

Lecture 1 – Environmental Philosophy: An Introduction

1. WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

Philosophy (etymologically, the love of wisdom [*philo*(love)+*sophia*(wisdom) in Greek] is *the enquiry into the broadest and most fundamental questions regarding existence (what is real?), knowledge (what can be known?), and value (what should be done?)*. Let me elaborate on these three important areas of philosophy.

- The broadest and most fundamental of all human enquiries centers on the question ‘what does it mean to exist?’. This enquiry in philosophy is called **metaphysics** (before/ beyond physics or the physical) or ontology (study of being or existence). What do metaphysicians discuss? For example, they ask what exactly is the nature of the human being; is this nature something permanent (*atman* in *Vedanta*) or something transient and impermanent (*kshenika* according to the Buddha). There are several theories on these matters. Many modern philosophers say, well, we don’t know whether there is any permanent or impermanent substance underlying our being. All that we can know is: we are embodied conscious beings with a mixed bag of at least four wonderful basic abilities (or faculties) – reason, passion, will and language.
- The second most fundamental study within philosophy centers on the question what we human beings can come to know at all, what is true or false knowledge, etc. The enquiry concerning knowledge is called **epistemology** (theory of *episteme* or knowledge). Logic (the study of correct argument or thinking) and the study of methodologies of other branches of knowledge like natural and social sciences are branches of epistemology. What do epistemologists discuss? For example, they ask whether we have any direct access to what we perceive. How can we say we are sure that there is a world out there from what we perceive with our senses?
- The third central part of philosophy is the study of value (*axiaa*) or **axiology**. Metaphysics, epistemology and the sciences concern with facts and the truths of facts; they ask what *is* real, what *is* knowledge, what *is* a chemical, physical, biological or social phenomenon? But axiology concerns with value and the good. The questions of axiology are: what *should* be done? (or the study of right human action or ethics/ morality), what *should* be appreciated for its beauty? (or aesthetics), what *should* be the basis of sharing power and governing human society? (or politics). What do axiologists discuss? For example, the moral philosopher asks whether there is a single principle to decide the goodness of human action, say divine order, happiness, rational sense of obligation or duty, or whatever?

When Isaac Newton wrote the *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* in 1687, physics was still thought to be a branch of philosophy. In fact, before the modern era every subject currently listed in university catalogs would have been considered philosophy. It is when new methods of enquiry like experiment, observation, explanation, verification, and evidential reasoning developed that philosophy was considered different from other fields of study. But still, these branches of human enquiry, which are narrower in their scope than philosophy, begin from philosophical assumptions (metaphysical, epistemological and even ethical assumptions) usually not discussed in those subject areas. For example, physics assumes that we *can know* the external world through measurable concepts like time, space, mass, motion etc. Many of these concepts cannot be clarified through further use of the scientific method and hence philosophy is taken recourse to. So we have **further branches of philosophy** like the philosophy of biology, the philosophy of technology, the philosophy of science, the philosophy of economics and so on. Further still, there could be ethics of biology, ethics of technology and so on.

The most basic **method** of doing philosophy is *logical reasoning* and *critical thinking* usually without much reference to empirical methods. Hence it is a completely *conceptual* exercise. Conceptual clarification and clarifying various approaches to undertaking a particular study – this is an important and relevant area of philosophy. Philosophy may question reason itself, but by the use of

reason. We must remember that philosophy (and the sciences as well) is a plainly **human endeavor**. Philosophy is not based on holy books and extra-human authority, though one can philosophize about matters of religion. This is called philosophy of religion, which again is a human endeavor.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES

We should not be fooled that a particular philosophical perspective is an absolutely objective final answer. Philosophical perspectives are particular ways in which we think about ourselves, our world and whatever is important to us at particular times and places in history. It is our way of making sense of and understanding our reality. *It is on the basis of such understanding that we relate to reality (ourselves, the world and other humans). Hence, these perspectives and scrutinizing them philosophically is extremely important.*

It is useful to consider that knowledge is produced through the operation of at least **two definitive factors**:

- **the structure of the human mind** (It is through our consciousness that we access realities outside our mind; we do not have any direct access to things as they exist outside us. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant makes this distinction in the following way: the thing-in-itself or *noumena* [to which we have no access], and the thing as it appears to our consciousness or *phenomena* [which is the only thing we access]. To clarify this point, think of it that many animals are color blind, and the reality of color is not accessible to them. They see the world differently. Also, they relate to the world in a very different fashion. We use complex technology to intervene in our world, to make it suit human purposes. Animals, if at all, use very rudimentary forms of technology, say, the nests that birds make.)
- **the cultural, imaginal, historical elements** that influence our way of looking at reality. Scientific knowledge too is a product of the human mind, but extraneous cultural influences on this type of knowledge could be considerably reduced through scientific methodologies.

In short, we need to remember that ‘**objectivity**’ is plainly a ‘human objectivity’. It is very difficult to say we *know* things really *are* as we know them. ‘Objectivity’ is a function of the finite mind of the human subject. ‘Reality’ does not speak to us and reveal its fundamental nature to us, but we deal with ‘reality’ and impose our perspectives on it. If the Vedic Indian thought that nature was ‘spirit’, it was certainly a perspective of nature, which allowed her/him to relate to nature in a particular way. Without the understanding of nature as matter obeying certain universal laws, modern science was not possible. Medieval Europeans did not think so. They were shocked when this ‘new story’ began to emerge. You know the story of Galileo and how he came into conflict with the Church, which was still under the spell of the medieval worldview.

So the **message** is: *if we, for example, want to save nature today, it is rather important that we examine how we understand nature, what value we attach to it, and, if need be, think about a perspective-change or paradigm shift.* Whether we like it or not we live our lives on the strength of certain established stories, perspectives or narratives, and on the strength of the rejection of certain others. These big stories (‘**metanarratives**’ as some contemporary philosophers call them) dominate for a time and could give way to other stories in time. They are called metanarratives because they have explanations for everything under the sun, right from matter to mind, within a coherent system. It is altogether another matter whether these explanations can stand the scrutiny of independent questioning, but within the system (that is, if we accept the system’s internal logic and basic assumptions) things do fall in place rather coherently. Historical examples of metanarratives include religions, and ideologies like Marxism and modern science.

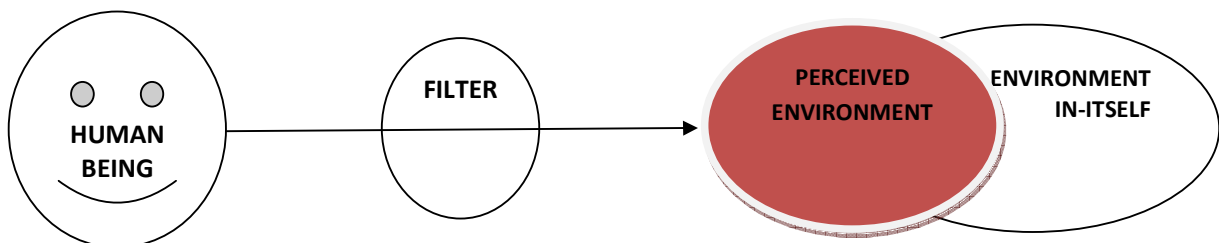
It is very important to realize the power of these mega stories on our day-to-day lives. We can also call these mega stories **cultural or philosophical filters** – that is, we access reality not in any pure, absolutely objective way but in accordance with certain rules already set. It is as if we look at

things always through a colored pair of glasses. Reality comes to meet us not in an untainted, unadulterated fashion but as already filtered and philosophically conditioned. Underline that this is *not a lack or deprivation* (or something evil we can overcome); rather, it is the way we are. Such is the human condition. Think of it, without having at least a popular (as against strongly theoretical and mathematical) understanding of modern science, it is so very difficult to understand what it means to say that the earth is spherical and not flat because such understanding contradicts our common experience. People before the modern era took the earth as flat and even conducted their science (natural philosophy) under that assumption.

So, what I am trying to tell you is: humans in their recorded history did not always relate to Planet earth as we moderns do. Early human beings thought of themselves as integral parts of nature unlike people of the scientific era, who think of her as a manipulable machine from which humans is separate and distinct and over which they ought to establish mastery. This amounts to say that ***we see the environment through a cultural and philosophical filter*** and behave towards nature accordingly.

The **good news** is: these cultural filters are changeable and are usually rather different in different cultural settings. So: if we today think that there is a problem with our way of relating to the environment, there are possibilities of questioning, improving or changing our cultural filter. This is neither easy nor quickly achievable, but still possible. We can gradually weave new stories, new narratives, and, as it were, begin to wear a different pair of glasses.

Figure 1: The Cultural Filter



3. PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE AND THE ECOLOGICAL DISASTER

Sixth Century BCE (before common era; CE=common era) of ***the Axial Age*** (the period 800-200 BCE that was the ‘axis’ for later human culture), was an important period for philosophy. (The idea of the Axial Age is from the book *The Psychology of Worldviews* by the German philosopher Karl Jaspers [1883-1969]). In fact, this period was the time when in different parts of the world philosophical thinking started independently (without any cross consultation or dialogue): Socrates, the pre-Socratic thinkers like Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle in Greece, the Vedic and Upanishadic sages, the Buddha and Mahavira in India, Lao Tzu and Confucius in China, Zoroaster or Zarathustra (founder of Zoroastrianism/ Parsi religion) in Persia (today’s Iran), and the Jewish prophets in Judea (in today’s Israel). According to Jaspers, the spiritual and intellectual foundation for later humanity as we know in history was laid during the Axial Age.

Before philosophical thinking began in the Axial Age, ‘**myth**’ was the mode of thinking. Myths are tales narrated in poetic form, easy for committing to memory and presenting orally, which stood for people’s beliefs about fundamental matters like, for example, the origin of the world, religious beliefs and ethical values. Myths, however, contained thought as well, without claiming so much that these could be rationally justified.

Philosophy in India and Greece (western philosophy begins from Greece) ***began by thinking about nature***. (Here we discuss only Indian and Western philosophy because they are the philosophies that concern us most, but we must remember that there are other philosophies as well, for instance, Chinese and African philosophies, as well as tribal and non-mainstream philosophies of India.) The Vedic Indian's attribution of divinity to powerful natural forces was an attempt to understand the *rta* or order/ law of nature. This somewhat spiritual understanding of nature survives in all the Indic/ Dharmic religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism. Similarly, the earliest Greek thinkers began with the question 'what is the 'stuff' or first principle (*arche*) out of which the whole of reality is made?'. Both these philosophical traditions, thus, began with the fundamental law or stuff of the world. (Please mark that early Greek philosophers took a route different from the accepted spiritual and mythical perspectives available in their societies, unlike in India. They posed philosophy in opposition to spiritual enquiry. This is not the case with India, where philosophy and the spiritual enquiry are considered integrally or holistically.)

But **Socrates** of fifth century BCE Greece, one who is credited with properly founding western philosophy, turned away from philosophy's concern with nature. In Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus* (Plato wrote his books in the form of dialogues), Socrates is quoted as saying: "Landscapes and trees have nothing to teach me, only people do." For him, philosophy was a matter only of the inner world of human beings. In a sense, this turn of events is remarkable: when philosophical thinking in India and China were nature-oriented in the Axial Age, the **human revolution** began in Greece, which led to all the developments in the west, right from the scientific revolution to the many political revolutions. Socrates's was a definitive revolt against the contemporary Greek indistinctness between the divine and nature. In the ninth century BCE, **Homer** (author of the first literary classic of the west, the epics *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) did not clearly distinguish between nature and the gods; rather they are fused imaginatively. The gods both exist in nature and *are* nature. In fact, the pre-Socratics began rejecting the traditional explanations of nature as divine. It was an era of the decline of the prevalent religious beliefs in the Greek world. Socrates advanced what was supposed to be the more progressive way of thinking: ***unambiguous separation between nature and spirit***.

As a result, a *philosophy that separates humans from nature and places them on a higher pedestal in the hierarchy was born*. So, Greek philosophy of nature, on which is western thought as such is broadly based, was **dualistic** (separating the human from the natural) and **hierarchichal** (the human is higher in the ladder of priority).

The Greeks thought of nature or '*phusis*' (physics) as indifferent *poiesis* (bringing forth or emergence – from which we have words like 'poem') threatening to overwhelm everything. Opposed to *phusis* is another type of *poiesis* called *techne*, which is human-assisted emergence as different from *phusis* or self-emergence. *Techne* challenges and tames *phusis*. During the Greek era *techne* meant only gentle taming of natural forces. But it is remarkable that this concept is pulled to extreme dimensions in the modern era, where technology means indiscriminate manipulation of the natural.

Western philosophy showed remarkable fidelity to its origins in Socrates and Plato. It began to consider the human mind as the powerful spiritual world, separated radically from the material world or nature, which ***the intelligent being was to tame, conquer, and use for the purpose of human advancement***.

Let me take a moment to remind you that we are tracing the intellectual history leading to the environmental crisis. I am now going to add one more trail of thought that came from another intellectual history and joined with Greek philosophy to produce the modern western culture. During the medieval times (the Medieval Age, also called negatively as 'dark ages' for its blind beliefs), the **Judeo-Christian religious ethos** came to be established in Europe – conclusively by fourth century CE, when the Roman Emperor of the time (Theodosius the Great), declared Christianity, the

persecuted and derided sect until then, as the state religion. Judeo-Christianity is a Semitic tradition of the Middle East which travelled to Europe and became a dominant stream of European culture. Judeo-Christianity places the human being at the centre of creation (in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, God blesses and tells the first human beings after creating them: “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and *subdue* it.” Genesis 1:28). For the medieval Europeans, nature was ordered creation, and they looked at the overwhelming nature (the skies and the seas, the natural forces, and wildlife) as manifestation of the glory of God. That is, the medieval Europeans understood nature as *theophany* (manifestation of the divine) or divine epiphany. But during the medieval times, the separation between the visible (earthly) and the invisible (heavenly) worlds became watertight, and the invisible world was privileged over the visible. They also understood the hierarchy of beings with God at the top, followed by humans, and nature (non-human living beings and inanimate beings) was placed below the hierarchy of intelligent beings (God+humans). Hence, the eastern view of nature as imbued with the divine and worthy of respect never really came to be established in the west.

Matthew Arnold, the nineteenth century English poet and cultural critic, writes in his book *Culture and Anarchy* (1869): “Hebraism (Judeo-Christian culture) and Hellenism (Greek culture), — between these two points of influence moves our world.” Now, the cultural development of the meeting of Hebraism with Hellenism only furthered the radicalization of the western understanding of the strenuous separation between humans and nature. Hence, what is called ‘**anthropocentrism**’ (*anthropos* is Greek for man), the centrality of human beings in the world, got firmly established in the west. You need to mark that this development was very gradual, and during the ancient Greek era itself there were only tendencies towards the modern triumphalist humanism. At that time there was no notion of the untoward exploitation of nature. Similarly, consider this: though the cultural ethos of the Medieval Christian era was anthropocentric, the 10-12 centuries of the middle ages gave no real hint of the ecological crisis about to come in the four centuries of the Age of Reason since the seventeenth.

4. THE MODERN SCIENTIFIC WORLDVIEW AND THE ECOLOGICAL PROBLEM

I am now going to trace a brief history of the scientific worldview which came to be environmentally so destructive (and, of course, humanly speaking very liberative!). With the gradual rise of modern science, the western view of nature came to be established in most parts of the world. If during the medieval times learning and education was considered important for securing salvation or life in the ‘next’ world, during the modern era learning began to be considered a tool for making life in this world more comfortable. ***Knowledge is to be acquired for its earthly use.*** **FRANCIS BACON** (1561–1626), an English statesman and philosopher, was the first to make this argument seriously in his book *The Advancement of Learning* (1605). The saying “Knowledge is power” is attributed to Bacon.

For this, Bacon suggested, the assumption that all knowledge was available in the sacred texts and ancient philosophical works had to be abandoned, and the moderns should observe phenomena and plan experiments with them, in order to arrive at new, useful knowledge. Hence, Bacon, in a way, inaugurated the scientific methods of observation and experiment. In order to know the world of phenomena, Bacon advocated the study of their causes (not their ultimate cause or first cause, which is God according to the medieval philosophers, but their empirical or secondary causes) through *observation and experiment*. Bacon used a sexist imagery while arguing for **aggressive science**: the new sciences are supposed to be generative, masculine and useful, whereas the pool of philosophical knowledge of his time, he thought, was sterile, feminine and useless.

So Bacon won the battle against sacred, other-worldly knowledge and aggressively set into motion the search after useful scientific knowledge. His even more illustrious contemporary, *Rene Descartes* (1596–1650), a French philosopher and mathematician, called the father of modern

philosophy, advocated a **new way of thinking about the mind** (the intelligent principle) and matter (the physical principle) in terms of absolute separation between them. The Greeks and the medieval philosophers believed that everything, even material things, actually had a non-material form. Plato called it the 'idea' or 'form', and Aristotle called it simply 'form'. Plato believed that the idea (or concept) of a thing existed separately and it was more significant than the actual thing. Aristotle thought that the idea could only be conceptually separated but in reality it always existed along with things. But Descartes argued on the contrary that *the universe is composed of two radically separate elements: matter which is formless and inert but is extended in space, and mind which is non-extended but intelligent*. Descartes could not really explain how these two radically separated principles could come together in humans, but his attractive explanation came to be established.

If Bacon gave importance to observation and experiment, the mathematician Descartes thought that mind is the storehouse of knowledge and the basis of all knowledge is not the senses (as Bacon thought) but the human mind. Hence, Descartes is called a *rationalist* (as he emphasized the significance of reason and the mind) and Bacon is called an *empiricist* (as he emphasized the significance of the senses and experiment). What Descartes has done is he gave a rational basis for the higher significance the western intellectual culture had already placed on the human being. *The rational human mind thus was seen as the conqueror of everything external to it*, even in the practice of observation and experiment. Also the idea came to be accepted that everything in the universe can be made intelligible through the human mind and basing on its principles of reason. Descartes, thus, is the champion of the Age of Reason.

There was also another strain of thought at this time which justified **private property** and the European capitalist ventures, leading to colonialism. **JOHN LOCKE** (1632–1704) was the English philosopher and political thinker who first argued on the background of the English colonization of North America that an individual had the right to acquire and own land if she/he leaves enough and as good land for others. This is called the 'Lockean Proviso' (Locke's provision). This is Locke's answer to the question 'how can one appropriate unowned resources without denying other people's equal claim on them?' His conditions for acquiring property are: (i) one can appropriate as much as one could use well, (ii) one must leave "enough and as good" for others, and (iii) one may appropriate property only through one's own labour. Actually, as the argument progresses, Locke makes too many exceptions on each of these restrictions to the acquiring of property so that an unrestricted **capitalist system** is thereby justified. It is evident that such appropriation creates the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. Locke favoured this because even if the 'have-nots' have lost access to property, they have access to more goods now. So, their overall condition, he said, is bettered by others' appropriation of resources. With this, Locke is also justifying private property and the colonization of continents by his enterprising compatriots.

Now, property, despite its great use, brings about division, competition and even war. If you have watched the nice 1980 classic satire *The Gods Must be Crazy* (first part), the coca cola bottle dropped accidentally into the African bush tribe's village from an American plane, becomes a cause of discord among the bush people because the bottle is found to be a very useful commodity for them and thus each family of the bush people wanted to possess it as 'property'. The innocent tribes people had no idea of property until then, and the commentator tells us that with the introduction of the notion of property, there is discord among them. Not that Locke invented the notion of property; he justified the colonial trend of his times philosophically. Armed with the notion of property, European merchants thought they had the 'right' to conquer other lands and make these their property under the false moral argument that they only knew how to make the best use of these resources and the natives did not. Such is the history of **planned colonialism** which led to unsustainable western prosperity.

Unfortunately today, this is the paradigmatic political model, whether for liberal democratic societies like India or for communist systems like China.

However, the **deterministic view of the mechanistic universe** (the idea that everything in the universe follows certain well-governed laws), which is an integral part of modernism, was the contribution of **SIR ISAAC NEWTON** (1642-1727), an English mathematician and physicist. According to this view, whatever that occurs, wherever it occurs and whenever it occurs (space and time), occurs in a regular, law-governed, mechanistic way. Newton successfully showed that the same formulas covered the movement of bodies of all kinds wherever they are located in the universe. This is the scientific worldview proper.

It is often argued by today's environmentalists that there is a **link** between seeing the world as made up of particles subject to universal laws like the gravitational force and regarding it as open to unrestrained exploitation. Only what is fully understandable can be controlled and exploited ("knowledge is power"); we have power only over predictable phenomena. Newton demystified nature, and chased away its phantoms; in it there is no mystery or wonder. There is nothing out of the box. Such understanding helped realize Bacon's dream of knowledge that will aid humans to free themselves from the domination of nature. Ecologically speaking, when science began to be applied in manufacturing processes in the nineteenth century, it transformed those processes into instruments of globally destructive potential. There was no thought for the earth's limits to replenish its resources.

During this strikingly revolutionary era, what changed most was the **PICTURE OF THE HUMAN BEING**. The human being is no more thought to be a fragile being at the mercy of the powers of nature, but the one having intelligent control over the fury of nature. For Descartes, the human being is *unique* because it is a *thinking thing*, and the only such thing in the universe (other embodied creatures cannot think, and the non-embodied thinking being, God, has no body, and so cannot act in the world). It goes without saying that the thinking thing has dominion over non-thinking things in the world. So this uniquely exceptional being is the centre of the universe.

It was also the era of the **rise of the individual**. Early societies were much more communitarian than the modern, where the rights of the individual is asserted and he/she is considered in reference to nothing else but her/his person. The first important aspect of this development was the freeing of the person from the clutches of *religious authority*. The ideology of secularism, which came to be introduced during this period, separated the church/religion from the state, which later came to mean removal of religion from the common/ public sphere. Secondly, the political principle of democracy was established, with which human beings were freed also from violent, *autocratic political power*. Liberty, equality, fraternity – were the watchwords of the free individual.

In his famous essay "What Is Enlightenment?" (1784), **IMMANUEL KANT** (1724-1804), a German philosopher, defined Enlightenment as maturing of the human mind, and the courage to use one's own judgment in accordance with the achieved maturity. Kant also argued that an individual is the ultimate unit of moral judgment. The worth of the individual is so holy that nothing, not even political authority, could impinge on the **dignity of the person**. The person owns his own self (self-ownership), and hence she/he cannot be used for any utilitarian purpose like the common good. 'I am not the property of anybody. Without my consent I cannot be used for any social good.' The image of the modern individual is that of the atom in the scientific theory of matter. Unattached to anything, anyone else, free and self-contained, the individual voluntarily comes together to participate with other similar atoms (individuals). This is today critically called the **atomistic view of the individual**. Modernism and its political form, liberalism, have little patience for the social aspect of the person.

Thus, the Baconian project of using the sciences for the **improvement of the human condition** came to be established. What happened along with it was the complete transformation of the physical environment where people lived and the unimaginable exploitation of natural resources all

over the world (through colonization). The atomistic individual could without any restraint freely use resources of the world that he/she justly acquires.

Two types of **ETHICAL PHILOSOPHIES** were advanced during the modern period in an attempt to rationalize human behavior in accordance with the rational temper of the times. The first system of ethics (both for individual action and for social policy making) called **utilitarianism**, the main proponent of which was the English philosopher **John Stuart Mill** (1806-1873), considered happiness (or pleasure) as the main principle according to which every human action should be judged for its morality. That is, if an action results in *the maximum happiness for the maximum number of people*, then it is moral. Utilitarianism can be used to judge our actions towards animals since this ethics is about pain and pleasure. But in the nineteenth century, utilitarian moral arguments were used by the classical liberal philosophers for the support of the freedom of the individual, for free market, and for private property (also for colonization).

But the most powerful ethical theory was that of **Immanuel Kant**. He argued that morality should be grounded not on happiness but on reason. His ethical theory is called '**deontology**' because it is expressed in terms of rational duties (deon=duty) which we are always obliged to fulfill as long as we are rational human beings. He has a few such rational formulas of obligation, the most famous of which is: "You should always treat humanity in your person and in the person of others as always an end in itself and never solely as a means." That is, a person should never be treated as means to achieve anything else, (not even for the sake of the most hallowed goal or for achieving the utilitarian maxim of the happiness of the majority), for a rational human person is an end in herself/himself. Nothing else is required, not even God, to justify her/his dignity. We should remember that Kant's ethics is the foundation for modern human rights movements and the whole talk about individual rights. We cannot deny the contribution of deontology in these fields.

But Kant's ethics has done **severe damage to the environment**. He sharply distinguished between human beings and other entities. Cruelty to an animal is bad not because there is intrinsically anything wrong about it (for only cruelty to humans is intrinsically wrong), but because it might remind us of cruelty to members of our own species. Ethics is strictly species-specific. Such an ethical theory was the crowning point of the modernist picture of the universe – everything is intelligible and ethical only in accordance with the human person; everything else is there to help improve the human condition; to the other human person we are bound by ethical duty.

HUMAN CENTRISM is figuratively similar to the heliocentric view of the universe. Every being in the world revolves around the human being and is pulled towards this being, as if by an unseen centripetal force. (Have a look at Figure 2 below.) This worldview is a problem when we consider environmental philosophy.

5. NEED FOR A NEW ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

From our discussion so far, I hope it is clear that the western perspective, which today has become nearly the universal perspective under the banner of **modernity**, is not environment-friendly by any stretch of the imagination. Scientific developments and the Age of Reason have been fantastic for human beings, but a grave danger for nature, and indirectly for human beings as a whole, since we live in and through nature, and are integral parts of nature.

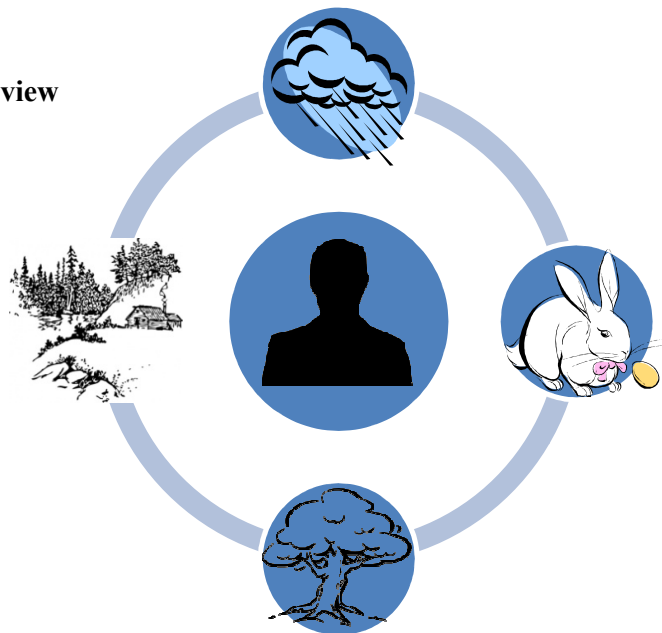
So, we need to remember today that *when we say there is a crisis of environmental thinking, this crisis is an offshoot of the western paradigm, despite the many advantages this paradigm has given to humanity*. A **critical and historical perspective** is important to understand the environmental crisis. Modernity is a product of the west, and with colonialism, modernity was blindly imposed on the rest of the world without any room for critical and selective accommodation. The Age of Reason also

led to increase in western wealth primarily on account of *colonization* and imperialism. Another remarkable aspect of these developments was the establishment of the western intellectual perspective (its philosophy, sciences, methods and its store of knowledge as the *universal way* of gaining knowledge and the *only depository* of real knowledge. Lord Macaulay, credited with establishing the English system of education in India, said in 1835: “A single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.”

At the same time, we need not imagine that anthropocentrism was such a gross evil. From a humanistic perspective, ***anthropocentrism was a great boon to humanity***. Anthropocentrism speeded up western development unlike never before. It led to the Renaissance and the Age of Reason; it led to curious men discovering far off territories and traveling around the globe for the sake of discovery and commerce; it led to scientific inventions and discovery of the laws of nature; it led to several humanistic developments. Many political revolutions that unfolded in England, France and America shaped the modern democratic ethos.

So, we need to remember that **you and I are not less westerners** in as much as our education and training – and thus our perspectives – are rather westernized. We need to remember that several aspects of our contemporary life, which we glorify and consider as great achievements are products of the modern worldview. We need to remember that most of our favorite ideologies and ways of life are thoroughly colored by modern philosophies. Just pick up one of your favorite modern ideology or idea. It is rather easy to show how this idea is related to the modernist worldview. I have already shown how modern science is a product of this worldview. For the sake of another example, let us choose **Marxism**. How is it a modernist ideology? It believes that we achieve self-actualization through our work; capitalism alienates us from our self because of its repetitive productive processes and the bourgeois’ desire to earn profit; hence there is the contradiction of class interests (between the class of the bourgeois or capitalists and the proletariat or workers) which leads to a revolution, a rule of the leaders of the proletariat to establish efficient socialism (by maximizing production through the abundant and efficient use of science and technology), and finally to ultimate communism of classless society where all contradictions will dissolve and human beings will be free to self-actualize themselves through their work. In this description of Marxism, it is clear that there is a strong undercurrent of humanism running beneath it.

Figure 2: Human-Centric Worldview



We also cannot forget the **developmental angle** of modernity and the western paradigm. In fact, economic development everywhere has a thoroughly contradictory aspect and a *profound dilemma*: economic and industrial development brings about human prosperity but the same development affects the environment adversely; development increases human happiness and provides us with better material conditions, but it destroys the environment. A completely poor and most primitive human community is probably most friendly to the environment, but from a humanistic angle how do we justify the inhuman conditions and abject poverty of that community? We may blame the western paradigm with a sense of our own cultural parochialism, but are we ready to throw away everything that modernity brings to us in order to be more friendly towards the environment?

That is the difficult question.

Western philosophy seriously forgot about nature for a long time. It was only in mid-twentieth-century that there was a revival of the philosophy of nature, termed *environmental philosophy*, and that too in response to (that is forced by) what was widely perceived as the “ecological crisis” in the 1960s. The new *environmental philosophy is an account of how human beings should think about the natural world and their place within it*, how we could imagine a new narrative. An important question here is about *value*: do only human beings have value, or also non-human life has value? Is nature intrinsically valuable just as human beings are?

Twentieth-century environmental philosophy is a recognition of several things, most importantly *the harm that total, absolute and blind acceptance of the technoscientific culture has done to our Planet*. This does not mean environmental philosophy is anti-science; rather, it means that environmental philosophy, based on a critique of technoscience, demystifies science, and allows us to look at nature more integrally, holistically. *‘Technoscientific culture’ does not mean a special attitude among technologists and scientists, but it is a cultural phenomenon and a philosophy associated with modernity*. Modern environmental philosophy looks towards a harmonious relationship between nature and humans. It argues for a cultural and philosophical revolution.

Modernism brought material prosperity and unprecedented health and development for the human beings. It saw the world as full of resources for human beings, who are at the centre of the world, to exploit, use and improve their condition. Human condition had marvelous improvement during the modern age just as environmental condition deteriorated drastically. Hence, today’s environmentalists argue, what we now require is a **change of attitude**, an honest appreciation of nature and our place in it, and a lifestyle according to this changed attitude. If we have any sense of responsibility for the future human generations, we cannot be blind to environmental concerns even from a purely selfish human perspective. A Native American proverb made famous by environmentalism says: “We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our Children.”

---END OF LECTURE ONE---