a; Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018).

Proponents of pragmatist environmental paradigms such as the Ecosystem Services framework that act from an ecologically influenced self-interest, critique the view above, stating that conservation through assigning intrinsic value to nonhuman nature is not practically implementable due to the failure of gaining global support (Armsworth et al., 2007). The utilitarian argument for conservation that regards ecosystems as instrumental use for humans is seen as more useful and appealing, and therefore more effective in affecting (inter)national policymaking (Marvier & Wong, 2012; Batavia & Nelson, 2017). However, arguing that concepts do not work in practice is not a justification for the application of moral theories of which the underlying moral considerations are seen as "most practical". The same holds for dismissing intrinsic value in nonhuman ecosystems based on the premises that it is less effective, rather than a valuation of the moral justifications for the framework. As I have shown in the previous section, the pragmatic application of some ecocentric principles in a capitalist system is not sufficient for dismissing moral theories solely on grounds of practicality. As Batavia and Nelson (2017, p.372) argue, "while a policy or procedure should probably be rejected if it is morally inappropriate, a moral proposition should certainly not be abandoned just because it is politically unpopular or inexpedient." Consider the principle of "racial equality", which asserts that "All are equal before the law and are entitled without any

discrimination to equal protection of the law" (United Nations, 1948). Although such movements have historically been met with significant opposition, they are not rejected on the premises that they do not have impact on social and political frameworks. They are also not evaluated on their practical applicability or their utility to humans, but rather on the basic moral premises that every individual, regardless of their race, has the right to be protected by the law. Hence, I concur with Batavia and Nelson (2017, p.372), that a framework "identifying and quantifying the human benefits of nonhuman nature should support, but not define, the mission of conservation." It has become clear that scientific evidence regarding human impact on its environment is not lacking, but rather the denial of this in society and its political, economic and social systems that prevent mitigation policies (Kopnina, Washington, Taylor, et al., 2018; Washington, 2017). Thus, although the advantages that ecosystems offer in terms of utilitarian value for mankind can be appreciated, they should be embedded within a moral framework that recognizes the intrinsic value of nonhuman nature.

Furthermore, critics of the ecocentric paradigm argue that assigning intrinsic value to nonhuman nature steers us away from the practical side of the spectrum in terms of being a viable moral theory in a context where human relationships with nature are based on conflicting values (Batavia & Nelson, 2017). In such contexts, decisions based on quantifiable preferences may seem less value-laden and therefore more objective than decisions that grant "special consideration to a particular moral belief about intrinsic value" (Batavia & Nelson, 2017, p.373). However, despite appearing objective and thus fairer, all conservation decisions, including those based on economic calculations, "are premised on ethical beliefs", and therefore always invoke some conceptualization of intrinsic value, either for the sake of humans alone, or including nonhuman nature (Batavia & Nelson, 2017, p.373). As a result, environmental pragmatism, in this case expressed in the use of ecosystem services, is often seen as an impartial and inclusive method for evaluating the "social costs and benefits of biodiversity and ecosystem services" (Turner & Daily, 2007, p.29). However, it is important to distinguish between measurability and true objectivity. In this I echo Batavia & Nelson (2017), who state that operating on anthropocentric utilitarian values inherently reflects the subjective values of humans, and thus deciding what to value and how to measure it is influenced by these human perspectives. Consequently, the supposed neutrality of the ES framework is compromised by underlying ethical beliefs. Recognizing intrinsic value in nature is merely an alternative approach, which provides a counterpoint to the human-centered perspective of the ES model

and other pragmatist theories such as the ecosystem or sustainable development frameworks, offering a broader and potentially more ethical framework for ecological sustainability.

3.2 The need for ecocentrism and deep ecology in ecological sustainability

In the previous section, I explained how environmental pragmatism insist that anthropocentric ethics are adequate in reasoning for behaviors that promote environmental sustainability. However, I have also argued how such reasoning ultimately results in utilitarian principles that guide environmental ethics based on the premises that humanity's short-term gains are prioritized over the environment it lives in. Rees (2008) argued similarly, and noted that such optimism has little support in environmental history, since despite humanity's resources and capacity "to execute a smooth transition to global sustainability out of mutual self-interest" and despite decades of "organized environmentalism, two world summits on environment and development, repeated warnings by scientists and the emergence of 'sustainable development' as a mainstream mantra, global society continues its drive toward ecological disaster and geopolitical chaos" (Rees, 2008, p.90; Taylor et al., 2020, p.1093).

As noted by Taylor et al. (2020), one argument supporting the practical inclusion of ecocentrism in environmental sustainability is that collective action cannot be achieved through the anthropocentric strategy of promoting self-interest in the pursuit of global sustainability. This argument is based on earlier research, which indicates that anthropocentric values cannot adequately present the kind of moral considerations and language that is required to lead to political action (Lakoff, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Taylor et al., 2020). Furthermore, it has been argued that the anthropocentric premises on which global initiatives such as those by, but not limited to, the UNGA, MEA and UNESCO, are based, provide insufficient proposals to maintain biodiversity and ecological sustainability. Such anthropocentric arguments provide utilitarian reasons for conservation, which are often seen as debatable and insufficiently compelling. On the other hand, ecocentric values have shown to inspire visionary proposals, driven by deeper ethical commitments to the intrinsic value of nature, such as the protection of half of the remaining ecosystems on Earth's surface (Dinerstein et al., 2017; Kopnina, 2016; Locke, 2013; Ripple et al., 2017; Watson et al., 2018). As argued by Taylor et al. (2020), important steps have been taken to reach this goal, such as resolutions by the European Parliament to protect and restore 30% of the ecosystems within the EU by 2030 and protecting half the planet by 2050, and assessments have been made of how these objectives can be realized (European Parliament, 2020; Müller et al., 2020). Ecocentrism is a critical driving

factor for such movements, as the success of movements like Wilson's (2016) "Nature Needs Half" and endorsements from international bodies like the European Parliament are motivated by a deep respect and concern for nonhuman nature (Kopnina, Washington, Gray, et al., 2018).

A similar argument is found in Kopnina (2012b, p.248), who state that "the failure of the current political system to address biodiversity loss stems from the fact that ecocentric values are under-represented in the most powerful strata of society. While private expressions of biophilia are acceptable, the more pronounced publicly expressed deep ecology position is discouraged as radical." As a result, international policy meetings, documents, and summits such as those by UNGA or the MEA often represent the environmental pragmatism that results in shallow ecological, or weak anthropocentric positions. However, as I have illustrated above, such positions fall short in addressing the root causes of environmental degradation and biodiversity loss and tend to promote superficial changes rather than the transformative shifts needed for true ecological sustainability. As argued by Taylor et al. (2020, p.1094), ecocentric and deep ecological principles may "become central in the development of international instruments", and "propose concrete implementation plans that will turn these values into policies to be adopted and enforced by governments." Such inclusion ultimately depends on the academic and social discourse shifting away from anthropocentric rationales for ecological sustainability to a deeper moral obligation towards all life on Earth.

The phenomenon of sustainable development as it is conceptualized in international discourse such as is reflected in the WCED's sustainable growth framework has led to the capitalization of sustainable economic growth in the organizational sphere (Purser et al., 1995). In recent years, the incorporation of ecocentric and deep ecological principles in organizational and corporate domains reveals a spectrum of adoption levels, which ranges from superficial applications to more embedded ecocentric practices. Organizational literature provides both hope and challenges for the consideration of our biosphere. There is hope in the fact that there are more and more instances in which ecocentric and deep ecological principles have (albeit marginally) been adopted in the social, political, or corporate governance structures. One such paradigmatic example that is often associated with the integration of ecocentric principles is Patagonia Inc., with its main mission to "build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, and use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis" (Patagonia, 2018). According to others, Patagonia is therefore an example of organizations that move beyond the traditional economic growth model, towards alternative organizational models in which fairer and completer consideration is granted to the environment (Guinot, 2020). It is

argued that organizations such as Patagonia regard the natural environment as its most important stakeholder, and thus, "Unlike companies of the old economic paradigm, their objective is not profit-maximization or short-term profitability (...) Patagonia has a superior purpose: The safeguarding of environmental interests" (Guinot, 2020, p.605).

However, as Purser et al. (1995, p.1065) note, "corporate environmentalism and so-called 'greening-business' strategies remain fundamentally constrained by the capitalist imperative for continuous growth and profit maximization." As a result, traditional corporate models are in their core at odds with the values proposed by ecocentrism and deep ecology, and hence, the tension is demonstrated between profit-driven traditional economic business models and the ecocentric notion that nature should be valued based on its intrinsic value. Furthermore, they criticize the notion stating that Patagonia is explicitly ecocentric, and instead, argue that the sustainable development paradigm that prevails, in which businesses can be green while making profits, is based on anthropocentric foundations (Purser et al., 1995). Although such companies instill a certain hope in the shift towards ecocentric and deep ecological infused paradigms, they are still embedded with principles focusing on shareholder value, production, and economic progress.

Nevertheless, the growing discourse around ecocentrism and true ecological sustainability (as opposed to the capitalist growth model based on pragmatic environmentalism) suggests that there is room for optimism. Although the literature remains divided and limited about consensus around ecocentrism in the corporate field, the gradual shift towards more ecocentric and deep ecological principles indicates a growing awareness to environmental stewardship. Frameworks addressing environmental concern continue to emerge (e.g., Araujo et al., 2022; Mukherjee et al., 2020), and hence, the practical pathways for organizations to integrate ecocentric principles in their governance is illustrated. Furthermore, as Guinot (2020, p.605) notices: it may be true that organizations still have a long way to go until they can be considered ecocentric, their success "reveals that it is possible to move away from the neoliberal economic model and its hyper-consumerist values," and towards a more equal and just consideration for all of nature.

4. Discussion

Upon reflecting on the most important environmental challenges of our time, is has become apparent that a coordinated, collective political effort is needed to address the degradation of our biosphere, and instead advocate for a sustainable future. In this thesis, I underscored the urgency of integrating ecocentric ethics into our political and governance systems, a perspective

echoed by Chawla and Cushing (2007, p.438), who argue that "the effect of private actions is limited unless it is combined with organizing for collective public change." However, the current global political landscape reveals a certain absence of empirical cases demonstrating support for deep ecology principles, as the entrenched dominance of anthropocentric power structures continues to marginalize ecocentric viewpoints. This has resulted in a perpetuating a cycle where the interests of other species are routinely overlooked or deprioritized in decision-making processes (Barry et al., 2002; Eckersley, 2004, 2012; Kopnina, 2012b). The environmental pragmatist tendency to subordinate environmental considerations to economic interests suggests that conservation strategies that are rooted in anthropocentric frameworks are insufficient to address the ecological crises humanity faces today. Indeed, without institutional mechanisms to represent ecocentric advocates, the interests of nonhuman species will likely continue to be neglected. Considering this, it becomes clear that integrating deep ecology into political interests may require affirmative actions informed by both anthropocentric and ecocentric ethics. This integration is not merely a theoretical exercise but a practical necessity to ensure the survival and well-being of all species. Hence, the challenge before us is not just to advocate for ecocentric ethics but to fundamentally restructure our political and governance systems to incorporate these values meaningfully. This requires a shift from anthropocentric to ecocentric and deep ecological ethics in environmental decision-making processes, ensuring that the intrinsic value of nonhuman nature is recognized and preserved. In this I echo Kopnina (2012b) and Purser (1995), who argue that the needed ecocentric thought is no different from the form of social change that led to the abolishment of slaves, or the fight for gender and racial equality. The future of conservation depends on our ability to integrate these ethical considerations into actionable political strategies, to bridge the gap between moral advocacy and practical governance. This dialogue must continue, and thus I invite academics to put forwards a diverse range of perspectives that contribute to a holistic and inclusive approach to environmental conservation.

Conclusion

It has become evident that the ethical limitations ingrained in anthropocentric thought have been a driving force in ecological degradation and the perishing of much of our biosphere. As a response, literature has shown how a shift towards more ecocentric and deep ecological principles is imperative to sustain all biotic and abiotic beings on planet earth. To advance this shift, it is required to rethink our political, social, and corporate systems to prioritize ecological

well-being based on the value it has in itself, not for what it can produce. The purpose of this thesis is to show that despite the shortcomings of current international frameworks, there is hope for a worldwide ecological ethic based on equal valuation for all.

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