# HUMANISM AND ENVIRONMENTALISM: A DIALOGUE

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**Abstract**
Humanism as a mode of thought is traceable to the ancient era. Amongst other things, it is characterised by a kind of human-centeredness (homocentrism). Especially in its modern conception, it is an emphasis on the worth of human experiences as the benchmark for decision making; and that holds that humans should take responsibility for their actions without recourse to supernaturalism, ideology, or religion. This way of thinking has influenced a wide range of human activities including perceptions about man, his place within the natural world, and how he interacts with it. Employing the evaluative method, this paper appraised the link between, as well as the influence, of humanism on environmentalism. Particularly, since the former is generally viewed as being anthropocentric and thus anti-environment; the paper sought to verify this claim. It was found that, in spite of its controversial status, humanism has certain pro-nature elements that have positively driven the cause of environmentalism. Thus, the nexus between humanism and the environment is complementary and not totally antithetical as generally perceived.
**Keywords:** Humanism, Homocentrism, Environment, Environmentalism, Nature

## Introduction

A holistic study of environmental problems facing humankind today would reveal the level of hostile relationship that exists between humans and nature or the environment. For example, the primitive human engaged in activities that impacted on the environment, activities geared "toward the liberation of himself from both visible and invisible forces in the universe" (Ogundowole 93). Max Nicholson states that "man's impact on his environment goes back far beyond the beginning of history" (10). However, the advent of industrial revolution of the eighteenth century is regarded in this work as the beginning of modern man's "reckless" degradation of the environment; a scenario that has brought about a reduction in biodiversity. This means that the modern man has contributed much more to environmental destruction than any organism on earth. Given that modern man is the successor of ancient man, he must do something decisive to minimize (or eliminate if possible) environmental degradation in order to make the environment not only habitable for himself but also for other organisms that share the environment with him. Coming up with a robust and serviceable environmental philosophy is expedient because the entire human population may be extinct in the absence of such a philosophical environmental paradigm. For instance, if "man was [sic] not the first form of life on the planet earth" (Ogundowole 4) then he could equally become extinct if his life style were self-destructive. It is also a manifestation of anthropocentric hubris to believe that human appearance on earth is the final stage of evolution, because no one knows for certain the future trajectory of evolution despite the present domination of the planet earth by man (Omosulu 1-2). The point is that man needs the environment to survive and not *vice versa*: nature can conveniently dispense with humans, but humans cannot exist without the natural environment. This point is buttressed by Q. Ashoka Chakkaravarthy when he says that "the very basis of human survival hinges on the sustainable inter-linkages with the environment" (74).

In this connection, the 1960s marked the beginning of a serious rejection of anthropocentrism which had dominated the West as a paradigm of man's interaction with nature (because it was viewed largely as the cause of the problem). As an alternative, non-

anthropocentrism emerged; but with it came serious controversy; all its different theories (biocentrism, deep ecology/ecocentrism, ecofeminism, egalitarianism, eco-utilitarianism, etc.) were considered unsuitable for the problem at hand. For about two decades, heated debates amongst philosophers continued. This situation prompted Bryan Norton's article in which he proposed a convergence hypothesis. Norton argued that non-anthropocentrism in its entirety was neither philosophically viable nor politically necessary; rejected the idea that humanism was the enemy of environmental protection. According to him, "the assumption that environmental ethics must be non-anthropocentric in order to be adequate is mistaken. There are two forms of anthropocentrism, weak and strong, and weak anthropocentrism is adequate to support an environmental ethic" (Norton 131). In other words, Norton's article was actually a defense of anthropocentrism against its critics, among which is Paul Warren Taylor.

Later on, in his book, *Towards Unity among Environmentalists,* Norton explained his convergence hypothesis using a hypothetical conditional. He predicted that certain interests or principles in both anthropocentrism and weak anthropocentrism could be harmonised to produce generally acceptable environmental policy positions (240). His efforts marked a departure from the generally hostile attitude towards the anthropocentric worldview amongst environmental ethicists; provided grounding "for naturalistic methods and empirical tests to resolve value disputes" (Minteer 186); became a fixture for the pragmatist movement; while also establishing a foothold for environmental humanism (Light and Katz qtd in Minteer 186). His work also opened grounds for pluralism in environmental ethics –a claim he later elaborated by appeal to Arne Naess' Ecophilosophy. However, his success at reconciling anthropocentrism with non-anthropocentrism soon proved to be an overestimation as it became enshrouded in controversy. But that may be a discussion for another day; it suffices here to present the above as art of the background from which environmental humanism received impetus to roll forward. However, in spite of spirited efforts by scholars and philosophers to showcase the role of humanism in environmentalism, the multifarious controversies which have plagued humanism, have also threatened its environmental component. This paper has accounted for two questions out of many that lie at the heart of the controversy –most of which bother on the humanist agenda for the environment. The first deals with whether humanism has any relationship with environmentalism at all; and the second concerns the role of humanism in environmentalism. The paper contains a conceptual framework; an account of humanism and its role in environmental ethics, and a conclusion.

**Understanding the Concept of Environmentalism**

The term environmentalism (also referred to as Environmental Rights) covers a wide range of notions, philosophies, ideologies, and movements which are aimed primarily at addressing environmental conservation, preservation, protection, restoration, and improvement. Generally, environmentalism represents the calls for conscientious efforts to improve the balance between human activities (be they developmental, explorative, or recreational) and the various natural systems; in a way that can guarantee sustainability. According to Lorraine Elliot, "In various ways, environmentalism claims that living things other than humans, and the natural environment as a whole, are deserving of consideration in reasoning about the morality of political, economic, and social policies" (n.p). Many environmentalist organizations (whether, religious, social, political, or educational) tend to have one thing in common, the aim of influencing the behavioural, attitudinal, and political processes towards sustainable management of nature's resources. Gottlieb avers that attempts to fulfil this goal:

> […] may include the support of practices like informed consumption, conservation initiatives, investment in renewable resources, improved efficiencies in the material economy, transitioning to new accounting paradigms such as ecological economics, renewing and revitalizing our connections with non-human life or even opting to have one less child to reduce consumption and pressure on resources. […] Environmentalists and environmental organizations seek to give the natural world a stronger voice in human affairs (n.p).

Indeed, environmentalism has a long history that stretches back to the ancient era; its earliest ideas are traceable to Jainism of the 6th century B.C in India. According to Jeffery D. Long Jainism proffers a system of environmental protection through activism; that is a form of nonviolence to nature (n.p). Sometime earlier in 630s Middle East, Caliph Abu Bakr forbade his army from cutting or burning trees or slaying the animals of their enemies, but to rather "save them for food" (Aboul-Enein and Zuhur 22). Apart from this, several other Arabic medical treatise of the 9th and 13th centuries deal with environmentalism and environmental science. Most of these tackled air pollution, soil contamination, municipal solid waste management/mishandling, and environmental assessments of some localities (Gari 475).In the West, elements of environmentalism are found in the reign of King Edward I of England who in 1272 banned the burning of sea-coal because its smoke posed a pollution problem (Urbinato 44). Like its antecedents, modern environmentalism emerged, as reaction, during the Industrial Revolution of the mid-19th century, when smoke pollution from coal-powered factories became a serious problem. This was followed closely by the large volume of industrial chemical discharges of the 1900s. Environmental protection legislations soon emerged. These include Britain's Alkali Acts (passed in 1863), to regulate air pollution caused by producers of soda ash. Then came the 1958 Alkali Order which mandated that all industries emitting smoke, grit, dust and fumes be placed under supervision. Subsequently, several other legislations became a necessity as different industries sprung up with increasing prevalence and divergence of pollution and degradation.

As governments began to prove less effective in the fight against pollution, it became necessary for environmental movements to come up to pressurize leaders to do the needful. For example, the amenity movement of 1870s Britain influenced the emergence of the Commons Preservation Society (in 1865) and the Lake District Defence Society (later known as the Friends of the Lake District) which were formed to fight industrialization and urbanisation together with their dire consequences on the natural environment.

It is worthy of note that much of this activism was primarily pro-conservation (with a typical emphasis on air and water). The rise of Romanticism (and its ideals of a modern environment) gave vent to advocacy for environmentalism with the intellectual support of people like John Ruskin, William Morris, George Bernard Shaw and Edward Carpenter who fought against consumerism, pollution and other activities that proved harmful to nature (Gould 15 – 19; Wall 9 – 14). The movement was largely a reaction to conditions of life in industrial towns where there were concerns about poor sanitation, cramped living spaces, water and air pollution amongst others. Jan Marsh reports that Rustin, like other idealists, championed a return to rural life which they eulogised as a mythical utopia; obviously a revolt against the polluted environments of urban areas (1 – 6). These ideas inspired the establishment of several other environmental groups in the UK, such as the Royal Society for the Protections of Birds, the Garden City Movement, and the Clarion Movement. In the United States environmentalism began in the late 19th century, also, out of concerns for protection of natural resources –

especially in the West. Philosophers who made key contributions to this movement include John Muir and Henry David Thoreau. In his book, *Walden,* Thoreau shared his experiences of living a simple, nature-friendly life with the hope of persuading people to become intimately close to nature. On his part Muir preached that nature had inherent rights, a belief he developed after hiking in Yosemite Valley and a study of ecology and geology. He went on to lobby the US Congress to create the Yosemite National Park; then he set up the Sierra Club in 1892. Some of the principles exposed by these two philosophers became the bedrock of modern environmentalism.

Intellectual underpinnings have largely determined the different forms of environmentalism we have.These are generally grouped into two: those considered anthropocentric, and those considered as non-anthropocentric. Other descriptions of these two divisions include "shallow" ecology versus "deep" ecology or "technocentrism" versus "ecocentrism" respectively (Elliot n.p). While anthropocentric approaches focus mainly on the impact of environmental degradation on humans and their interests; non-anthropocentrism focuses primarily on the interests of nonhuman nature (as in biocentrism) and entire ecosystems including nonliving things (as in ecocentrism). These two divisions are the mainstay of all the other forms of environmentalism as seen below.

**Apocalyptic Environmentalism**

This is an anthropocentric environmental movement which began in the 1960s and early '70s with a strong expression of pessimism regarding the long term prospects of the Earth; most people in this movement were convinced that civilization was a malaise and nature would never cope its excesses. That is, the planetary ecosystem was reaching an unsustainable point and that the possibility of mankind driving the Earth to a catastrophic end was eminent. Hence, there was no hope for future generations (Elliot n.p).

**Emancipatory Environmentalism**

This anthropocentric environmental movement also emerged around the 1970s. It is marked by attempts are developing strategies for limiting environmental degradation such as recycling, alternative energy technologies, restructuring of economic and social planning, amongst others. In contrast to apocalyptic environmentalism, emancipatory environmentalism promotes an ethos and attitude of "stewardship" regarding the environment. It also pursues the enhancement of human life through the creation of a safe and clean environment as well as advocacy for distributive justice, and the involvement of governments in the fight for effective public transport and energy efficiency. In the 1990s emancipatory environmentalism evoked a popular slogan "Think globally, act locally" to stimulate awareness for the impact of human activity on the global environment (Elliot n.p).

**Free Market Environmentalism**

This anthropocentric mode of thinking proposes that the free market, property rights, and tort law provide the best tools to preserve the health and sustainability of the environment. It considers environmental stewardship to be natural, as well as the expulsion of polluters and other aggressors through individual and class action. According to Stroup, proponents of this view also argue that governments (from history) have proved incapable of handling environmental problems and should not be trusted with the responsibility (Stroup n.p). Critics see this argument as ironic because it is big businesses that cause most environmental crises; they often cut costs to maximize profits and end up compromising safety standards which results in environmental degradation (Tyler n.p).

**Evangelical Environmentalism**

Founded in the United States of America, this is an anthropocentrism environmental movement with a religious basis. It emphasises a biblical mandate which projects mankind's role as steward and a subsequent obligation for the caretaking of nature. Amongst other issues, the movement is known for its doggedness in facing climate action from a bible-based theological viewpoint. According to Asamoah the Evangelical Climate Initiative holds that "God's mandate to Adam to care for the Garden of Eden also applies to evangelicals today, and that it is therefore a moral obligation to work to mitigate climate impacts and support communities in adapting to change. Failure to carry this mandate will affect the current and the future generations" (59).This movement is controversial among some non-Christian environmentalists due to its specific religious roots.

**Social Ecology and Deep Ecology**

These two are environmentalist movements that are biocentric in orientation. Murray Bookchin championed social ecology which traces the causes of environmental degradation to the doorstep of unjust and hierarchical relationships in human society. It argues that decentralized small-scale communities and systems of production are more sympathetic to environmental concerns and should be preferred. Deep ecologists (such as Arne Naess, Bill Devall, and George Sessions) advocate a more radical system of decentralization and call for the restoration of a "spiritual" relationship with nonhuman nature (Elliot n.p).

**Animal Rights**

This is another biocentric trend of environmentalism. It teaches the interconnectedness of nature and advocates animal rights. The Australian philosopher Peter Singer wrote *Animal Liberation* (1975) to state this case while the American Tom Regan (also a philosopher) wrote the *Case for Animal Rights* (1983). Animal rights activists decry cruelty to animals; they demand an end to all forms of exploitation such as use of animals for scientific experiments, as sources of entertainment, and food.

**Ecofeminism**

Another biocentric form of environmentalism, identifies oppression, hierarchy, and spiritual relationships with nature as key factors in dealing with degradation. They link oppression of women, for instance, with a domineering attitude towards nature which views both women and nature as valuable only to the extent that they satisfy to men's needs. Ecofeminists have established a central role for women in environmentalism. However, they are divided in opinion on how to conceive the relationship between nature and women.

**The meaning and Nature of Humanism**

*Humanism*, as a term, has many meanings due to a myriad of factors which may be categorised as conceptual, experiential, socio-political, religious and even economic. In the light of this fact, the term could refer to a whole lot of things. As the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* explains, humanism means any of: (i) a reasonable balance of life (as conceived by the early Greeks); (ii) the study of the humanities; (iii) freedom from religiosity or supernaturalism; (iv) the responsiveness to all human passions; (v) or a philosophy which considers man at its centre (homocentrism) and sanction (541). Modern day definitions of humanism (rooted in the Sixteenth Century renaissance)tend to view it in the last sense. For instance, the American Humanist Association defines it as "a progressive life stance that,

without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead meaningful, ethical lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity" (web). Similarly, *The Humanist Magazine* states that humanism "is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion"; it affirms the dignity of humans, supports the maximization of individual liberty and opportunity in line with social and planetary responsibility. It advocates human rights and social justice, and freed of supernaturalism, acknowledges the existence of humans as part of nature; thereby deriving its goals from human experience "rather than theological or ideological abstractions". Humanism emphasises that humans take responsibility for their own destiny (web).

Etymologically, the term humanism is derived from the Latin concept *Humanitas,* an allusion to the idea of benevolence towards fellow men without distinction. Latin grammarian AulusGellius notes that this idea of humanism is not the same as that which was held by the ancient Greeks –who saw it as scholarship of the humanities (XII: 17). Corliss Lamont reports that the word *humanist* was first used in the sixteenth century to designate the writers and scholars of the European Renaissance. He further observes that Contemporary Humanism "includes the values of Renaissance Humanism, but in Philosophic scope and significance goes far beyond it" (12).Twentieth century humanism, he maintains, is generally not an exclusive way of thinking for philosophers, but it is a credo for average men and women seeking to lead happy and useful lives; as a philosophy however, it is multi-faceted congenial to this modern age, yet fully encompassing of the lessons of history and of the philosophic tradition. Its task is to organize into a consistent and intelligible whole the chief elements of philosophic truth and to make that synthesis a powerful for and a reality in the minds and actions of living persons (13). It is important to state at this point that the roots of humanism (as a philosophical tradition) reach far back into antiquity with thinkers spanning across the globe from ancient South Asia, ancient Greece, medieval Islam, and the European renaissance. According to Lamontthe two most important philosophical precursors of humanism –naturalism and materialism–stretch back into the ancient era. These include Protagoras –arguably the first humanist, who declared, "man is the measure of all things"; the Sophists who would rather discuss the practical everyday issues than resort to abstract topics; Socrates who in spite of belief in a God worked out a philosophical agenda independent of religion, declaring "Man know thyself"; and Aristotle the first naturalist who always opposed Plato's other-worldly postulations, and insisted on explaining the things of this world with here-and-now facts. In the medieval era Spinoza stands out as his work (which caused him to be accused of atheism) influenced epoch-making scientific developments (like the Copernican revolution). In the early modern era Nicholas Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, and Charles Darwin's naturalism can be roped into humanism as well. In the U.S. naturalism grew under John Dewey and Frederick Woodbridge and flourished under scholars like John Randall Jr. who would later sign the *Humanist Manifestos I and II;* Ernest Nagel, and Sidney Morgenbesser (34-40).

Materialism also provided a strong bulwark for the development of humanism, Lamont argues that both naturalism and materialism thrive on the scientific method and that both have exercised a far-reaching influence on humanism. The history of materialism dates right back to the pre-Socratics –Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Democritus; then during the Golden age of philosophy, Epicurus expressed quite a strong materialism (43). The medieval era saw little materialist expression but in the modern times Francis Bacon revived the tradition, Thomas Hobbes his former secretary gave it a methodical foundation in the seventeenth century (45). And by the eighteenth century the French encyclopaedist duos La Mettrie and Helvetius, Holbach and Diderot, were on hand to propel materialism forward. Then in the nineteenth century the mantle passed to the Germans Jacob Maleschott, Ernst Haeckel, Ludwig Buchner

and Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (45-46). Needless to say, almost all materialists were irreligious, trusting in rationality and science rather than superstition and supernaturalism; thereby giving vent to humanism. However, Auguste Comte in the middle of the nineteenth century created a religion, complete with rituals and festivals, called Positivism, whose deity was not any supernatural being but humanity. In England John Stuart Mill developed his philosophy of Utilitarianism (a reworking of Comte *without* his rituals and mysticism). His socio-political bent provided impetus for humanism. Bertrand Russell's humanism is controversial but he is often cited as a humanist because of his board membership of the British Humanist Association. "Russell's most original contribution to philosophy lies in his demonstration of the essential identity of logic and pure mathematics" (Lamont 49-50).

Humanism has religious roots as well; Lamont has traced it them to the doorstep of Judeo-Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism and Islam. He has also drawn links between humanism and contemporary Christian sects such as Unitarians, Quakers, and Christian Socialists. He argues that even sects that were hitherto thought of an anti-humanist (Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal denominations of today) thrive on a measure of humanism. As evidence, he points to (i) their emphasis on man's responsibility to better his lot even while seeking supernatural help, and (ii) the humanitarian works of church ministries–aims that he maintains, are in concordance with the humanist agenda (53-65).

In spite of its modern distancing from religion and supernaturalism, humanism has religious components; which has made it possible to draw out the following typology:-

a) **Religious Humanism:** there are two strands of this category:-(i) non-superstitious people who claim that ethical humanism is their religion; and (ii) 'superstitious' people who have incorporated humanist principles (and ideas) into their beliefs and practices; for example Christian Humanism.
b) **Secular Humanism:** those who consciously reject superstition and religion, but embrace metaphysical naturalism, altruistic morality and distributive justice. Secular humanists uphold a rational and scientific worldview which projects humanity as the sole determinant of all standards, values, characteristics, and behaviours as deemed best via human reason rather than any supernatural authority ("Humanism" *Encarta Dictionary* CD-ROM).
c) **Environmental Humanism (Ecological Humanism)** falls within the ambit of secular humanism and is supported by the 1970s philosophy of evolution (especially evolutive humanism). It is an internationally emerging notion which extends the naturalist tradition of ancient Greek philosophers. In his 2017 book, *The Pioneers of Eco Humanism,* Brian Moriss identifies three people as the (often ignored) pioneers of this trend of thought: Lewis Mumford, Rene´ Dubos and Murray Bookchin. Environmental humanism places humanity within the centre of all the decisions that need to be carried out to ensure a better environment for everyone.

Moreover, as Lamont has noted, humanism as a philosophy can be characterised in several ways including; "scientific Humanism, secular Humanism, naturalistic Humanism, or democratic Humanism, depending on the emphasis that one wishes to give"; it is the viewpoint that humans have but one life and should make the most of it without requiring sanction or support from supernatural sources who "in any case do not exist" (15).This implies that the typology of humanism is quite elastic, depending on one's point of emphasis. Be that as it may, humanism (in whatever form) tends to place (squarely in the hands of man) the responsibility of making the world a happy, beautiful, moral, and peaceful habitation for all. Humanism must not be confused with anthropocentrism or*homocentrism* (human-centeredness) which tends to place moral worth and value upon humanity above all else. On the contrary, humanism does

not preach a hierarchical order of being in which humans are most important; nor does it propose the domination of nature above humankind. It also does not support any egalitarian system; it simply upholds the potential of mankind to take responsibility for its own destiny without recourse to superstition or the supernatural. John Shook traces the origin of confusing humanism with homocentrism to those definitions of the former that came before the 1950s; he maintains that by the 1970s much of the confusion was abated and by the 1990s it was totally contained. He goes further to assert that the clarification has provided a springboard upon which to acknowledge humanism as a platform for engaging societal challenges –including environmental issues (web). It is noteworthy, however, that whilst the confusion may have been abated, the conception of humanism as adjudged from the attitudes and behaviours of some humanists, indicates that some still consider it as synonymous with anthropocentrism. Evidence for has been shown in the successive section (particularly under John Shook's categorisation of environmental humanists).

**The Nexus between Humanism and Environmentalism**

The point has already been made (in the background above) that humanism is controversial together with its claim to an environment-friendly agenda. In fact, one of the most controversial issues is whether humanism has any connection with environmentalism let alone having anything to offer in the fight against the global environmental crises. In other to find out if there is a nexus between humanism and environmentalism, this controversy must be examined. Evidence suggests that there is a serious misconception about humanism; that is, its erroneous synonymy with homocentrism (human centeredness).Having married humanism with homocentrism, scholars (environmentalists particularly) wonder why a human-centred philosophy can turn around to protect the interests of other species at the same time. On this basis it is often dismissed as an unsound basis for genuine environmentalism.
However, on their part, humanists contend that this is a misconception of the true nature of humanism, they argue that:

> Because of its name, some people think that Humanism must be completely human-centred, concerned only with human welfare. Humanists are indeed concerned with human welfare and happiness, but because of this concern, humanists also care about the natural world, which we all depend on and which will have to sustain our descendants…. ("A Humanist Perspective on Care of the Earth" web).

Similarly, Shook argues that humanism is not exactly the same as homocentrism (human-centeredness) rather, it is "a life stance or ethical view, which prioritizes (1) this mortal life and (2) the ethical responsibilities we must share to best enhance this life for all". He maintains that unlike homocentrism, humanism stresses not only the value and interests of humans but those of other components of the environment as well–both living and non-living(web). Also in agreement, Brian Morris argues that environmental humanism is an effective alternative to anthropocentrism (which has been rejected by some environmentalists for its extreme emphasis on human interests) and nonanthropocentrism (again rejected for its extreme emphasis on non-human interests) (1-2).

Shook goes further to aver that in the quest to ascertain whether humanism has a place in environmentalism, the principles of humanism are more useful pointers than any attempt to

box it into fixed tradition (web). In doing this he falls back on an analysis of three contemporary kinds of humanism which he labels Type A, Type B, and Type C. He explains that Type A humanists are of little help to environmentalism. Although they would not deplete the Earth's resources (since it is irrational and unethical); they feel the responsibility to protect or conserve natural resources is optional, a matter of personal choice. Thus they preach environmental management as an ethic but do not feel compelled to protect the environment. Type B humanists are more environmental friendly because they tend towards communal living as an ethical principle. They take serious care of the environment which is considered as part and parcel of the community (in much the same way as humans). As such they are less likely to be criticised by environmentalists. Type C humanists are the most environmental friendly; they take *all* life seriously and do not consider human life above other species. Their stress on 'intrinsic value' of all life, as a principle, endears them to hard-core environmentalists and eliminates all friction between the two groups. Shook proceeds from here to conclude that all these aspects of humanism contain principles that make them candidates for environmentalism and that the decision to choose which type to align with in any environmental agenda lies with the environmentalists (web). Hence, he maintains, humanism has a place in environmentalism.

Another aspect of humanism which points to a favourable disposition toward environmentalism is the idea that this life is all we have, there is no immortality of the soul; once we die, it is all over. If there is anything like immortality at all, it is only possible in the legacy we leave behind when we die; artists leave their works, scientists leave their research findings, technologists leave their inventions, philanthropists leave their humanitarian footprints, politicians leave their social reforms, and so on. Lamont states that this idea which derives from naturalism and materialism, is a keystone 'doctrine' of humanism because "if human beings realize that their careers are limited to this world, that this earthly existence is all that we will ever have, then they are already more than half-way on the path toward becoming functioning humanists" regardless of their general attitude toward the universe or any deity (89).

Anchoring on this same notion of reality, Martin S. Pribble argues that whether one is religious or irreligious, whether one believes in a creationism or evolutionism, one thing is a solid and uncontroversial fact: "we live on earth, and without it, we perish." Thus, he maintains, this life and planet is all we have, there is no second chance, and whatever we exploit into extinction will be gone forever. This should be enough reason to protect and conserve nature's resources. He argues further that upon this undeniable fact all humans, as dependent on the environment as other animals, have a heightened responsibility to protect it because of their higher capacity to modify and also destroy it (web). He concludes that because humanism is concerned with *thislife* (not any afterlife) and how it can be improved upon, "environmentalism is a key part of humanism, for without the environment, there are no humans" (web). According to the British Humanists Association, humanists also argue that their use of reason, (scientific) evidence, empathy and respect as pivotal principles of their ethos, qualifies them to engage in environmentalism (perhaps more than others who depend on supernaturalism or some 'other-worldly' authority). They also hold that they extend their empathy to future generations "who will also depend on our planet for their survival"; as many others extend the same empathy to other sentient living things. Thus humanism teaches that people should consider the consequences of their actions on other species (not just humans) whenever they contemplate any exploitation of environmental resources (web).

On a similar tone, other humanists argue for preservation of the environment on aesthetic grounds. They reason that if we could go to great lengths to preserve man-made art (from years of earlier human civilisations at that) we should do the same for nature; especially

because unlike human art, nature's art –whose beauty is found in wilderness, once lost is literally irreplaceable. Again the aesthetic experience most people derive from their encounter with wilderness (for instance) is incomparable to that of man-made art because the former produces a feeling of aesthetic appreciation that could rise to "an almost mystical intensity" ("Humanists on the Environment"web). Thus humanists argue for preservation of nature and invariably lay another claim to an environmentalist agenda. Finally, humanists argue that their involvement in environmentalism is proof that their philosophy is not entirely or exclusively homocentric. They point to the involvement of humanists in the formation of organisations like UNESCO (which has environmental responsibilities globally); the promotion of birth control and setting up of UN Birth Control programmes as a vital key to population reduction (in order to cut down demands on natural resources); the establishment of most environmental charities "such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the World Wide Fund for Nature, all of which are non-religious and are powered by both people of faith and those with none ("A Humanist Perspective on Care of the Earth" web).

**The Impact of Humanism on Environmentalism**

From the preceding section, it is already obvious that humanism has made an impact on the environmentalist movement. Needless to say, some of the impact has already been accounted for. In any case, it is important to highlight them more clearly and then specify those which were not mentioned. Perhaps the first and most prominent way by which humanism has impacted environmentalism is the provision of an additional (or alternative) viewpoint of contemplating the relationship/interaction between man and nature. At a point in history, humanity was standing on the precipice of a looming environmental doom, and worse of all, faced with extremely *limited* choices for policy and action. The available options were; (a) a destructive dominionism fed by Greek mythology and Judeo-Christian anthropocentrism; (b) anthropocentrism, an unsustainable paradigm fuelled largely by the Baconian dream of mastering nature, Cartesian dualism and the capitalist order; and (c) nonanthropocentrism, an equally untenable way out which suggested the subordination of human aims to perceived natural ones; thereby threatening to cast us back into a primitive existence. In the words of David Watson:

> In innumerable texts the choice we are given is either mechanism or spiritualism, either mammon (industrial capitalism) or God (religion), between Cartesian philosophy with its dualistic metaphysics and its emphasis on the technological mastery of nature, or so-called 'spiritual ecology' which embraces some form of religious metaphysics –either neo-paganism, theism, pan(en)theism or mysticism. […] the choice we are presented with is either the 'prison house of urban industrial civilization' with its accompanying ideologies, or 'primitivism' –entailing the wholesale rejection of technology, the affirmation of a hunter-gathering existence and the embrace of neo-paganism –tribal animism (12).

At this height of this dilemma, humanism entered the stage. Drawing currency from thought systems like naturalism, materialism and science, this new way made a strong case for man's capacity to distance himself from superstitious or supernatural authority (as well as a counter-productive superiority complex towards nature). It also provided a platform for humanity to take responsibility for transforming its societies in order to ensure the simultaneous flourishing of mankind and nature. Thus humanism:

Is another ecological tradition that repudiates both mechanism and spiritualism that while critiquing industrial capitalism and the mega machine, along with its anthropocentric and dualistic paradigm, does not go to the other extreme and embrace primitivism and some form of religious metaphysic. This is the tradition of organic or ecological humanism… (Morris 2).

A second way by which humanism has contributed to environmentalism is the rise of humanist activists whose activities forced governments and institutions to take the responsibility for environmental conservation and protection seriously. According to the British Humanist Associations, humanists were actively involved in "setting up organisations such as UNESCO." They have also been at the forefront of curtailing the demands on the environment by cutting down overpopulation; they helped to set up the United Nations birth control programmes (web). Furthermore, environmental humanists have collaborated with people of rational orientation and all sheds of beliefs to establish environmental charities and other non-governmental organisations that fight for environmental causes.

A third way that humanism has impacted environmentalism is through its 'aggressive' activism. Environmental humanists have (often in collaboration with other environmentalist groups) taken the bull by the horn by demanding that governments take action to prevent/mitigate the harm caused by climate change. The Humanists Society of Scotland for instance, has not only adopted the Earth Charter but is constantly mounting pressure on the government to ensure compliance with its dictates. The Earth Charter is a UN environmental policy instrument which was launched in 2000 by the Earth Charter Commission. The society also supports the development of renewable energy as well as the enthronement of the principle of environmental justice in all matters regarding environmental exploration (web).

The fourth way by which humanism has had an impact on environmentalism is via its emphasis on the role of reason and science (over superstition and authority) in the efforts to understand environmental issues and proffer appropriate solutions. Instead of automatically blaming science and technology for every environmental problem, humanism has provided an intellectual and social framework for the evolution of an environmental ethos which centres on mankind's capacity to handle its issues through the use of comprehensive rational and scientific methods. Hence a distancing from 'deep green' beliefs about intrinsic value, or even superiority of non-human life forms, or the sentimental attachment to nature's beauty; have unfettered the human mind and focused it on the real issues –ensuring a better world for today's world as well as future generations.

Finally, humanism has promoted environmentalism through it intellectual tools such as philosophy, literature, art and science. Indeed, from the rise of modern humanism (arguably at the turn of 19$^{th}$century) to date there is hardly any field of human endeavour that it has not touched. Ecological humanism, just as social humanism, has been particularly impactful in the area of environmentalism; often supported by scientific evidence, it has armed many societies, communities and institutions with pragmatic solutions to quelling environmental crises.

In spite of humanism's positive contributions to environmentalism highlighted above, there are some negative ones. First, the philosophy (and worldview) of humanism is shrouded in controversy and hence inconsistent; there are several strands of humanism which make it difficult to pinpoint which exactly applies to any particular environmental issue at any given time. Even amongst humanists themselves, there is a seemingly unending debate as to what exactly should constitute humanism. Perhaps it is this major flaw of humanism that has spread to, and infected environmental humanism as well. For instance, if we may refer to Shook's typology of environmental humanists cited above, we find at least *three* shades of opinion on what or who is an environmental humanist. Such a shaky identity tends to be unreliable for the

purpose of dealing with environmental problems; particularly in areas like formulation of ethics, policy, strategy, administrative principles, action plans, and laws which border on the environment. Hence, rather than provide a fixed solution, humanism has introduced yet another controversy in the quest for an ethical paradigm of man-nature relations. The impact of this is what we see; a lot of effort with little result. This situation might have been what Whitehead foresaw when he cautioned, "The prophecy of Francis Bacon has now been fulfilled; and man, who at times dreamt of himself as a little lower than the angels, has submitted to become the servant and the minister of nature. It still remains to be seen whether the same actor can play both parts" (96). Indeed, as demonstrated above humanist are actually *struggling* hard to play these roles effectively.

Somehow related to the issue of the shaky nature of environmental humanism is the negative impact of humanism which derives from a strain of the philosophy. Certain humanists conceive of the environment in a homocentric sense. They focus rather on the rights of humanity and tend to drag their feet when it comes to taking action on environmental protection and conservation. Even though they believe in an ethical responsibility of care for nature, they do not agree with other humanists that that duty is compulsory; rather they think it is a matter of personal choice. Shook argues that these kind of humanists have impacted negatively on the environmentalist agenda –both in thought and action (web). Third, certain humanist strategies for reducing demands on environmental resources –such as population control– have been criticised as immoral and homicidal. For instance, many faith-based organisation (including the Catholic Church) are against such birth control methods as abortion (which is considered largely as murder or infanticide) and other forms of artificial birth control (the pill, intrauterine devices, in-plants, etc.) which are seen as not only curtailing human flourishing but also offending their belief in the sanctity and dignity of human life. Non-faith critics of population control do so on grounds of infringements on human freedoms and rights especially where such birth control is made compulsory by either governments or other equally powerful institutions. Such reactions to humanist policies impact negatively on environmentalism particularly because they tend to enshrine a non-cooperative attitude amongst those who should be major stakeholders in the fight to save the earth.

## Conclusion

The above exercise has exposed the relationship between humanism and the environment. It has made it possible to see the meaning and nature of environment and humanism. In the course of the exposition, it became obvious that humanism as a philosophy is as controversial as any other philosophy. It has also been possible to uncover to the numerous ways (both positive and negative) in which humanism has impacted on environmentalism. From this, it may be concluded that the quest to find a unanimous philosophical ground upon which to base environmental ethics, policies, strategies, attitudes, and laws is yet to be over. There is still room to do more. We all owe ourselves, nature, and future generations this duty; and we cannot afford to fail because there is no alternative earth to run to, when this one is totally compromised.

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