



# Paul Taylor on Egalitarian Biocentrism: Implications for Environmental Sustainability in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

*Paul Taylor tentang Biosentrisme Egalitarian: Implikasinya terhadap Kelestarian Lingkungan di Delta Niger, Nigeria*

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## ABSTRAK

Paul Taylor mencoba memetakan jalan alternatif untuk filosofi lingkungan dengan mengartikulasikan egalitarianisme biosentris sebagai kerangka kerja etis untuk meningkatkan dan mempromosikan ekosistem yang ideal, seimbang secara etis, dan harmonis berdasarkan gagasannya tentang penghormatan terhadap alam. Makalah ini, oleh karena itu, meneliti sifat dan karakter etika biosentris Taylor, mencatat implikasinya untuk mengurangi masalah lingkungan Delta Niger melalui instrumentalitas kelestarian lingkungan. Ini mengeksplorasi seluk beluk sikap menghormati alam; konsep kebaikan makhluk; dan konsep nilai yang melekat pada makhluk hidup manusia dan non-manusia yang menunjukkan bagaimana mereka berdampak pada pengelolaan lingkungan di wilayah Delta Niger yang kaya minyak di Nigeria. Ini menggunakan metode analisis tekstual baik teks primer dan sekunder. Ini juga menggunakan hermeneutika untuk mengeksplorasi dan menafsirkan tema-tema kunci dalam filosofi lingkungan Taylor. Ini berfungsi sebagai panduan yang berguna untuk proses pembuatan kebijakan di semua tingkat pemerintahan di Nigeria tubuh-politik vis-à-vis polusi dan bentuk lain dari degradasi lingkungan di wilayah tersebut. Ini menyimpulkan bahwa etika biosentris Taylor yang berlabuh dan bergantung pada latar belakang atau dasar penghormatan terhadap alam memiliki keaslian dan masuk akal. Direkomendasikan agar upaya yang sungguh-sungguh diintensifkan oleh kementerian lingkungan federal dan Urusan Delta Niger untuk mengatasi berbagai tantangan yang melawan lingkungan. Lebih lanjut merekomendasikan bahwa perusahaan multinasional (MNC) yang beroperasi di wilayah tersebut memberikan tanggung jawab sosial perusahaan (CSR) mereka kepada masyarakat tuan rumah untuk mengatasi masalah lingkungan di wilayah tersebut.

**Kata Kunci:** Nigeria; semenanjung bakassi; kalabar; kamerun.

## ABSTRACT

Paul Taylor attempts to chart an alternative course for environmental philosophy by articulating biocentric egalitarianism as an ethical framework for enhancing and promoting an ideal, ethically balanced, and harmonious ecosystem based on his idea of respect for nature. This paper, therefore, examines the nature and character of Taylor's biocentric ethics, noting its implications for mitigating Niger Delta environmental problems through the instrumentality of environmental sustainability. It explores the nitty-gritty of the attitude of respect for nature; the concept of the good of a being; and the concept of the inherent worth of both human and non-human living beings showing how they impact on environmental management in the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It employs the method of textual analysis of both primary and secondary texts. It also utilizes hermeneutics to explore and interpret key themes in Taylor's environmental philosophy. It serves as a useful guide for the policy making process at all levels of governance in the Nigerian body-politic vis-à-vis pollution and other forms of environmental degradation in the region. It concludes that Taylor's biocentric ethics which anchors and hinges on the background or foundation of respect for nature has authenticity and plausibility. It recommends that genuine efforts be intensified by the federal ministries of environment and Niger Delta Affairs to address the manifold challenges militating against the environment. It further recommends that multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in the region render their corporate social responsibility (CSR) to host communities to curb environmental problems in the said region.

**Keywords:** Paul Taylor; Egalitarian; Biocentrism; Environmental Sustainability; Niger Delta; Nigeria.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The central focus of this paper is to attempt an exposition of Taylor's biocentric egalitarianism showing its implications for environmental sustainability in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Suffice to say that biocentric egalitarianism constitutes the hallmark or springboard of Taylor's environmental ethics, an appendage of moral philosophy, i.e. applied ethics as a second-order discipline. Environmental ethics is theory and practice about appropriate concern for, values in, and duties regarding the natural world. By classical accounts, ethics is people relating to people in justice and love. Environmental ethics starts with human concerns for a quality environment, and some think this shapes the ethic from start to finish (Asuo 2018). Others hold that, beyond inter-human concerns, values are at stake when humans relate to animals, plants, species and ecosystems. According to their vision, humans ought to find nature sometimes morally considerable in itself, and this turns ethics in new directions.

Environmental philosophy examines our relation, as human beings, to nature or our natural environment: it reviews our philosophical understandings of nature and our conception of nature's value and entitlements; it explores how we are to live with and in nature, and to what degree nature is or is not implicated in our own human identity (Asuo 2019, Asuo & Kingsley 2017, Udoudom, M. 2021). The question whether *nature* and *environment* are useful concepts at all, or merely contribute to attitudes that pathologize our relations with our world, is also considered. Environmental philosophy includes in its scope all the core discourses of philosophy: metaphysics - our assumptions about the basic stuff and structure of things; epistemology - how we come to know and understand nature, and how different epistemologies reveal different aspects of the natural world; aesthetics - the patterning that may or may not be taken to confer meaning or value on nature; and ethics - the morality of our treatment of living things and systems. Environmental inquiry also overlaps with other disciplines, such as environmental psychology and environmental politics, and is furthermore cross-cultural, since different societies understand and relate to their natural environments in different ways.

## 2. HUMANS AS MEMBERS OF THE EARTH'S COMMUNITY OF LIFE

This belief holds that human beings are members of the earth's community of life and as such "an integral part of the natural order of the earth's biosphere" in the same sense and term as other living entities, since we are biological beings as they are and

also product of evolution (Bassey *et al.*, 2020, Egbeji, 2021). The above affirmation does not deny the difference between humans and the non-human living beings. Rather "we keep in the forefront of our consciousness the fact that in relation to our planet's natural ecosystems we are but one species population among many." Tete and Ariche (2021), adds that we should adopt "behaviours that would foster the integrity, stability and beauty of biotic communities"(86).The realization of the above gives us a true sense of communion and fellowship as equal members of the earth's community of life.

This fellowship of humans with other nonhuman living things as equal members of earth's community of life is rooted in the following five realities:

3. The fact that nonhuman living beings share with humans the same biological and physical requirement for survival and sustenance in the sense that both must constantly respond and adjust to environmental development and changes;
4. The fact that like human beings, all living beings have a good of their own, which consequently requires that no member of this community of life has absolute control of biological and environmental factors;
5. A common sense of freedom; although, human beings enjoy certain form of freedom because of their free will and autonomy to make choice and decisions (which enables them to pursue their values and direct their own lives), they also share a certain kind of freedom with nonhuman living beings. This kind of freedom is the absence of constraint in pursuing and furthering ones good and well-being;
6. The fact that humans are a recent arrival on the planet earth and a, new comer, as established by the theory of evolution: this view calls humans not to see themselves as the final goal of evolution, but as beings that fit into the same structure of life with all forms of life;
7. Finally, the fact that humans need the nonhuman living organisms, while they in turn do not need us.

## 3. THE NATURAL WORLD AS SYSTEM OF INTERDEPENDENCE

This belief supports the idea that the earth biosphere together with human species is a complex, but unified web of interconnected entities and events. This is such that the survival of each living being is not only determined by the biological and environmental conditions (as seen in the first of the five realities discussed earlier) but also by its relations and interactions with other beings. Through its mode of symbiotic operations, the natural world functions as

organic system of interdependence in which "...the interactions of its various species populations comprise an intricately woven network of cause-effect relation." The belief that the world is a system of interdependence shows that no living entity is an isolated unity in the natural world, but a web of life.

### 3.1 Individual Organism as Teleological Centers of Life

This third element of the belief-system comprises a certain way of focusing our attention on individual organism as entity that has its very life to live in its own unique way. To conceive an organism as a teleological centre of life is to:

say that its internal functioning as well as its external activities are all goal-oriented, having the constant tendency to maintain the organism's existence through time and to enable it successfully to perform those biological operations.

This understanding of an organism in a manner does not mean in any way that we ascribe to it human characteristics, rather we see it as that which has a single, unique point of view.

### 3.2 The Denial of Human Superiority

In order to properly adopt the moral attitude of respect for nature, it is not just necessary but essential to reject the belief-system of human ethics, which holds that human beings are inherently superior to other nonhuman living organisms. This belief system which is culturally, religiously and philosophically ingrained in our attitude holds that "our reason and free will, it is supposed, endow us with special worth because they enable us to live on a higher plane of existence than other living things are capable of." However, Taylor rejects and denies this very belief-system of human superiority, claiming that it is a prejudice that emerged strictly from human point of view. This view of Taylor is similar to that of Peter Singer and Tom Regan's in their criticism against the human civilization (inspired by anthropocentrism) that taught and promoted human's superiority over animals.

## 4. THE CONCEPT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS

The first consideration that arises in dealing with the nature of these conflicts is the biological and existential fact that both humans and nonhuman living beings of the natural world must continually share and use the natural environment to pursue and realise their individual and unique ends. Furthermore, in these

conflict situations, human beings, in pursuing their values and interests, must use the natural environment and "...must also directly consume some nonhumans to survive."

Taylor asserts that the moral dilemmas or conflicts between human ethical system and the ethics of respect for nature "arise when human rights and values conflict with the good of nonhumans."

Below are some clear examples of competing claims:

1. Cutting down woodland to build a Medical centre;
2. Destroying a fresh water ecosystem in establishing a resort by the shore of a lake;
3. Replacing a stretch of cactus desert with a suburban housing development; and
4. filling and dredging a tidal wetland to construct a Marina yacht club.

## 5. THE CONCEPT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental sustainability is the responsibility to conserve natural resources and protect global ecosystems to support health and well-being, now and in the future. Because so many decisions that impact on the environment are not felt immediately, a key element of environmental sustainability is its forward-looking nature. In fact, it is basically an ideology that presupposes the concern for meeting today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. In the words of Ariche et al "Environmental Sustainability means promoting a healthy environment for both human and non-human lives" (p. 202).

## 6. ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

The problem of environmental degradation is indeed a signature issue in the oil-rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. In sum, the myriad cases of environmental challenges in the region includes, amongst others, acid rain (which leads to loss of biodiversity), gas flaring, ozone layer depletion (CFC), oil spill, green house effects, flooding and coastal erosion (Ilozobhie & Egu 2014; Egu & Ilozobhie 2015; Ilozobhie & Egu, 2021; John & Nnadozie 2021).

## 7. IMPLICATIONS OF TAYLOR'S EGALITARIAN BIOCENTRISM FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION.

Taylor's conception of egalitarian biocentrism as a model or paradigm in environmental ethics has numerous implications for contemporary Nigerian society's quest for environmental sustainability. It is against this background that Taylor asserts that it is possible to attribute rights to future generations through

effective and ideal environmental management strategies. He claims that we have moral responsibility to limit the harm caused by climate change in our respective environments.

In Taylor's perspective, climate change, enduring land use, persistent degradation of the environment, and sustainability are all concerned with relationships of equity between spatially and temporarily distant people. Climate change is particularly difficult to parse, as the dispersed causes and effects are unevenly generated and felt, and the sources are thoroughly integrated with contemporary expectations for what constitutes a morally good life. In particular, Taylor is disturbed by the high spate of uneven distribution of costs and benefits resulting from climate change, and those with fewer resources are generally asked to bear the biggest burdens and brunt's. What he aptly calls the "perfect moral storm" is the outcome of a lack of ethical consideration of the impacts borne by marginalized individuals, cultures, and the environment as a whole. This, in Taylor's view, underscores the necessity or rationale for cultivating the attitude or habit of moral responsibility towards distant (future generation) people. Hence, environmental sustainability in Nigeria is a moral desideratum or proviso for national development.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This study examines the nature and character of Taylor's egalitarian biocentrism noting its implications for environmental sustainability in contemporary Nigeria. It explores the ethics of respect for nature and its wild life or non-human living beings in the natural environment. In sum, it seeks to address the problem of environmental degradation and makes a strong case for conservation of biodiversity and wildlife protection in Nigeria using Taylor's biocentric egalitarianism as an ethical framework or single guide. Taylor rationally offers an individualistic ethics, biocentric egalitarianism, as a way with which to frame nature's value. Biocentric egalitarianism put forth the view that all living things have equal worth as teleological centers of life". In other words every living thing has its own biological interest and with that its own end-*telos*. All other capacities- such as sentience or rationality are not counted as holders of relevant value. Non-living things, including water, rock and other abiotic things that comprise the habitats in which living things dwell, are considered lacking in similar value, and large group of animals, such as abiotic communities and species, are considered subordinate in value. Any growth in the rate of consumption of a nonrenewable resource, such as a fossil fuel, causes a dramatic decrease in the life expectancy of the resource. Humans will always be dependent on agriculture so land and other renewable

resources will always be essential. The time required for a society to make a planned transition to sustainability increases with increase in the size of its population and the average per capita consumption of resources. Social stability is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for sustainability. Social stability tends to be inversely related to population density. The environment cannot be enhanced or preserved through compromises. We consume environmental source capacity by releasing many wastes (e.g. CO<sub>2</sub>, EFCs, oxides of sulfur and nitrogen that made acid rain) into the air because we claim the investment in energy production and refrigeration (human-made capital) substitutes for healthy air or atmosphere. We extinguish species (depletion of biodiversity source capacity) by converting jungle to cattle ranches because the human made capital (or strictly quasi-human made agriculture) is a substitute for the natural capital of biodiversity. The monumental challenge of ensuring, within less than two human generations, that as many as ten billion people are decently fed and housed without damaging the environment on which we all depends, means that the goal of environmental sustainability must be reached as soon as humanly possible.

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