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Mansour, Elena

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Rethinking Environmental Ethics: African "Anthropos" and *Ubuntu* as an Ethic of Difference

by

Elena F. M. Mansour

s2060957

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Faculty of Humanities,
Leiden University

Supervisor: Dr. Michael Onyebuchi Eze

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Table of Contents

Introduction

A growing number of scholars in environmental studies refer to the "Anthropocene" to describe a new geological era, within or ensuing the current Holocene, in which human activity is the primary driver of mutations in the Earth's systemic processes (Dryzek & Pickering 2019). What scholars term "anthropogenic" environmental change refers to human-caused irreversible environmental devastations, such as global warming, deforestation and loss of biodiversity, which pose the biggest threat yet to human and non-human existence.

Academics and activists situate the source of emerging environmental crises with respect to modern political economic practices differently. "Green" or "eco-"capitalists generally view environmental degradation to be the result of market failure in incorporating the economic value of nature, and favour market-based solutions. In environmental ethics, this market-led approach which has been the predominant response in international governance is criticised as being too anthropocentric by ecocentrists. The latter cite human-centred value systems whereby humans alone possess intrinsic moral worth as the root cause of ecological destruction. As such, they propose an ontological shift towards non-anthropocentrism (non-human-centred value systems) which, by extending moral consideration to the non-human world, will guarantee more inclusive notions of justice and a sustainable future.

While my approach sympathises with the ecocentric cause, this thesis is sceptical of rejecting anthropocentrism entirely in search of more inclusive environmental justice. Building on recent literature which scrutinises an all-encompassing notion of *ánthrōpos* (human) in calls to move beyond "anthropocentrism", this thesis asks:

How might *alternative conceptions of human* challenge current responses to environmental crises and inform the quest for justice?

Historical and cross-cultural engagement with "multiple anthropos" reveals that environmental justice for the non-human/excluded "other" in a global political economic context, specifically a neoliberal capitalist one, concerns both human and natural beings alike. Notwithstanding the value of the aforementioned approaches, to avoid generalisations, I move away from the anthropocentric/non-anthropocentric binary in search of a creative synthesis for an inclusive ethical theory that will respond to the various socio-political and economic needs of today. I will explore this question with reference to the African context, where scholars seeking a uniquely African environmental ethic to address the continent's challenges have tended to formulate the Africanist contribution in non-anthropocentric, and even ecocentric, terms. In dialogue with African anthropos, I propose to think of ubuntu philosophy as an "ethic of *difference*" whose concept of humanness extends consideration to "beings" as such. Only an ethic that respects, beside biodiversity, the diversity of human perspectives and experiences in relation to their environments – i.e., Other ways of Being – can warrant a truly sustainable future.

This thesis is structured as follows: **Chapter 1** presents the debate in environmental ethics between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism, which is echoed in eco-capitalist versus ecocentrist viewpoints. It indicates concerns regarding the sense in which "anthropocentrism" is used to discuss environmental crises in the context of neoliberal capitalism. Current discourse presumes a single "anthropos" at "the centre" of modern structures of domination, which complicates the ontological shift proposed by non-anthropocentrists.

Acknowledging a need for critical engagement with, and distinguishing between, notions of anthropos, **Chapter 2** outlines the methodology for the exploration of "multiple anthropocentrisms" and corresponding value systems in their historical and cultural contexts. I apply the theory of "othering" (Self/Other dualism) to analyse regimes of inclusion/exclusion of "others" from "the centre" of moral consideration. This suggests the relevance of the notion of *difference* – that is, of diverse "other" ways of being – both in enabling and resisting the existing structures and relations of domination.

Chapter 3 examines more closely the notion of anthropos in anthropocentrism as "domination". Historical and cultural engagement shows a Western notion of anthropos (Self) "at the centre" of modern political economic thought and practice that functions to structure the lives of both humans and non-human beings (Others). This violent categorisation ("Othering") of beings according to Western standards of humanity was central to Western expansionism, modernisation and global economic integration, as it was used to justify the domination and exploitation of "others". Anthropocentrism in the sense of "domination" functions as a regime of exclusion that conditions Being in the world for the different (non-human) "other" on *sameness*. By privileging an archetype of human that presupposes human interests, the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism perpetuates ontological imperialism (Being-over-Others) to the detriment of "other" ways of being, both human and ecological. Challenging ontological imperialism in this context requires engagement with alternative notions of anthropos and associated value-systems, that is, with *difference*. In this respect, non-anthropocentrism falls short.

To this end, in **Chapter 4**, I explore how African conceptions of personhood have informed African environmental ethics, and challenge the tendency in Africanist scholarship to frame the African contribution in non-anthropocentric/ecocentric terms. In **Chapter 5**, I explore the relevance of *ubuntu* philosophy and situate the Africanist contribution in its provision of an *ontology/ethic of difference* (Being-through-others). I revise Bantu ontology to articulate an alternative conception of anthropos which bears a dialectical relationship to "other beings" as such: In the African worldview, *difference* is essentially constitutive of the human anthropoid. Ubuntu ("humanness") thus offers an epistemic baseline for formulating a more inclusive and dialogic paradigm in environmental ethics that is applicable to both the human and natural world.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Scholars and activists have offered different responses to environmental crises. The predominant response in international governance to unsustainability challenges has been the adoption of market-led solutions that promote decarbonisation, bioconservation and "green growth". This approach seeks to fuel a global energy transition away from fossil-fuel based economies towards more sustainable forms of development. In an ambitious pledge towards reaching a global target of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 and net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, governments, multinational corporations and civil society alike have implemented such "greener" policies to demonstrate their commitment to sustainable use of natural resources in order to combat environmental degradation and thus ensure the wellbeing of "future generations" of humans (Fetting 2020).

Despite international efforts, carbon emissions have continued to rise, reaching an all-time high in the past decade (Forster et al. 2023). The current approach of extending market principles to the environment in pursuit of more sustainable forms of economic growth, also known as "green capitalism" or eco-capitalism, has been the subject of various criticisms. Scholars generally question whether capitalism, an economic system tailored to limitless growth and exploitation of natural resources, is at all compatible with a world of finite resources. It is well-documented that the historical process of capital accumulation and the pursuit of economic growth has contributed to current environmental crises, which underpins arguments from critical theorists that capitalism is inherently unsustainable (Foster 1999; Harvey 2014).

In environmental ethics, the philosophical branch concerned with the moral foundations of human relationships to the environment, the discussion centres around the *values* that inform modern political economic practices. Environmental ethicists question how humans should understand and relate to the natural world, the moral status of non-human entities, and the nature of the obligations of humans, if any, towards the environment. In the context of anthropogenic (*human*-induced) environmental change, the ethical debate is often framed in terms of the opposing viewpoints of anthropocentrism (human-centredness) and non-anthropocentrism (non-human-centredness). In this chapter, I delineate core misgivings in the debate between anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric theories of environmental ethics.

1.1. The Debate: Anthropocentrism versus Non-Anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism is commonly understood as a value system that places human beings ("anthropos") at "the centre" of moral considerations. Eric Katz (1999, 377–8) takes anthropocentrism to mean both the "idea that human interests, human goods and/or human values are the focal point of any moral evaluation of environmental policy and the idea that these human interests, goods and values are the basis of any justification of an environmental ethic." Traditionally associated with a Western worldview, it assigns intrinsic value to human beings over other forms of life in view of the former's privileged capacity for reason. The non-human world typically comprises other-than-human species, the animal realm, plants, microorganisms,

as well as abiotic factors, who are commonly seen as lacking rationality, consciousness, subjectivity and agency. In this view, environmental justice entails that "our responsibilities to the natural world are only indirect [and] are best understood with respect to the responsibilities that we owe other humans" (Jakobsen 2017, 184).

By contrast, non-anthropocentrism entails a shift away from value systems which place humans at the centre of moral concern. Non-anthropocentrists contend that moral arguments for environmental protection cannot be based on the promotion of human goods or interests (Katz 1999). Placing humans at the centre of moral consideration results in the objectification, subordination, instrumentalisation and degradation of the natural environment. Human exceptionalism establishes a hierarchical relation (human/nature dualism) to non-human entities that justifies their domination and exploitation for exclusively human ends, with little to no regard for the consequences for other forms of life. Rejecting the short-sightedness and speciesism of normative Western ethics, they present non-anthropocentric moralities that extend moral consideration beyond humans as the most appropriate response for navigating the Anthropocene. Against the dualistic cultural traditions of rationalism, non-anthropocentrism advocates a more holistic approach (rooted in "ecological realism") as to what constitutes "being" with nature. Recognising the ontological interdependence of humans and their environments generates a new understanding of human-nature relations that entails direct responsibilities towards the natural world. Expansion of the moral domain beyond humans has hence involved attributing rights to elements of the natural world. The most popular non-anthropocentric theories have been animal rights theory, ecofeminism, biocentrism which recognises intrinsic value in biotic life forms, and ecocentrism which extends the focus on living things to include the non-living components that make up the ecosphere, namely, ecosystems. The latter is generally accepted as the umbrella term for non-anthropocentric worldviews.

In an international context, the tension between anthropocentric versus non-anthropocentric environmental ethics is echoed in the contrasting standpoints of green capitalists and ecocentrists on how to respond to global environmental challenges. In the following sections, I provide further detail on the eco-capitalist (anthropocentric) approach and ecocentric (non-anthropocentric) viewpoints.

1.2. Eco-capitalism: An Anthropocentric Approach

Market-based attempts to accommodate sustainable development and mitigate anthropogenic climate change are based on an assumption that environmental degradation arises from "the failure of markets to reflect the environmental costs of production and consumption and the value of natural capital" (Scales 2015, 226). To ensure the protection of the environment, "it is essential to value the environment through determining the real costs of resource use and then proposing the most efficient solutions." This approach consists in emphasising the economic value of nature and "is often put forward as the only realistic and pragmatic way of explaining the importance of conservation to policy-makers and business leaders and achieving conservation goals" (Scales 2015, 226).

The integration of the environment via market mechanisms reflects a 'managerial' policy approach – it seeks to address the problems associated with anthropogenic environmental change in the context of current political economic practices. From this perspective, the capitalist market economy provides "the best means to innovate technological solutions that can compete with existing polluting practices ... by which to assure a sustainable future for humans and for the planet" (Fox 2022, 1-3). Green capitalist policies are presented as "win-win solutions", with its proponents trusting that capitalism is apt to accommodate the long-term goal of sustainable development all while maintaining economic growth (Scales 2015, 226). (Green) growth, they argue, is necessary to benefit future generations of humans in terms of ensuring an environmentally-friendly world while reaping the benefits of economic development – the central objective of which is to satisfy human needs. The latter indicates green capitalism's anthropocentric nature, albeit with a "technocentric" character, and hence the subject of criticism by ecocentrists (Chen Wu & Liu 2017, 447).

1.3. Ecocentrism: A Non-Anthropocentric Approach

Ecocentrics emerge as prominent critics of market-based approaches to the environment, arguing that the "key pathway to sustainability" requires an explicitly non-anthropocentric solution (Washington et. al 2017). Anthropogenic environmental degradation is understood by ecocentrists to be the outcome of human-biased interaction with nature that only recognises "other lifeforms insofar as they are valuable for human well-being, preferences and interests." Ecocentrism makes a moral claim based on scientific evidence of ecosystem complexity that "nature and life on Earth are *inherently good* ... nature has intrinsic value, irrespective of whether humans are the ones valuing it" (Washington et. al 2017, 34). Helen Kopnina (2016, 114) observes about deforestation/conservation projects how market-based approaches incentivise "practices that ensure forests are managed to deliver highest and best values to stakeholders (by which exclusively humans are meant)." In economic valuation of the environment, where the only relevant "stakeholders" are humans, the non-human world is valued only insofar as it serves specifically human interests: "Multiple species are ... doomed to exile or even extinction, as long as ecosystem services or natural resources or other human welfare benefits are successfully and efficiently extracted." This persistent instrumental logic in international sustainability discourse (including SDGs) reflects, for ecocentrists, an "anthropocentric approach in government thinking" that still excludes ecological concerns. The current environmental management regimes "proceed from the assumption that resources are to be harnessed and consumed for human use", making a "pro-development, pro-consumption approach to environmental management fundamentally unsustainable" (Abate 2019, 9).

Global environmental crises are thus perceived as an "anthropogenic problem that requires an ecocentric solution" (Abate 2019). The "transition to a truly just and sustainable energy future requires [not only a change in policies or technologies, but also] a change in mindset" (Frigo 2018, 3). Change cannot occur within existing frameworks that discard the intimate connections that make the so-called "human" world a fundamentally more-than-human

world. For ecocentrists, anthropogenically motivated protection of the environment simply cannot guarantee the sustainable future of the planet (Gribben & Fagan 2016; Kopnina 2016; Washington et. al 2017). Anthropocentrism rests on flawed ontological assumptions and unjustly privileges humans to the detriment of non-human beings: "To be ecologically sustainable, economic activity cannot replicate the anthropocentric shortcomings of Eurocentric rationality predicated upon dominion over nature; it cannot be an alternative form of development rebadged as sustainable development but an alternative *to* development" (Adelman 2018, 40). Rather, according to Pasi Heikkurinen (2016, 2):

> To organise human activities in a sustainable manner in the new geological era, a new ontology is needed that not only includes materiality and non-humans in the analysis, but also leads to an ecologically and ethically broader understanding of ecospheric beings and their relationships.

Ecocentrists thus argue that "a fully sustainable future is highly unlikely without an ecocentric value shift [from *homo sapiens* to planet earth] that recognises the intrinsic value of nature and a corresponding Earth jurisprudence" (Rowe 1994; Washington et al. 2017). Addressing environmental crises and ensuring a sustainable future necessitates a radical shift in our worldview that recognises human beings not as separate from their environment but as interdependent with ecosystems of living and nonliving things. Without ecological realities at the centre of our considerations, we are condemned to "unsustainable sustainability" – the main victim of which is non-human nature (Kopnina 2016). Notwithstanding problems within the human world (interhuman justice), ecocentrism "stands aside from these smaller, short-term issues in order to consider Ecological reality" and pursue inter-species justice (Rowe 1994). Via this value shift, non-anthropocentrism serves as an emancipatory ethic for the non-human world that moves to recognise, implement and protect the fundamental rights of nature (Eckersley 1992, 26; Hoek et. al 2023).

Contemporary dialogue in environmental ethics emphasises the need to shift to non-anthropocentrism in seeking justice for the non-human world. Such an ethic conceptualises the interrelationship between humans and nature in a non-hierarchical manner and refuses to reduce nature's value to human interests. Ecocentrism thus represents a radical break with Western concepts of Self (a "rational conscious subject") that inform modern political economic practices (Gosling & Case 2013; Banerjee & Arjaliès 2021). While the non-anthropocentric position makes an important contribution, it has nonetheless been criticised on account of its move away from a human-centred approach, particularly as regards the ontological positioning of humans in non-anthropocentric conceptions. I explore some key concerns next.

1.4. The Challenge: Who is the "Anthropos" at "the Centre"?

In a multidisciplinary review, Laÿna Droz (2022) challenges arguments that claim "anthropocentrism" to be the root cause of global environmental crises. Droz scrutinises the discourse of anthropocentrism by highlighting the term's various usages, meanings and associations in different linguistic, cultural and disciplinary contexts. From the Greek ἄνθρωπος (*ánthrōpos*, "human being") and κέντρον (*kéntron*, "centre"), "anthropocentrism" generally translates across cultures into human-centeredness or human-centred-thought. For Droz, this raises an initial question: "*Who* places *what/whom* at the centre of *what* (and *what/who else is therefore excluded* from the centre)?"

The most popular option in environmental philosophy derives from the English body of literature and takes *a human-related* concept of "who" that places *human beings* at the centre of *moral concerns*, to the exclusion of *animals/sentient beings/the environment/nature*. This interpretation, however, remains but one among several others. Alternatively, it is God that places humans at the centre of the universe (theocentricism); a scientific worldview has the Sun at its centre (heliocentrism); or, women are the ones excluded (androcentrism). The lack of a consensual answer to this initial question reflects for Droz the plurality and confusion of meanings of anthropocentrism. Hence, Droz (2022, 29) offers a tentative reconstruction of the implicit reasoning whereby "anthropocentrism" becomes the "scapegoat" of environmental crises:

1. Human societies use humans as a reference point. ["Man is the measure of all things."]
2. The belief that humans alone have moral standing, or else a surpassing degree of it, is and has been dominant in history.
3. These beliefs have justified individuals to adopt egocentric and egoist attitudes towards the world (or the excluded).
4. As a result, societies developed a relationship of domination and control over the world (or the excluded).
5. Capitalism, industrialism and consumerism emerged from this context and caused the current global environmental crisis.
6. Therefore, we need to get rid of anthropocentrism to save nature.

The first statement alone raises several questions. Insofar as anthropocentrism refers to a perceptual standpoint, "perspectival anthropocentrism" begs the question of whether (and how) one can do otherwise. That humans perceive and make sense of the world is "an unavoidable fact pertaining to our human condition" (Droz 2022, 29). Non-anthropocentrism, in this sense, is impossible. Alternatively, if it means that "human beings are being used as a reference point for the description of the world", such a statement is not universally endorsed, as noted above (e.g., theocentrism). There is also the question of "*which* human is actually taken as a reference point" – *who* is the "anthropos" presumed to be "at the centre"? Moreover, Droz (2022, 28) observes, "at the centre" can have several meanings, viz., a human-centred "perspective/standpoint" *or* "a hierarchical relation of domination relatively to an [excluded] 'other'."

In response to statement 2, Droz (2022, 30) writes: "history shows that the idea that all human beings have moral standing has not always been (and might not be) dominant everywhere, as shown by slavery, colonisation, the fight for women's rights, racial or religious discrimination." The group of humans ("we") who could legitimately discuss and judge to determine who/what has a moral standing is not uniform throughout history. Neither is there a uniformed "we" who have, as per statements 3 and 4, adopted "egocentric and egoist attitudes towards" and "developed a relationship of domination and control over" the world (or the excluded). Droz (2022, 31-2) observes the association of anthropocentrism to environmental vices ("egoism", "mastery", "domination") and how individual "psychological characteristics [of *some* humans] are extrapolated into traits of what it is *to be* human, or characteristics of the human species. ... To refer to these dominating tendencies as anthropocentric is misleading, as they do not characterise all humans." Such generalisations have violent ontological and epistemic implications:

> Defining what humans consist of in terms of a particular dominant group of human beings or specific traits that are dominant in some human individuals reinforces the domination of this group and the normalisation of this trait over other human beings, while erasing the diversity of other ways of being human.

This view of anthropocentrism as characterised by "domination and control" considers only certain humans "at the centre" – those who choose to dominate others. Crucially, it overlooks "other human groups excluded from this narrow understanding of anthropocentrism [some indigenous communities, non-Western cultures] that define humans in different terms" (Droz 2022, 32). As cited in Droz (2022, 32), De Jonge (2011, 309-13; emphasis added) remarks:

> While non-anthropocentrists may wish to hold a basic attitude in relation to environmental catastrophe, they fail to recognise that *the problem of domination applies equally to fellow humans. The reason why anthropocentrism needs to be challenged is therefore more complex than one which seeks to confront the human/nature divide. It must recognise that our notions of the 'other' include … members of the anthropocentric paradigm itself* ... To reject anthropocentrism as human centeredness is thus less important than recognising the tendency to place a set of given moral attitudes and beliefs at the centre of concern.

The above points to a parallel between the "domination" of the non-human natural world and domination within the human world. Such intersectional overlaps have been explored extensively by ecofeminists who argue that patriarchal structures of domination of women have simultaneously functioned to justify the domination of nature and support neoliberal economic development (Mellor 1997). That is to say, not all *human* lives are equal under capitalism. According to Audra Mitchell (2016), under neoliberalism, the problem of extinction extends beyond biodiversity and threatens diversity within the human species. This particular insight challenges generic claims that conjure "anthropocentrism" to problematise Western capitalism

(statement 5). In the words of Oriol Batalla (2021, 66), the "Anthropocene, by using *anthro* (Greek for human), blames humanity as a whole, disregarding any distinction among human beings … [this] narrative does not align with the reality that the current ecocidal crisis has not been triggered by humanity as a whole but by capitalism in all its dimensions." Thus, insofar as the problem of domination is not exclusive to human-nature relations but simultaneously permeates the human world, "the problem is not anthropocentrism per se but the modern capitalist economic system" (Droz 2022, 32). For Rafi Youatt (2017, 40), such claims:

> miss the historical responsibility of some humans over others; they underrate the specific structuring forces of colonialisms, capitalisms, and geopolitics, rather than species activity; and the historical and cultural human, rather than the biological human.

Generalisations about the "anthropogenic" crisis not only produce a dehistoricised understanding of the role of humans in perpetuating environmental injustices. By citing "human wellbeing" or, among ecocentrists, "our planet", sustainability discourse also has depoliticizing effects. Such claims implicitly assume that "global environmental degradation translates into shared concerns, that we share a common future and thus a common interest in combating environmental destruction. Such a conclusion is apolitical and abstracts from the power relations inherent in both the causation of ecological harm and the steps necessary to provide workable solutions" (O'Brien & Williams 2016, 244).

These considerations reveal some problematic assumptions underlying the ecocentric rejection of anthropocentrism. In problematising anthropocentrism as such, ecocentrists presuppose a single all-encompassing notion of human driving "the" anthropogenic environmental crisis. Arguing against anthropocentrism on the basis of "humans" – a uniformed and undefined whole – being at "the centre" is a misleading generalisation that erases the diversity of human experiences and ontological perspectives regarding what *is* human. It presupposes that "we" share equal moral status in the human world, and "risks imposing one implicit understanding of what 'human' is on this diversity of conceptions of humans."

In view of her findings, Droz (2022) calls for more critical attention to the "whos" of anthropocentrism – *who* places *whom* at "the centre" (and what else is thereby excluded from the centre). Youatt (2017, 42-3; emphasis added) reiterates the need to engage with the "politics of living", encouraging us to consider "multiple anthropocentrisms":

> anthropocentrism "as a question of political ontology and historically-positioned productions of differences in and across species lines [...] asks us to think about *how concepts of animality function to structure the lives of both human and non-human lives*. And rather than looking to move past the human or to transcend the human, it asks us to stay with the production of different kinds of humans as a question of political analysis.

Hence, questioning anthropocentrism is "to ask not only about moral questions of valuation" but about "the making of humanity as a category of practice – across lines of race, coloniality, migrants and borders, war, humanitarianism, and commodification" (Youatt 2017, 43). As Anna Grear (2015) puts it, "any ethically responsible future engagement with 'anthropocentrism' and/or with the 'Anthropocene' must explicitly engage with the oppressive hierarchical structure of the anthropos itself." This is where non-anthropocentrism appears to fall short (Youatt 2017, 42):

> [non-anthropocentrism] does not directly call into question the production of the multiple humans in anthropocentrism – that is, in focusing its attention on non-human actants, it sometimes assumes (tacitly, at least) that the 'human' in anthropocentrism is best described as a category encompassing the entire species, rather than asking how particular versions of the human come into being, and what the regimes of inclusion and exclusion are around those figures.

These criticisms underscore a need, prior to moving "beyond" anthropocentrism, to critically engage notions of anthropos that inform modern political economic practices, and to differentiate *other* ways of "being" in the context of environmental injustices. This is especially important when discussing environmental ethics in non-Western contexts. For instance, there is a growing tendency amongst scholars to frame the contribution of African philosophy to ethics in its non-anthropocentrism. While the need for critical engagement with diverse notions of "human being" is clear, critical analysis and deconstruction remains to be seen. Hence, the guiding question of this thesis: How might alternative conceptions of anthropos challenge current responses to environmental crises and inform the quest for justice?

Chapter 2: Methodology

The literature suggests that an analysis of the concept of anthropos – that is, of the idea of 'what it means to be human' – is necessary for any in-depth appreciation of environmental crises and associated injustices. The key point here is the importance of *differentiating* between humans when discussing the "anthropogenic" character of environmental degradation in order to historicise and re-politicise it.

Acknowledging "multiple anthropocentrisms" allows us to distinguish anthropocentrism in the sense of "domination" (Chapter 3) from "other" anthropocentrisms (human-centred value systems) in the perspectival sense (Chapter 4). In the latter sense, "being human" is not "to dominate", but to perceive, make sense of the world and act accordingly, and reflects the human condition. That is, in its most basic formulation, anthropocentrism denotes context-specific notions of what it means to be human – i.e., diverse ways of being human –, and varies per culture. The aim is thus to distinguish and investigate the notion of anthropos that informs hegemonic environmentally hostile practices, and to explore alternative conceptions of what it means to be human and the entailed relations to "others".

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The concept of human that is the subject of non-anthropocentric criticism assumes separation from and superiority over nature. Here, "anthropocentrism" in the sense of "domination" connotes an anthropos in a hierarchical relation of domination relatively to an excluded "other" – the category "who/who else is excluded from the centre" (Droz 2022). This indicates a potential starting point for analysing the who's of anthropocentrism and the making of "humanity" as a category of practice: who places who at "the centre" and what/who is therefore excluded? Using methods of critical analysis and philosophical argumentation, I propose to analyse the regimes of inclusion/exclusion entailed in "anthropocentrism" as domination – that is, the exclusion of "others" from "the centre" of moral concerns – in terms of "othering".

Edward Said's notion of Othering, as presented in his influential work *Orientalism* (1979), explains how social constructs justify the domination and exclusion of "others" from moral consideration. A key concept in postcolonial studies, Orientalism refers to "a discourse employed by the West of domination, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (Said 1979, 3). It describes how Western discursive representations of an Oriental "Other" served to justify European superiority over and colonisation of non-Western societies, and to preserve asymmetrical power relations in imperial settings. Othering typically involves the construction of a binary opposition between a dominant "self" ("us") and a marginalised "other" ("them"), where the latter is portrayed as exotic, mysterious, feminine, and outside the norm (Said 1979, 43; 206). The conceptual reduction of non-Western cultures and peoples into simplified stereotypes involves the dehumanisation of the designated Other that justifies their domination (Küey 2022). Such terms are used to create distinctions between groups, resulting in hierarchical relationships and excluded communities (Staszak 2009; Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2014).

Otherness thus plays a role in identity formation, influencing how humans perceive themselves and one another, and shaping intergroup relations – that is, relations to different "others". Ludmila Atanasova (2022, 83) remarked about modernity and otherness:

> Otherness is not simply difference. Otherness is a kind of difference that involves relationships of power … "Othering is a process that goes beyond "mere" scapegoating and denigration – it denies the other those defining characteristics of the "Same", reason, dignity, … and ultimately any entitlement to human rights."

Othering played a significant role in supporting modernisation and global economic integration by reinforcing power structures, justifying exploitation, and facilitating the expansion of Western ideologies and economic systems. The colonial domination supported the systematic extraction of "non-human" resources that was necessary for modernisation and Western capitalist development, inaugurating historical cultural structures of domination lasting to this day. Fourie, Deist & Moore-Berg's (2022), for instance, discuss how "hierarchies of being human" play out in contemporary South African societies, where systematic interhuman dehumanisation that is a legacy of apartheid contributes to social inequality, discrimination and conflict within human societies. Othering has also been described as "intimately" linked to environmental degradation under neoliberalism, both in exacerbating injustices in non-Western societies and in enabling the domination of nature (Andreucci & Zografos, 2022).

The colonial and imperialist legacies thus offer a historical and culturally-situated framework within which to analyse relations of domination underpinning "anthropogenic" environmental challenges. The notion of self-othering supports an intersectional approach to the problems of "anthropocentric" domination, illuminating the regimes of exclusion entailed in conceptions of anthropos (Self) with regards to non-human beings ("Others") in the context of hegemonic political economic practices. The human/non-human divide thus comes into view as Self/Other dualism to illuminate how discursive notions of being human function to exclude "other" (non-human) beings and perpetuate injustices on multiple levels. Through critical analysis and philosophical argumentation, I hope to respond to the need for investigating more closely the "human" at "the centre" of modern environmentally-hostile practices vis-à-vis the excluded "other", and what this entails for challenging anthropocentrism in a neoliberal capitalist context. Such is the focus of the following chapter. First, I briefly reflect on some practical and ethical considerations in the philosophical endeavours of the thesis.

2.2. Practical & Ethical Considerations

I realise that the subject of my thesis is ambitious, and there are many areas that need far more research and consideration that go beyond its scope. I am wary of succumbing to criticisms when using general terms such as "Western" or "African". Structures of domination exist even within cultures, and Self-Other dichotomies should not be used to essentialise. I rely solely on secondary sources although primary sources could support cross-cultural epistemic

diversification. Finally, I am grateful to all philosophers, activists, economists, ecocentrists, communitarians, and “others” alike that have inspired me to think, feel and dance as I philosophise!

Chapter 3: Western Anthropocentrism

In the previous chapters, I identified a gap in the literature pertaining to a need among environmental philosophers to distinguish between humans amid anthropogenic environmental change. I will now focus on the anthropos at "the centre" of "anthropocentrism" as understood by ecocentrists (as "domination") as the first step in the analysis of multiple anthropos and anthropocentrisms. Questioning the human at "the centre" draws attention to the power relations and regimes of exclusion entailed in "anthropocentric" domination that inform modern value-systems and contribute to environmental injustices, particularly in the context of neoliberal capitalism.

3.1. The Anthropos at "the Centre"

The anthropos that is the subject of concern for ecocentrists is one which assumes separation from, and control of the non-human world, namely, nature. Anthropocentric domination over nature is typically understood in the context of modernisation, industrialisation and Western expansionism, with the beginning of large-scale resource-extractive activity. Kenneth Peter (1993) locates the West's proficiency at "domination" in its history of ideas. For Peter (1993, 182), Western culture displays a peculiar kind of "anthropocentric humanism", a human-oriented outlook that "places humans at the centre of the universe as the source of all value, where 'everything else is an object to be viewed, manipulated, used or discarded by the human subject.'" It is peculiar because, "unlike other forms of humanism, anthropocentrism [in Western culture] goes beyond the elevation of the human species and degrades all else." Let us examine the entailed notion of anthropos who dominates non-human "others".

According to Peter (1993), the anthropocentric humanism that characterises Western modernity is historically rooted in Judeo-Christian monotheism whereby "man", created in God's image, was perceived to have "dominion" over nature, i.e., the physical world. The advances in natural sciences in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the subsequent radical new ideas of the Enlightenment, marked a shift in Western thought that strongly reinforced the mental construct of separation between humans and non-humans. The ontological and epistemological assumptions that facilitated domination by humans are best illustrated by the father of modern philosophy René Descartes' *cogito* argument: "I think, therefore I am". For Descartes, thinking confirmed one's existence independently of the external world. Cartesian mind/body dualism contrasted the thinking human subject (*res cogitans*) with the external world of physical objects (*res extensa*) that lacked this unique quality. Accompanying scientific progress and discovery via methodical inquiry and observation was a newfound sense of agency founded upon the innately *human* capacity for reason. The concept of "anthropos" in Western thought as an entity defined by rationality took full form through the notion of abstract moral individualism that emerged during the Enlightenment period. Thinkers like John Locke and Immanuel Kant argued for the intrinsic worth of the human individual as a rational free-willed agent, emphasising individual

rights and freedoms, autonomy, dignity, conduct by reason. The Enlightenment was a celebration of "man" – rationality became the source of humanity.

These ideas and values, which elevated the status of humans, laid the foundation for liberal political economic thought and practices that supported Western modernity. These ontological assumptions are reflected in modern political economic theories depicting what it means to be an individual, and how individuals relate to others. Modern liberal states rest on the atomist idea of a conglomerate of separate individuals as co-autonomous authors of the law, where political authority is tasked with the protection of the right to pursue one's own conceptions of the good. As capitalism emerged and expanded during the Industrial Revolution, the concept of moral individualism became closely intertwined with economic practices. Modern market liberalism and laissez-faire economics rest on the premise that individuals pursuing their self-interests would lead to overall prosperity and societal well-being. This period saw the triumph of instrumental rationality, linear progress and abstract individualism. As part of the Enlightenment project, the scientific method was similarly brought to bear on the study of economics and produced the abstraction known as *homo-economicus* ("economic man"), a continuum of both "scientific man" and "rational man" produced by Cartesian dualism (Mellor 1997). This notion of a fundamentally rational, autonomous, utility-maximising individual that exists in abstraction from the material environment occupies the centre of neoclassical economic theory.

As Peter (1993) observed, the elevation of the status of humans in Western culture corresponded, ontologically, to the degradation of all else. Modern Western identity was predicated on a disembodied "thinking self", where reality and "being" entailed a distinct capacity for rational thought – to *be* is to think. The emerging culture of dualism, rationalism and individualism, asserting the moral worth of the rational human subject, reinforced the mental construct of a hierarchical division between humans and "other-than-human" or "non-human" entities.

The ontological and epistemological assumptions that underscored European modernity, which associated *being* in the world with *thinking*, privileged rational beings as the subjects of "knowing, freedom, rights, and values" (Shen 2012). In *The Animal that Therefore I am*, Jacques Derrida (2008, 86-7) describes how the notion of Self entailed in "I am" does not depend on being-in-life but on thinking … a thinking soul that does not at first appear to itself as life." In this new modern worldview, "being" was an exceptionally human/cognitive phenomenon; other modes of being appeared in view of their (in)capacity for reason. Nature, the animal world and others deemed without capacity for rationality, consciousness, subjectivity or agency were delegated to the non-human world of objects. Where reason was the measure of subjectivity, agency and *humanity* by Western standards, "Being" in the world was equated with – and, as I aim to show, *conditioned* upon – "thinking". The new understanding that prioritised humans over non-humans characterises Western modernity and its concept of selfhood. Specifically, as I elaborate next, this particular notion of human ("being") as thinking, which perceived itself as "the centre" of moral concern and subject of reality in view of a distinctive capacity for reason,

played a key role in enabling the domination and relentless exploitation of non-human resources. The theory of "Othering" becomes informative for viewing hierarchical relations of domination over and the exclusion of "others" from moral concern ("the centre"), given certain ideas about what it means to "be" (human) in modern political economic practice.

3.2. The Excluded "Other"

In advancing the rational being as superior to all other creatures, Western modernity inadvertently created an epistemic space for self-othering. Within the framework of a dualistic ontology that gave primacy to thinking beings, not everything had value. The intrinsic value of the rational human subject (Self) – a moral agent given a distinctive capacity for reason – corresponded to the instrumental valuation of the non-thinking non-human object (excluded Other). Those who deviated from said norms of the thinking Self (rationality) were delegated to the non-human realm not merely as separate objects but as morally inferior beings. Othering in the context of Western modernity occurred in two senses, both of which were essential in justifying domination and supporting modernisation.

3.2.1. Othering of Nature

The first was the Othering of Nature. A key historical feature of Western modernity is the project of the modern natural sciences to achieve a complete technological mastery over natural processes (citation). The ontological dualism that informed the Western notion of modern Self entailed a pathological relationship to nature as existing for humans' use. According to William Leiss (2007, 52), the domination of nature consisted in "the effort to understand how all processes function, in terms of physical, chemical and biological interactions, so that we can replicate those processes and then intervene in them to produce the outcomes that we desire." Already during the Scientific Revolution, Europeans began to conceptualise nature as something to be observed, analysed, and studied. Under the gaze of scientific man, "all parts of nature are reduced to the status of instruments, either more or less useful to human beings" (Peter 1993, 182). In the process of modernisation, the natural world was increasingly subjected to the worldview and values of a Western thinking anthropos. Enlightenment thinkers, influenced by Descartes' dualistic philosophy, further embraced the idea of progress and the power of human reason to shape the world. Rapid developments in science, technology and industry saw growing emphasis on reason as the source of moral value and key to progress; the discovery of the laws of nature and universal truths; the centrality of human interests/needs; and individual and collective prosperity. The means to all this was the objective world. Fabio Possamai (2013, 3) observes how nature, conceived as having a "different ontological reality", became a "representation" of human progress and Promethean emancipation. Faith in religion was replaced with faith in progress through the accumulation of knowledge and wealth – this was the "promise of the conquest of nature" (Peter 1993; Leiss 2007).

The latter statement exemplifies a radical break with tradition, a new conception of history as linear, and the triumph of instrumental reason in Western thought, as well as the ontological degradation of non-human nature. The Enlightened anthropos, "freed" from the backwardness of tradition, would take it upon himself to expand the quest for knowledge and "universal" truths. Andrew Biro (2016, 92) notes how instrumental rationality supported the domination of nature in Western modernity: "Just as traditional ways of life were cast as "irrational" from the perspective of modern instrumental reason, nature itself was subjected to the same logic." Nature was seen as mysterious, wild, unknowable and unpredictable, as something to be overcome and mastered for human gain (Tulloch 2015). A society's control over nature was the standard of civilisation and a measure of progress (Cudworth & Hobden 2014; Wolloch 2016). In the pursuit of higher ends, the Enlightenment's "mastery of nature" involved "the conceptual and practical reduction of "nature" to limited terms that are comprehensible and useful for the rational subject" (Biro 2016, 92). The construct of non-human nature in Western conceptions of Self/human reduced the environment's value to its utility, abstracting natural beings from their own contexts of difference and systemic processes. In this hierarchical relation (Self/Other dualism), nature was excluded from consideration based on its *incapacity* for reason, that is, its "difference from" Western standards for Being (rational thinking). Instrumental rationality driven by a belief in progress through scientific knowledge and reason justified the exploitation of natural resources for economic gain, and undergirded Western capitalist expansion.

3.2.2. Othering of Humans

The implications of Western conceptions of Self/anthropos were, however, not exclusive to the natural world; nature, by Western standards, was not the only "non-human" being. Speaking to the peculiar character of anthropocentric humanism in Western culture, Peter (1993, 182) remarked: "Anthropocentrism sometimes goes further yet, and degrades other human beings to the status of objects." Like nature, humans were subjected to the Orientalised gaze of the West. Consider the following passage by Hegel (1956, 91-3):

> Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained … shut up; it is … the land of childhood … the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained; so that the Knowledge of an absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting. The Negro … exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality—all that we call feeling—if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.

Enlightenment values about humanity, truth, universality and progress underscored racist attitudes. European powers considered themselves more advanced and civilised than other cultures, often using this rationale to justify their expansion and domination over non-Western societies. William Easterly's *The White Man's Burden* (2007, 23) displays the dichotomy of the

"West and the Rest" as the West's self-pleasing fantasy that "we" were the chosen ones to save the Rest. Reason, which made a universal archetype of the Western Self, became a standard against which to measure one's humanity. As Said (1979, 98) shows, in the colonial encounter, peoples who deviated from Western norms were deemed "different, inferior, backward". The non-Western Other was not a full moral agent, but a child that needed to be guided towards the light to attain humanity. Traditions and indigenous ways of life were a sign of savageness and vulnerability. Where one's rationality was not recognised, *human* beings were also delegated to the morally inferior non-human world, as an ontologically distinct category of objects with no subjectivity in its own right.

The reduction of humans to terms that were comprehensible and useful for the rational subject shows in the development of scientific racism during the Enlightenment period, with thinkers attempting to categorise and hierarchise human beings based on physical and intellectual attributes. Indeed, the instrumental logic that justified the conquest of nature similarly underscored the reduction and domination of "other" humans, also considered non-human. Diego Andreucci and Christos Zografos (2022, 4) note:

> The colonial order of race hierarchy – assimilating natives to the realm of nature or "savagery" – was central to the extraction of resources and surplus value from peripheries, justifying the disposing of indigenous peoples' and slaves' lives in plantations and their "entombment in mines".

The accumulation of knowledge and capital that supported Western modernity and industrialisation relied as heavily on *natural* resources as on *human* capital, that is, on the commodification, racialisation, and exploitation – the Othering – of peoples. Ben Clift (2014, 46; emphasis added) describes this parallel: "The onset of modernity saw the formation of land, labour and capital as *abstract*, *impersonal* and *dehumanised* entities – as factors of production."

3.2.3. Othering as Ontological Imperialism (Being-over-Others)

The categorisation and hierarchical ranking of beings based on rational intelligence and moral agency thus had violent implications. By the standards of modern Western "anthropos"/Self, animals, plants and "other" non-thinking entities were systematically excluded from moral consideration. The primacy of knowledge, progress, prosperity and growth that underscore modern political economic practices corresponded to the subjugation of different "others" ("non-human" beings) to Western worldview, values, standards and methods. Under the gaze of Western anthropos, Being was not recognised in and of itself but was *conditioned* upon the standards of universal man, on scientific rationality, utility and progress. In the interactions between humans, nature and "others" that underscored modernisation processes, creatures often depended for their ontological status and moral worth upon *recognition* by the Enlightened Western anthropos – that is, on sameness.

This is what then constitutes "ontological imperialism", that is, according to Emmanuel Levinas (1969, 43), the "reduction of the other to the same". It illustrates the idea that a specific mode of Being and understanding of reality is prior, hierarchical and privileged over other (different) ways, what Levinas (1969, 45) calls the "priority of *Beings* over existents" - the priority of some beings over others. For Levinas (1969, 17), self-othering has violent and imperialistic tendencies, a "totalising" effect "that organises men and things into power systems, and gives us control over nature and other people." That is, in imposing conceptions of the Self onto Other cultures, *difference* is suppressed. The notion of ontological imperialism speaks to how, in the process of modernisation, Western conceptions of Self, value systems, and their ontological, epistemological and metaphysical assumptions (which prioritised rational beings), deemed universally true, were violently imposed upon "other" (irrational) modes of being. The Enlightened anthropos asserted its own moral worth ("centrism") and the supremacy of Western cultural values to the exclusion and domination of others. Amid scientific discovery and technological advancements, and in the pursuit of predominantly European economic interests, "existents" in the world were unjustly measured against Western standards of "being" (human) that only recognised its own kind (sameness). In the image of the Western Self which privileged Being-as-thinking, "existents" were abstracted from their own contexts of Being – of difference – to fit foreign norms. The dominance of Western cultural values and practices thus reflects the priority of one modus vivendi (privileging some anthropos) over "others" that abstracts from contexts of difference and conditions "being" in the world upon sameness.

3.3. Anthropocentric Humanism: A Regime of Exclusion of Difference

The human/non-human divide viewed through the lens of "Othering" (Self/Other dualism) gives us a sense in which anthropocentrism has historically functioned as a regime of exclusion. First, the human at "the centre" of moral consideration *given a capacity for reason* corresponds to a specifically *Western* concept of anthropos. The construct of a rational autonomous individual Self as a universal archetype at the forefront of progress and development established a hierarchical relation of domination relatively to a non-human Other, where *those excluded from "the centre" (non-humans) were not exclusive to nature*. Youatt (2017, 43; emphasis added) sheds important light on the power dynamics entailed in conceptual categorisations pertaining to "anthropos"; offering a critical perspective on humanist ontology, he writes:

> [T]he divide between human and animal comes into view not just as one separating humans from non-human animals, but as a more general *category* of animality *that structures life conditions for a range of creatures*.

Viewed in its relevant historical and cultural contexts, "anthropocentrism" as domination, through the lens of Othering, confronts us with the making of humanity as a category of practice that structures life conditions for *human and natural beings alike*. Anthropocentric domination (Western modernity/expansion) relied on the abstraction of "non-human" beings from their own

contexts of Being/difference; it involved the violent imposition and homogenisation of Western values and ideas about what it means to "be" in the world (viz. as thinking/rationality) that structured conditions for *beings as such*.

On the one hand, the disembodied anthropos implicated in human/nature dualism structured "Being" for the natural world according to specifically Western perceptions about "human" needs and interests, e.g. profit-maximisation, material wealth, economic growth. In a worldview of instrumental rationality, technological advance and linear progress, existents in the natural world appeared only insofar as they served these interests. On the other, alongside nature, Western notions of anthropos justified the domination of non-human human "others" – the notion of anthropos/Self implicated in anthropocentric domination (Western anthropocentric humanism) simultaneously involves a human/human dualism. We have seen how, during colonisation, the Western notion of anthropos was imposed upon other human societies, with its own definitions of what constitutes "human" needs and interests that were taken to be universally true. Such values, while "human-centred" (anthropocentric in a perspectival sense), were by no means universal. In the Enlightened man's mission to "civilise" the backwards Other, foreign value systems *with Western anthropos at the centre of consideration* were forcibly introduced to the effect of undermining "other" anthropos, local traditions, beliefs and practices. For instance, the seizure of African landmass and human capital by European settlers resulted, through the repression of the African anthropos, by extension, in the repression of African-human-nature relations and of alternative systems of meaning that informed human ways of Being in the world. The notion of Western anthropos denied other humans their own cultural and historical contexts in the name of science, truth, progress and development; it denied local conceptions of what it means to be human and associated practices and relations to nature as per the non-Western "Other" anthropos. It excluded *other* anthropocentrisms.

Modern political and economic practices are, in this sense, predicated on the homogenisation of values in line with the dominant ideologies of colonising/imperial powers that historically structured conditions of life/Being for non-human "others". It is not that "man is the measure of all things" (perspectival anthropocentrism), but that the perspective of *Western* man, deemed a universal archetype, has dominated in the measure of things. Human exceptionalism given an intrinsic capacity for reason was "exceptional" to a *specific* type of human; speciesism becomes less plausible when considering hierarchies of Being, and regimes of inclusion of sameness and exclusion of difference, *within* the human species. It is *this* anthropocentric ethic, a Western humanist one, which defines and conditions "being" in the world (mortality, humanity) according to attributes such as reason – i.e. upon sameness – that has justified the domination and relentless exploitation of both natural resources and humans through the violent imposition of demoralising norms and practices which abstracted a range of creatures from their own ontological/epistemic frameworks, in the name of progress and development.

We have seen how the ontological assumptions that undergird modern "human" practices have a Western notion of anthropos at their centre that prioritises Being as thinking, conditions

recognition (ontology, morality, humanity) on associated standards, and excludes "other" beings that deviate from such notions. Such regimes of exclusion which privilege *some* beings over others function to structure conditions of life for a range of creatures by abstracting different others from their own contexts of meaning. Viewed in a broader historical cultural context, anthropocentric domination reveals a dominant notion of anthropos at the centre of modern political economic practices that privileges certain modes of Being, and *conditions* "being" in the world for "existents" upon Western standards – i.e. sameness. This I call an *ontology of sameness*, that is, a mode of Being-over-others where moral exclusion of "others" consists in the *denial of difference*. It is this dynamic that drives the ontological degradation and extinction of "other" (different) beings. I elaborate further on how this dynamic drives environmental degradation under contemporary neoliberal capitalism to problematise eco-capitalism and redefine the ecocentric challenge to anthropocentrism.

3.4. Neoliberal Capitalism: Ontology of Sameness

The notion of ontological imperialism speaks to the dominance of a Western notion of anthropos and cultural hegemony of Western values in the modern global political economy, reflected in current practices and unsustainable patterns. Free-market growth-based neoliberal capitalism places *some*, not all, humans at the centre of consideration. It rests on a culturally-specific mode of "human-biased" interaction (rather than anthropocentrism as such) that promotes the interests of some humans over others. That is to say, this *particular* strand of anthropocentrism speaks to the priority of *some* beings and value-systems over others – nature, humans, associated value systems, and "other" marginalised "existents" – in the making of modern institutions and in their current manifestations.

The hegemony of neoliberal capitalism perpetuates ontological imperialism by *privileging a certain mode of Being* that aligns with values, beliefs and interests of Western anthropos. To be exact, the modern political economy privileges a cost-benefit worldview and the needs of a rational, self-interested, autonomous, disembodied human being that is *homo-economicus*. It privileges the market anthropos' mode of Being in relation to other beings, including nature, which abstracts from the external environment for personal gain. "Being" in an international political economic context is predominantly conditioned upon the standards of a market anthropos. This is exemplified by how international institutions often promote neoliberal policies and practices as *conditions* for financial aid or economic development. This neoliberal influence tends to prioritise market-oriented approaches, privatisation and deregulation, which can clash with / erodes alternative understandings of human wellbeing and values present in non-Western cultures. As a result, local economic systems, cultural practices, and traditional knowledge are often devalued or marginalised in the pursuit of economic growth and integration into the global market. In prioritising market forces, eco-capitalism privileges the disembodied economic Self who abstracts the environment in order to maximise own utility to the exclusion and detriment of alternative ways of "being" in the world. Ontological degradation in the context

of anthropogenic environmental change lies in the abstraction (Othering) of beings from their environments and the homogenisation of values – that is to say, in annihilating *difference*.

3.5. Redefining the Challenge to "Anthropocentrism"

The problem with ecocentrism is not anti-humanism per se. Rather, its diagnosis of eco-capitalism and "anthropocentric" domination in the context of hegemonic neoliberalism is incomplete: It fails to recognise the parallels of capitalist relations of domination in both human and natural worlds. According to ecocentrists, ongoing environmental degradation and the blind spots of green capitalism lie in the logic that "economic interests of development" (note, these are predominantly *Western* interests) "should come first": "due to vested interests (or sometimes disinterests or ignorance) of a multitude of stakeholders and 'consumers', sustainability becomes nothing more than a talk shop ... high-jacked to justify further 'business-as-usual'" (Kopnina 2016, 113). But the extinctive consequences of the instrumental logic of market-based frameworks and "business-as-usual" are not limited to the natural world. The "anthropocentrism" driving environmental degradation, and the proposed market-based responses, remain *exclusive* to *specifically* entrepreneurial concerns to the detriment not only of planetary ecology but also humans.

The "non-human" world in this particular strand of anthropocentrism with a Western anthropos at its centre encompasses "Other" humans that, as a consequence of this very anthropocentric domination of nature, have experienced unequal development and suffer profound injustices. The structural injustices perpetrated by neoliberal capitalism are evidenced in the disproportionate distribution of the burdens of environmental crises and the marginalisation of non-Western communities, reflecting these historically-rooted patterns of domination (Faber, Levy & Schlegel 2021). It is in this vein that Batalla (2021, 66) rejects the notion of an "Anthropocene" and speaks rather of a "Necrocene" wherein "green capitalism is a ramification of the business-as-usual neoliberal praxis as it does not contemplate the pressing matters caused by capitalism as it exists today which are inherently linked to inequity, exploitation, death and extinction." Parallel injustices within the human world speak to the hegemony of a particular notion of anthropos perpetuating historical patterns of domination in the form of ontological imperialism, causing the extinction of "other" anthropos, ecological beings, and cultures. Environmental injustices thus not only concern "non-human" *nature* but similarly "other" existents that continue to be marginalised by regimes of exclusion. Not all humans are at the centre of "anthropocentrism", not all lives are equal under capitalism, and *not all anthropocentrisms are complicit in human domination of nature.* In a neoliberal capitalist context, the quest for environmental justice concerns "non-human" Others as such. Hence, the challenge to anthropocentrism as domination (Youatt 2017, 43; emphasis added):

> Anthropocentrism thus reveals itself as "a historically positioned ideology, working within circuits of colonialism, liberalism, and capitalism [that] works unevenly across place, space, and time. It is therefore more accurate to think about *anthropocentrisms in the plural*.

In this respect, ecocentrism falls short. Ecocentrists presuppose a single, universal human at the centre of moral consideration in factually *hegemonic* conceptions of humans. The term "anthropocentrism" does not represent all humans at its centre but privileges a certain understanding of what it means to *be* (human) – a specific ontology (mode of Being) that presupposes human needs/interest and relations to the natural world that is particular to Western historic and cultural contexts. Ecocentrists appear to confound the anthropocentrism *of* market-based approaches (eco-capitalism/neoliberalism) with "anthropocentrism" as such. Viewed in its relevant context, the subject of criticism is not all humans but the capitalist stakeholder/consumer, a *market anthropos* (an entrepreneurial Self) rather than *anthropos* as such. By failing to critically engage the notion of anthropos, ecocentrism fails to see that the capitalist world economy privileges a particular type of human, *homo-economicus*, that abstracts (itself and others) from the environment with little regard for Others, both humans and non-humans. It misses how this economic cost-benefit worldview legitimises certain forms of Being (sameness) over others (differences). Thus, while ecocentrists claim to expose the deficiencies of anthropocentrism, in deriving from these consequences of "business-as-usual" *first and foremost* the need to protect ecosystems, it overlooks the paralleling inequity, exploitation, death and extinction in the human world that is structurally linked with anthropocentric domination of nature and environmental degradation. The notion of ontological imperialism shows that what is lost in ontological human/non-human (Self/Other) dualism is also the Other *human*.

In prescribing new norms and proposing radical ontological shifts in international policy, ecocentrism risks becoming afflicted with the same disease it seeks to cure. Droz (2022, 41) illustrates this danger:

> Anti-anthropocentric rhetoric must beware of the odd assumption that 'the imposition of a non-anthropocentric account of the value of the rainforest on the third world would somehow not be imperialistic' … Otherwise, they might reproduce imperialist and orientalist bias: 'Contemporary environmentalists are again coming to Africa like the European colonialists did before them, with what appears to be a "new" set of environmentalist ideas to save Africa and their environment' … Similarly, replacing human beings with another element (animals, biotic nature, etc.) at the centre simply shifts the problem; the newly excluded elements (human beings, abiotic nature, etc.) are again at risk of being valueless, or only instrumentally valued … As such, post- or anti-anthropocentric frameworks must not be used as ideologies of domination, with totalitarian dangers such as the rejection of individual rights for the good of the whole ecosphere, for instance.

Peter (1993, 188) further describes how environmental ethics/initiatives can easily become displays of man's "mastery" *over* mastery of nature. This point can be extended to non-anthropocentrism, where humans are still the ones who attribute value, even intrinsic value, to "beings" in the world. Consider the attribution of rights, a Western cultural phenomenon, to nature (Nash 1989). The non-anthropocentric/ecological human who seeks to attribute rights *to*

nature given the latter's inherent value "reinscribe[s] the idea of a morally reasoning human subject as the arbiter of value, which seems to come full circle to the very problem it is trying to avoid" (Youatt 2017, 41). Hence, even the most benevolent environmental efforts risk emulating the passion-driven domination of nature that has pervaded Western culture (Peter 1993).

Non-anthropocentrism, especially if adopted in non-Western contexts, risks imposing its own worldview and conception of what it means to be human that dictates how one *ought* to relate to nature ("humanity's duties towards nature"). As an environmental *ethic*, non-anthropocentrism promotes a conception of the "good" that can easily clash with cultures and traditions, even eco-friendly ones, in which "the good", and the entailed role of humans, still varies. By failing to challenge the generic "human" implied in the Anthropocene, ecocentrism risks not only reproducing already-existing inequalities but also becoming an *ontology of sameness* itself. The non-anthropocentric solution involves its own conception of anthropos (an ecocentric Self) that equally risks undermining "other" modes of being human. Youatt (2017, 40; emphasis added) remarks: The non-anthropocentric conception of human "paradoxically re-emerges as a universal figure, defined by *species* rather than *history*, carrying moral capacities to order and re-order the world." The non-human-centred ontology/ethic that is based on scientific evidence of human-ecological interdependence promotes new standards for Being in the world, e.g., one that recognises the legal rights of nature. However, morality is relative to context. Human perspectives on reality, value-systems and practices (viz. their entailed relations to "existents") differ across cultures. Non-anthropocentrism thus ignores important historical and cultural *differences* between humans in the context of the "anthropogenic" environmental crisis to the effect of ontological imperialism and epistemic violence.

History shows that environmental justice for the "non-human" world in the context of the modern political economy concerns humans, nature and "others" as such that are the victims of anthropocentric domination and the regimes of exclusion that underscore "anthropogenic" environmental degradation. We are encouraged to consider *multiple* anthropos and engage "other" anthropocentrisms – that is, alternative conceptions of human and their entailed relations to non-human beings – before considering "non-" or "post-" anthropocentrism. The 'either/or' ethical binary (anthropocentrism/non-anthropocentrism) in current environmental discourse becomes dogmatic, often limiting the terms of debate to either the entrepreneurial Self or an ecocentric Self. Such abstractions pertaining to "anthropos" and/or "nature" do not encourage consideration of "other" anthropos or multiple anthropocentrisms – that is, of *difference*. Yet, it is precisely an *ontology* and corresponding *ethic of difference* – that is, a mode of Being and way of life that does not prioritise some over (different) "others" but sees "difference" as constitutive of Being/humanity – that holds some promise in response to the degradation of environments and diverse ways of being induced by the legacies of modernisation, anthropocentric humanist domination, and ontological imperialism. This, it seems, is the challenge for contemporary environmental ethics.

To this end, the following chapters are dedicated to the exploration of alternative worldviews which have been sidelined in the historical process of modernity. Specifically, I approach *anthropos* from an Africanist perspective.

Chapter 4: African Environmental Ethics

African environmental ethics seeks to understand and articulate the ethical dimensions of human relationships with the environment within an African philosophical context. The field emerged in response to the continent's unique challenges. Although African countries bear the least responsibility for anthropogenic climate change, they suffer the greatest burden of its adverse effects (UNSG 2020). Africa and more specifically Sub-Saharan countries' environmental challenges are numerous – desertification, deforestation, land and water pollution, disappearance of wildlife – and go hand in hand with developmental efforts.

Scholars in the field often problematise the anthropocentrism of Western developmental models as contributing to environmental injustices across Sub-Saharan Africa. According to Joseph Ogar & Samuel Bassey (2019, 74), Africa's developmental trajectory, which relies heavily on industrial fossil-fuel driven technologies, responds to "a develop-or-die attitude shrouded in a deeply anthropocentric man-nature relationship." The pressure to "develop" has had far-reaching consequences for natural habitats. The desire of African states to catch up with the developmental pace of the Western world has contributed to "the mass destruction of their ecosystems through the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources" and a "breakdown in environmental stability" (Ogungbemi 1998, 264):

> The drive to develop [like Europe and the U.S.] has led to wholesale abandonment of traditional practices and values of forest land management as if development and modernisation were incompatible with conservation of forest and protection of trees.

In the pursuit of modernisation in an anthropocentric fashion, "Africans have departed in practice from *who they are* at the core" (Ogar & Bassey 2019, 78; emphasis added). Mbih Tosam (2019, 172) describes the historical context of this trajectory:

> As a result of the colonial encounter, Africans were forced to abandon some of these indigenous environmental values and sustainable practices for an anthropocentric approach. With this outlook where humans have moral responsibility only towards humans, development meant the complete disregard for traditional African holistic values and customs.

The aim of African environmental ethics is thus to articulate African values to inform African peoples' relationships to their respective environments and to implement policies in line with their historical and cultural experiences. Philosophers Chinedu Ifeakor and Andrew Otteh (2021, 157) warn that one must be "careful not to import from other cultures but to look into the ontology of such people. There will be rich cultural or ontological materials which will enhance effective communication of values for the conservation of the environment." As such, scholars contend that any properly *African* ethic must be in agreement with African ontology. The search for a uniquely African environmental ethic via a return to tradition thus speaks to an African

philosophical enterprise of reflecting on "who one is" outside of imposed frameworks – i.e., on *other* ways of being human.

In this chapter, I first discuss African relational ontology and how community-based morality has informed African environmental theories to date. I then discuss how defining African ethics as "non-anthropocentric" is ill-suited in view of historical cultural context: It undermines the vocation to develop a "uniquely" African ethic that reflects the values of African anthropos which were historically subjugated by Western culture "to the caprice of the god of technology, industrialisation and capitalism" (Ojomo 2010, 59). It is only through critical engagement with notions of "human" outside of these discursive frameworks that the contributions of African philosophy to environmentalism can be found. The chapter lays the foundations for a discussion on ubuntu philosophy in Chapter 5, which shows African humanness as a mode of "Being-through-others". Far beyond dichotomies that promote assimilation and homogenisation of values, the African notion of "human" expressed in ubuntu cherishes *difference*.

4.1. African Relational Ontology

The African cosmological worldview comprises a community of beings that include the living, the non-living, the living-dead, the unborn, the spiritual, the physical and the unknown. According to Michael Eze (2017a, 625), the African community is "not just a collective of humans; it is a fluid habitation of interactive forces, beings, elements and animate and inanimate matters of the environment."

The Rwandan philosopher Alexis Kagame distinguished four main categories of Being in the cosmology of African Bantu peoples: *muntu* (beings with intelligence); *kintu* (beings without intelligence, inanimate things/objects); *hantu* (being of time and space); and, *kantu* (being of mode, quality/quantity). The common suffix "-*ntu*" stands for a vital life force that is the core of all being. It is the link that connects all beings, from the Supreme Being (God), through spirits, ancestors, humans, down to the smallest grain of sand. Abiola Irele (1996, 16) describes this "vital force" as "a pulsating life of interacting essences, of forces" that runs through all elements and ties them together in "the great chain of being". Within the hierarchical cosmology, these separate but interrelated beings (including the "dead, departed, desensitised and formless invisible" ones) are "all endowed with active forces, that is, they have some form of life in them" (Eze 2017a, 625). The Belgian missionary Placide Tempels (1959, 35) famously observed about Bantu ontology:

> Force is even more than a necessary attribute of beings: Force is nature of being, force is being, being is force.

"Every element that exists has a vital force. Nothing can exist or become conceived without force." In this ontological scheme, beings do not exist in abstraction but in "an intimate ontological relationship … nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other

forces by its movement" (Tempels 1959, 28). This metaphysic captures the African's experience of "reality as a relationship of things" as an embedded, relational and communal being (Jimoh 2020). The human being, like all creatures, is always found in relationship to the environment. In the great chain of being, the human person is "a composition of mobile forces which interlock'', "only one of the many beings that are in constant symbiotic dialogue and interaction" (Eze 2017a, 626). This sense of community encompasses together with humans the broader physical and metaphysical universe. The Bantu people's cosmological worldview sketched above informs my analysis of what constitutes "being" (human) in an Africanist perspective throughout Chapters 4 and 5. Let us first consider how African worldviews have informed the development of African philosophy.

4.2. African Philosophy in Search for Ontology: "Who am I?"

The formulation of a uniquely African environmental ethic fuses with a broader debate about the status of "African" philosophy, and questions of African identity, in a post-colonial context (Masolo 1994). In the absence of a monolithic body of knowledge, scholars have relied on language, folk culture, myths and oral transcriptions passed down over generations to identify key concepts and common norms and practices that can be said to constitute African morality (Chemhuru 2019). Notwithstanding internal differences, they insist on a "complementary unity" in the continent's diverse indigenous, religious and cultural traditions (Callicott 1994, 160).

A common theme in African belief systems, customs and practices is that the *community* occupies a fundamental position. This notion of a shared sense of community finds its full expression in communitarianism, an ethical theory that focuses on the significance of community and social relationships in shaping individual identity and ethical values. In African conceptions, "a person is thought of first of all as a constituent of a particular community, for it is the community that defines who he is and who he may" (Ray 1976). To the question "What/who am I?" or "What do I ought to do?", the answer is to be found in the community that shapes "us". Scholars identify in this general culture of communitarianism an African morality that emphasises communal relations as the fabric of human societies. The African notion of Self is commonly associated with the Kenyan philosopher and theologian John Mbiti's communitarian axiom, "I am, because we are; and, since we are, therefore I am" (1969, 106). The notion of embedded personhood is thus commonly evoked to distinguish African communitarianism from modern Western atomic and abstract individualism, and has strongly informed the trajectory of African environmental ethics.

4.3. Current African Environmental Ethics

In African cosmological worldviews, the moral community comprises not just humans. While not directly citing communal values, Segun Ogungbemi's "ethics of nature-relatedness" constitutes the first explicit articulation of an African environmental ethic. It derives from an "ethics of care" – a universal moral code of "not taking more than you need from nature" – that

"is essential to traditional understandings of environmental protection and conservation" (Ogungbemi 1998, 268). Where ethics of care are not unique to African societies, it is adapted as "nature-relatedness" to fit Africa's peculiar circumstances. Ethics of nature-relatedness asserts that, whereas humans necessarily rely on the natural world for their existence, "natural resources do not need man for their existence and functions" (Ojomo 2010, 57). As such, we ought to treat the environment with due respect.

Although Ogungbemi's formulation offers some insight into the African dimension of environmental crises, it is criticised for alienating the "African spirit and peculiar experiences" (Ojomo 2010, 60). The metaphysical/spiritual element is essential to African ontology and necessary for any proper African environmental theory. In this respect, Godfrey Tangwa's "eco-bio-communitarianism" constitutes another significant contribution to anchoring an African orientation in environmental ethics. Tangwa (2004, 389) bases his conception on the metaphysical outlook of pre-colonial African societies, specifically of the Cameroonian Nso, which involves the "recognition and acceptance of inter-dependence and peaceful coexistence between earth, plants, animals and humans." Traditional Africans' attitudes towards nature and customs imply respect for invisible and inanimate forces which are viewed as part of the community; in African cosmology, "there is a reason for whatever exists although human beings may not immediately know it." These cosmic relations dissolve the dichotomy that separates humans and nature in the dominant Western cultures. Eco-bio-communitarianism thus encompasses Africans' traditional "eco-bio-centric" attitude of "live-and-let-live", that ought to be substituted for the aggressive motivation of domination in the way nature is approached by humans (Tangwa 2004, 394).

Further contributions include Mogobe Ramose's "Ecology through ubuntu" (2005) and Kevin Behrens' "relational environmentalism" (2014). Ramose (2005, 105-6) extends the Bantu concept of *ubuntu/botho* ("human-*ness*") through to human-nature relations, arguing that indigenous African thought implies a "different perspective of reality or being [from Western human-*ism*]" that strives a harmonious balance in the totality of the relations of beings. Whereas ubuntu emphasises moral relations from the perspective of "humanity towards others", relationality focuses on the interdependence of different elements of the ecosystem. Behrens (2014, 63) argues that the African "belief in a fundamental interrelatedness between natural objects … accords moral standing to all living things, groups of living things, as well as inanimate natural entities."

Both ubuntu and relationality provide the framework for more current ethical formulations. Chinedu Ifeakor's (2018, 139; 143) "obligatory anthropoholism" adapts relationality to illustrate the "privileged place of humans" in African ontology as uniquely "obligated" towards the ecosystem. For Danford Chibvongodze (2016, 157), ubuntu should be reclaimed to serve the conservation of the natural wildlife as African ontology "transposes moral obligations not only to their fellow human beings, but also to the surrounding natural environment." Ubuntu has also been adapted in a communitarian fashion to argue for animal rights (Horswethke 2019) and ecofeminism (Chemhuru 2019). Finally, drawing on Ramose,

Bantu insights provide the ontological premise for Michael Eze's *humanitatis-eco* (2017a, 626-7): "The sacredness of nature is because all elements have vital force … Embedded with spirit and force, the environment is not just inconsequential, it is part of life and constitutive of one's humanity." To "be" (human) is to be part of this eco-community, to exist, become and evolve in relation to other beings such that "one's overall life experience is tied to" how they relate to the environment. For Eze, however, this relationship does not give rise to certain "rights" or "obligations" per se, as is common in Western culture. Morality, here, is expressed in "subjective dialogue" with other beings that make up the shared community of plants, animals, humans, etc. In this, Eze (2017a, 623) claims to break with previous positions which, he argues, have been adapted to fit Western epistemes. From an African perspective, to live ethically is to embody "*a way of life*" – to *experience* oneself in a dialogical relationship as a part of a whole.

4.4. African Ethics: Non-anthropocentric?

The perceived need to resist anthropocentrism in the context of Africa's environmental challenges explains the growing tendency among scholars to situate the contribution of African philosophy to environmental ethics in its "non-anthropocentrism". Initially, African ethics have been described as "monotheistic and anthropocentric" (Callicott 1994, 157). John Mbiti, for instance, sees an essentially anthropocentric attitude in Africans' shared belief in a supreme God which places man at the centre of divine creation. However, scholars nowadays evoke the African conception of a communal Self to challenge the claim that the African worldview is anthropocentric. J. Baird Callicott (1994, 167) captures this precedent:

> In this notion of embedded individuality – of individuality as a nexus of communal relationships – we may have the germ of an African environmental ethic. Add to the intense sense of social embeddedness an equally vivid sense of embeddedness in the biotic community, and anthropocentric African communitarianism might then be transformed into a nonanthropocentric African environmentalism.

The claim is frequently made that, contrary to Western cultures, African traditional values and customs do not involve objectification and exploitation of the natural world. Tangwa (2004, 398-92) presents African eco-bio-centrism, where the lines separating humans and nature are "slim and flexible", in contradistinction with "anthropocentric and individualistic" Western worldviews. Others propose a similar notion of "eco-communitarianism" to close the knowledge gap between African and Western anthropocentric environmentalism, citing African "ontological relatedness" as a precedent for justice for "nature" (Ufearoh & Onebunne 2017; Bassey & Okpe 2018; Kruger, le Roux & Teise 2020). Kai Horsthemke (2019, 240) maintains that despite the expansion of African value systems like ubuntu and relationality to include "the non-human world" ("animals, birds, fish and trees"), human duties to nature remain largely indirect: "adoption of a more enlightened stance *vis-à-vis* the non-human world and animals in particular would almost certainly involve giving up the moral anthropocentrism that characterises many

attitudes and practices on the African continent." Ubuntu ethics have been reformulated in "non-anthropocentric" and communitarian terms to counter environmental problems rooted in "anthropocentric" activities, individualistic values and capitalism (Horsthemke 2019; Chemhuru 2019; Ayayia 2023). Ifeakor (2018) considers "obligatory anthropoholism" to be the most viable African non-anthropocentric theory; his position has been accepted by others (Bassey 2019; Ifeakor & Okpe 2021). Eze's (2017a) "eco-humanism" has similarly been qualified as a viable ethic against anthropocentrism and individualism (Kruger, le Roux & Teise 2020; Ignatov 2023)

Nowadays, scholars more readily argue that African ontology and ethics *are in fact* non-anthropocentric, as Tosam (2019, 172) seems to suggest:

> "African environmental ethics extends the moral community beyond anthropocentric concerns by including non-human animals, plants, the unborn, and the supernatural into the moral universe"

… a view equally shared by Timothy Okpe and Friday Oti (2019, 106), who argue:

> Africans are ecocentric because they accord recognition and respect to all beings ... Philosophically, therefore, African environmental philosophy is basically ecocentric where recognition is accorded to other lives and creatures that exist.

The question is: How complementary is a non-anthropocentric ethic to the African context? While African notions of community emphasise interrelatedness between human beings and nature, this need not render Africanist ethics "non-anthropocentric". This shift to non-anthropocentrism is based on an understanding of "anthropocentrism" in the sense of "domination of nature" that reflects particularly Western value systems. While environmentally hostile values have permeated African societies through the import of capitalism, the hierarchical relations of domination to nature that underscore the advent of modernity and continue to perpetuate today do not qualify "humans" as such. As Youatt (2017, 41) puts it, "one is not inherently anthropocentric [in the sense of domination] by being human." Anthropocentrism *in an Africanist perspective*, where the so-called "human at the centre" is inextricably linked to a broader network of vital forces, has distinctive moral implications. African notions of *anthropos* entail culturally-specific values, practices and relations with nature that, surely, defy Western anthropocentric humanism. Even Callicott (1994, 158) tacitly admits a notion of anthropocentrism that is reflexive of African frameworks of meaning:

> The anthropocentrism characteristic of Western utilitarianism drags in its train a lot of conceptual baggage that seems out of place in an African context. African peoples are traditionally tribal, and the typically African sense of self is bound up with family, clan, village, tribe, and, more recently, nation. To such folk, the individualistic moral ontology of utilitarianism and its associated concepts of enlightened rational self-interest, and the aggregate welfare of social atoms, each pursuing his or her own idiosyncratic "preference satisfaction," would seem foreign and incomprehensible.

Anthropocentrism reformulated in Africanist terms exemplifies that environmental ethics need not be categorised as "non-anthropocentric" to be valid; they may very well be anthropocentric, only the human in question is different in its constitution. This respects the notion of perspectival anthropocentrism, which is not unique to Western humans but a feature of "the human condition" (Droz 2022), allowing us to explore *multiple* – that is, "other" – anthropocentrisms. This point further supports the argument that the problem is not so much "anthropocentrism" as it is the dominance and "centrism" of a *particular* anthropos in hegemonic political economic practices.

Should we then accept "African anthropocentrism" (from a perspectival sense) instead? While the case could surely be made, I fear that this undermines the task of articulating a "uniquely" African ethic. Adapting to discursive binaries limits the terms of the discussion, and such dichotomous formulations become reactionary rather than responsive. As Ogar and Bassey (2019, 76) note, "moral philosophies are particular to their historic and cultural contexts." It would thus be uncanny to frame the contribution of Africanist environmental ethics according to an "anthropocentric–non-anthropocentric" dichotomy that responds to primarily Western concerns about "being" in the world.

Notions such as "eco-bio-communitarianism" and "eco-humanism" showcase that environmental concerns in Africa can very well be expressed in accordance with African conceptions of personhood without discursive terminology. Although such formulations do not directly label the African view of the environment as "(non-)anthropocentric", they still fall short. Environmental challenges here, too, are attributed to a generic "modern anthropos'" maltreatment of *nature* through misuse of science and technology. In these formulations, addressing environmental degradation via a return to tradition remains a matter of mending human-*nature* relations – it is about solving the problem of "human" domination and the degradation of "nature". The excessive focus on human-nature relations frames the search for justice in an African context as exclusive to the natural world. In limiting the scope of justice for the "non-human" world to natural beings, Africanist environmental ethicists replicate the misleading generalisation and dehistoricised interpretation that "we" in the human world share equal moral status, worldviews, responsibility and common interests.

The above considerations reveal limited engagement with the "anthropogenic" dimension of environmental injustices, and with notions of anthropos and "being" in an African conception, among African environmental philosophers. It is rather paradoxical: Current formulations of African environmental ethics provide crucial insight into the African anthropos' perspective, yet the African anthropos who values communal relations has been made to fit a foreign non-anthropocentric wave. The African's "unique" contribution has been formulated and valued insofar as this communal Self illuminates "human-nature" relations and "obligations". However, ontological degradation and environmental justice in the context of modern political economic practices does not merely concern recognition of "non-human" *natural* entities. That is, African

environmental theories to date, especially in their non-anthropocentric formulations, are not entirely grounded in *African anthropos'* historical cultural experiences and injustices structurally linked to current environmental challenges. Not all humans, and certainly not all African humans, are equally implicated in modern value systems that posit relations of domination to nature. And not all "modern" Africans have (nor seek) access to Western technology whereby, as Tangwa (2004, 394) suggests, they satisfy "the will to possess and dominate the world." How applicable is "obligatory anthropoholism" among present-day indigenous communities, where the subjective good and virtuous practices do not necessarily translate into "moral rights" or "direct obligations" as in Western culture? Even if African societies and leadership were to incorporate "eco-bio-centric" attitudes for eco-friendlier policies, this does not prevent those norms from becoming a source of conflict amongst Africa's diverse communities themselves. Where humans differ in their perspectives and conceptions of the good, prioritising one worldview or set of values at "the centre", even non-anthropocentric ones, inevitably carries the risk of perpetuating ontological imperialism and furthering environmental degradation, that is, the degradation of humans, natural entities and "other" ways of being.

Given the human condition, a key question for applied ethics in dealing with environmental crises in various contexts is how will we manage our *differences*? How do we deal with the aftermath of such differences vis-à-vis the natural world and within the human world? How will we accommodate diverse forms of life, multiple perspectives, values and practices? And, in cooperating, how do we make sure that communal values do not become a source of conflict (us-them)? *How do we accommodate the different "other"?* A truly inclusive and *sustainable* environmental ethic illuminates not only human-nature but also human-human relations – that extends consideration and relations to "other" beings *as such*.

In search of more inclusive environmental ethics/justice, we are compelled to reconsider conceptualisations of "human", such as in African contexts. The next chapter explores how *ubuntu* philosophy implies a worldview and morality that does not assimilate or reduce the experience and contribution of the African human to their recognition of the natural world. It is precisely with an *ontology/ethic of difference* which implies *Being-through-others*, that is, "being" human through "other" *beings as such*, that African thought provides a unique response to environmental challenges, one that is applicable both within and beyond the African landscape.

Chapter 5: In Dialogue with African Anthropos

Ubuntu encompasses various African expressions of "human being" found in the indigenous Bantu-speaking cultures of Shona, Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, Sotho and Tswana. Its most popular expression is in the South African Zulu/Xhosa aphorism *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* / *motho ke motho ka batho babang*: "a person is a person through other persons." Ubuntu emphasises our shared humanity; it says, in the words of Desmond Tutu (1999, 31):

> My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours. … It is not, "I think therefore I am." It says rather: I am human because I belong. I participate, I share." A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others … for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished.

Ubuntu suggests that selfhood "is not an abstract experience but evolves through "positive" relationship with other humans" (Eze 2023, 298). From this mutual recognition, virtuous practices of care, compassion and respect follow. Ubuntu's emphasis on shared bonds explains its association with communitarianism, namely, John Mbiti's formulation "I am because we are; and, since we are, therefore I am." This popularised interpretation of the Xhosa/Zulu aphorism has been criticised for privileging our own kind ("we") over "others", and reformulated as "I am because you are" that emphasises difference as a source of shared humanity (Eze 2017b; 2023). Ubuntu played an important role in the aftermath of South African apartheid and has been dubbed a "philosophy of dialogue and reconciliation" that promotes virtuous relations among humans.

Ubuntu philosophy has also been adopted in environmental ethics. This was the essence of Mogobe Ramose's (2005) contribution in arguing that *ubuntu/botho* ("humanness") encompasses interhuman as well as human-nature relations. The Xhosa/Zulu aphorism also underscores the "humanism" in Michael Eze's *humanitatis-eco* (2017a), although "ubuntu" as such is not mentioned explicitly. More recent adaptations of ubuntu since Ramose have been presented as "non-anthropocentric" in what, I have argued, is a dehistoricised and depoliticised understanding of "anthropogenic" environmental injustices. Some of these non-anthropocentric accounts draw directly on Mbiti's communitarian formulation of African personhood (Horsthemke 2019; Okpe & Oti 2019).

This final chapter is dedicated to "bringing back the human" that is lost in extractive binaries and "-isms", such as anthropocentrism-versus-non-anthropocentrism. It first discusses how (non-anthropocentric) communitarian formulations of ubuntu in environmental ethics not only undermine African notions of anthropos but also become problematic insofar as ubuntu offers a philosophy of dialogue. Drawing on previous insights, it revises Bantu ontology to distinguish the ontological positioning of an African anthropos with *ubuntu* ("humanness"). It finds in African notions of "human" an emancipatory *ontology* and *ethic of difference* that transcends discursive "-isms" in favour of openness and subjective dialogue with "others".

5.1. Ubuntu: I am because we are? An Ethic of Sameness

Ubuntu in Mbiti's communitarian formulation has been adapted in various non-anthropocentric contexts. For Horsthemke (2019, 250-1): ""I am because we are" could reasonably be interpreted as not being confined to the human realm, as transcending the species barrier … to counter a rigidly species-governed 'us-against-them' thinking." Likewise, Okpe & Oti (2019, 106-7) refer to "the Ubuntu philosophy of I am because we are and since we are therefore I am" to back up their claim that Africans "are" ecocentric "because they accord recognition and respect to all beings." This wholly communitarian interpretation of ubuntu ethics has faced criticism that is relevant to our discussion. According to Michael Eze (2017b; 2023), it misrepresents African conceptualisations of a human being to the effect of limiting ubuntu's potential to foster meaningful dialogue with those who are different from "us". Speaking directly to Mbiti rather than environmentalists, Eze (2023, 298) identifies two issues: First, it "presupposes that the community takes precedence over the individual. The African subject, it seems, would have no agency and is only human at the whim of the community"; second, it "recognises only our own kind of human beings or attributes humanity only to the people who are like us." It "privileges subjective preference to members of our community", that is, sameness over difference (Eze 2017b, 85). Crucially, Eze (2023, 298) notes: "Recognising our own kind is what fostered the politicisation of identities in post-colonial Africa." Ubuntu in this formulation thus "yields a dogmatic infusion of reality, that is, the idea of imposing ideologies that have no meaning to the lived experience of the people" … it becomes a "destructive ideology that ruptures the harmony even amongst societies which claim to practise ubuntu" (Eze 2023, 299).

One can see how communitarian formulations of ubuntu in an environmental context might replicate the pitfalls mentioned above. First, the imagined community ("we") comes prior to the individual. The person with ubuntu does not have agency, subjectivity or humanity outside the confines of this ecocentric community: One only "is" insofar as they belong to *this* particular community. Indeed, there is something disturbing about Okpe and Oti's claim. It reasons that Africans "are" *because* they display ecocentric dispositions. This reasoning emulates the Cartesian cogito "I am *because* I think"; it almost conditions the African's humanity, morality, personhood and contributions on communitarian ecocentric attributes. Furthermore, the "I" in "we" privileges their own worldviews, and those who share them, over "Others". Speaking to the broader topic of this thesis, such formulations take for granted that their view of what constitutes "the community" and "morality" (rights/obligations), while adapting from African cultures, is shared even among African communities. This is not to say that such views are not effective within their own contexts of meaning. However, insofar as such formulations prescribe norms in broader contexts, pertaining to global environmental challenges, they risk imposing their values upon those who deviate from this conception of "the good", privileging some "beings" over "others"; ubuntu here becomes exclusive, rather than inclusive. As such, where it concerns questions of environmental justice, ubuntu in its communitarian (and non-anthropocentric) formulation that prioritises the community over the individual fails as a philosophy of dialogue and "reconciliation" that can accommodate not only *bio*diversity but the reality of the diversity

of human perspectives, cultural practices and relations, that is, the diversity of "beings" that make up *environments*. I therefore propose to review Bantu ontology, and re-articulate the notion of anthropos and "humanity" entailed in ubuntu ethics in a different formulation.

5.2. Bantu Ontology Revisited: A De-Centred Anthropos

Often taken as a form of African humanism, ubuntu says: "to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them" (Ramose 2005). Ramose was one of the first to extend this Bantu notion of humanity to eco-philosophy. However, "humanism" is not entirely the appropriate rendition according to Ramose (2005, 105):

> The concept of *botho / hunhu / ubuntu* … is not readily translatable into humanism, especially if this latter is understood as a specific trend in the evolution of Western philosophy. *Humanness* is a better rendition of the concept than humanism. The former suggests both a condition of being and the state of becoming, of openness or ceaseless unfolding. It is thus opposed to any -ism, including humanism, for this tends to suggest a condition of finality, a closedness or a kind of absolute either incapable of or resistant to any further movement. But motion being the principle of change, it follows that resistance to it is tantamount to resistance to change. This basic difference between humanness and humanism speaks to two different perceptions of and perspectives on reality or being. Humanness regards being or the universe as a complex wholeness involving the multi-layered and incessant interaction of all entities. … Herein lies the ecosophical dimension of the indigenous African concept of *botho/hunhu/ubuntu.*

Notice how, for Ramose, ubuntu as *humanness* (which I occasionally refer to as African humanism for emphasis) differs from Western *humanism*, namely, a difference in *human perspectives* on reality or "being". That is, there is a different ontology at play in African "humanism" that deserves further consideration.

From the perspective of the African person with *ubuntu*, Being is a "complex wholeness", a "condition of permanent, multi-directional movement … incessant interaction of all entities … a condition of being and the state of becoming, of openness or ceaseless unfolding." Recall from Bantu ontology that reality is a manifestation of a life force (*-ntu*) that runs through all elements tied in the great chain of being. The anthropos experiences their reality and personhood in constant interaction and symbiotic dialogue with the various elements of their constitutive environment. This anthropos "looks at the universe from the de-centred self's point of view [as] the most realistic orientation to life as a wholeness" (Ramose 2005, 109).

Note the ontological positioning of this *de-centred* anthropos: the human being is not privileged in this complex wholeness of incessant Being and becoming. Eze (2017a, 627) describes the "evolving relationship between beings and forces" in Bantu thought as one of "ontological holism … no one being is superior in importance or prior in necessity." Where *all* beings make up the cosmic environment, no one entity is a priori "more constitutive" of "Being"

(and my humanity) than the other; the one is "incomplete without the other" (Ramose 2005, 106). Ills are interpreted as a "disturbance in the cosmic world … of harmony and balance" in the relations between different entities (Ramose 2005, 69). Eze (2017a, 627-9) further sketches the terms of this holistic and dialogical relationship in Bantu cultures:

> The human person is one with nature by way of *dialectical subjectivism*. ... One's subjectivity is fully expressed only in dialogue with other beings within the eco-community … Among the Igbo for example, *ala* (earth/land) is a goddess, one's overall life experience is tied to avoiding those things that might constitute an anathema to the earth goddess. Indeed, the earth is not only sacred, it acts as a force of deterrence to immoral proclivities … one's humanity is dependent on harmonious balance and positive relationships with human beings, animals, biological life, non-biological life, spirits, forces, and other inanimate elements that make up our environment.

This brings forth the interrelated, inclusive, dialogical and participatory character of *ubuntu*, in which "neither the human person nor the environment is prior or superior in moral status and recognition" (Eze 2017a, 629). On this reasoning, the restoration of *ubuntu/botho* vis-à-vis environmental degradation is a "quest for harmony", that is, for balance of "the totality of the relations that can be maintained between human beings amongst themselves as well as between human beings and physical nature … it is the strive for balance and harmony of and in the wholeness" (Ramose 2005, 106). There are two key observations to be made about the perspective of *anthropos* entailed in this interpretation of Bantu ontology, which I elaborate next.

5.3. Ubuntu: An Ethic of Difference (Being-through-others)

The first observation is that, from the African anthropos' *de-centred* perspective, to "be" (human) entails not merely "being" through "other" *persons*. In Bantu ontology, as part of the cosmic network, human beings experience an unfolding reality – that is, their "becoming" – through the *totality* of entities that are the *diverse* manifestations of a vital force, and the *mutually constitutive* elements of the environment/community. In this holistic web of life, one's "humanity towards others" is expressed not merely in their relations to 'other' *human* beings but finds its expression in "beings" *as such*. The constitutive community is made not just of "animals, birds, nature" but *also* includes the intelligent, the non intelligent, the rational, the non-rational, the living, the dead, the existent, the non-existent; beings, non-beings and the yet-to-be … From the perspective of the African subject, the question of "dualism" does not even arise for it goes against the "multi-layered and incessant interaction of all entities". In this African's worldview, "*difference*" is essentially constitutive of the human anthropoid. The African anthropos *evolves* in a space of *difference* that includes people, animals, plants, spirits, ideas, the known, the unknown … that includes "others" as such. It does not reduce or abstract, for everything that is conceivable has vital force and contains subjective address that speaks to its Being and becoming. The various entities in all of their different manifestations are equally recognised as constitutive of my personhood, that is, my incessant becoming. That is, the African

anthropos with ubuntu projects a "different perspective of reality" that *does not privilege some beings* (sameness/our own kind) *over others* (difference). Rather, ubuntu suggests an *ontology/ethic of difference* that embodies the notion of Being *through* "others" which says: a person is a person through "others" *as such*.

Note then a second aspect of this *de-centred* anthropos, whose ontological positioning does not subscribe to "-isms". According to Ramose (2005, 36), wholeness is not dogmatic: "Ubuntu is always a -ness and not an -ism." This point speaks to ubuntu's dialogical (and conciliatory) character. To "be" human in this ontological scheme entails a fluidity, open-*ness* of being in an endless state of becoming *through* other members of the community; to *experience* one's reality, morality, humanity and environment in interpersonal subjective dialogue with "other" beings. The anthropos is a mobile subject who expresses "humanity" and embraces *becoming* in *diverse* biological, cultural and social environments. Ramose's observation directly informs *humanitatis-eco* which, Eze (2017a, 629) contends, breaks with other African environmental theories in that it "suggests a radical shift from "-isms," that is, *ethics as an ideology* to *ethics as a way of life*." It is in this sense that Eze argues against construing a morality of "rights" and "obligations" which does not necessarily speak to Bantu cultural expressions. Noting the dangers of ethical generalisations, he remarks (Eze 2017a, 630):

> … the African view changes the basic question we need to ask about environmental ethics. The focus here is not on duty, that is, *what must I do as an ethical agent*? The emphasis herein is on the human individual, that is, *Who am I*? The question of what duty is right or wrong is substantively different from how do I become a good or responsible virtuous agent? … the challenges of the environment, while universal, are also localised. Our societies are very often differentiated in terms of history, narrative, and culture. Thus, it is impractical to devise one rule and generalise it … Adopting a particular approach to issues in one context and imposing it on another is nothing less than environmental imperialism, an epistemic dictatorship that ignores personal histories and context.

These philosophical considerations with respect to African "humanity" in Bantu culture present the African anthropos, and ubuntu ethics, in an alternative light that challenges current environmental discourse on morality and justice.

First, the notion of "human being" expressed in Bantu ontology strongly challenges non-anthropocentrism. The African *anthropos* (with ubuntu) which is overlooked in the radical shift to non-anthropocentrism suggests something substantially different than an anthropos who dominates, an ecocentric Self, or even a strictly communitarian Self. The *de-centred* anthropos has a "different perspective of reality or being [from Western humanism]" as "wholeness" that strives a harmonious balance in the *totality* of the relations of beings (Ramose 2005, 105-6). That is, the de-centred African anthropos recognises its humanity/"Being" in a space of *difference* that *includes* "others" as such. It transcends the human/non-human divide.

Second, the interpretation of ubuntu as human-*ness* further challenges environmental discourse which formulates environmental ills, and solutions thereto, in binary terms

(human/nature relations; anthropocentrism versus non-anthropocentrism; capitalism or ecocentrism, etc.). The unfolding of reality ("the environment") in Bantu thought is not restricted to relations with *nature*, or a particular community, or humans alone, or any other "-ism", as has been the focus for contemporary environmental ethicists. Rather, Being as wholeness suggests that both the causes of and solutions to ills concern the *totality* of our relations to "others": humans, nature, cultures, diversity.

Third, for *this* anthropos, morality (ubuntu as Being-through-others) looks different from Western culture. In the Bantu conceptualisation of "being human", one *experiences* morality with "others" as participatory, dialogical and subjective. Hence, where beings exist *through* their differences, morality in Bantu thought does not rely on a categorical imperative, but is expressed in subjective dialogue, in unique cultural traditions that need not necessarily translate into rights or "direct" obligations. The anthropos with ubuntu extends consideration to beings as such without need to *recognise* the "moral rights" of the environment for it to have intrinsic value. Everything (-*ntu*), from the smallest grain of sand, to a seemingly lifeless material object, to the everyday, becomes a way for one to recognise themselves in, and become *through*, the different other. Everything that makes up "my" environment constitutes "my" reality, informs my subjective good, and my everyday practices. Every encounter, breath, interaction, thought, dance bears the gift of difference. The world reveals itself, and me in it, in dialectical terms; the "other" is always implied in my "being" as a potential relative in my *ceaseless becoming* of "who I am". Ubuntu as an ontology and ethic of difference – "being through others" – speaks to the processual character of Being and of my "being" in it. This "I" is not categorised, not confined to -isms. And the "good" is always subject to negotiation.

Environmental challenges, while global, require localised responses which speak to the historical cultural experiences of the people. The ontological positioning of anthropos in ubuntu (human-ness) challenges the violent categorisation of beings in, and imperialistic tendencies of, ethical generalisations and ideological discourse. The question "Who am I?" speaks to these subjective differences and provides an epistemic baseline that consolidates the African anthropos' contribution to environmental ethics. Rather than a limiting "-ism", ubuntu as an ethic of difference, which sees different "others" as constitutive of personhood, encompasses a philosophy of dialogue not only vis-à-vis nature but, further, with those "other" beings within the community of difference. Guided by the open-endedness of the question "*Who am I*?", ubuntu in environmental ethics encourages us to participate in subjective *dialogue* with the "other" to consider how we, in our unique differences, interact in the great chain of being and Becoming. What makes up my humanity is how I, in my unique agency, engage "the environment" in its diverse manifestations: How do I as an environmental activist interact with my climate sceptic neighbour, or with a friend whose livelihood depends on fossil fuels? How do we each experience the air "we" breathe? The quest for environmental justice as a "quest for harmony" entails a harmonisation of our differences rather than homogenisation of values. Ubuntu does not privilege rational beings, or the ecocentric community, or the values of economic-man, but

extends consideration to beings as such. Ubuntu as a philosophy of *dialogue*, thus, becomes an emancipatory ethic that ruptures discursive binaries and ideological "-isms" (Being-over-others) to encourage being (human) *through* the other.

Conclusion

History shows that not all humans are equally responsible for, nor proportionately impacted by, "anthropogenic" environmental crises. It is necessary to critically engage the "anthropos" which is at "the centre" of modern value-systems and distinguish between humans – that is, to differentiate "multiple anthropos" – in the context of environmentally hostile political economic practices.

The notion of self-othering offers a framework for viewing the domination and moral exclusion of "non-human" "others" from "anthropocentrism" that underscores contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Its application reveals a hegemonic anthropos at "the centre" of modern political economic value-systems that aligns with Western historical cultural values. In this construct of human, the "non-human" world that was subjugated to discursive norms of rationality and exploited for economic gain was not limited to natural beings. Rather, the violent categorisations of anthropos (self-othering) structured conditions for all those "beings" that deviated from Western standards of "humanity", including *human* beings. Ontological degradation under anthropocentric domination consisted in the discursive abstraction of Others from their contexts of *difference*. The imposition and homogenisation of values constitutes ontological imperialism, that is, the privileging of one mode of Being (*sameness*) over "others" (*difference*). The hegemony of neoliberal capitalism, which reflects in current sustainability discourse and eco-capitalist solutions, functions as an *ontology of sameness* insofar as it privileges a disembodied Self/anthropos and associated values over other ways of being (Being-over-others). Environmental degradation and injustice under hegemonic systems and practices thus consists in the extinction of diversity as such: humans, biological, cultural, metaphysical, and "other" manifestations of being.

The challenge to "anthropocentrism" for environmental ethicists becomes the recognition of contexts of difference, that is, developing an *ethic of difference*. By failing to critically engage and distinguish multiple notions of anthropos, non-anthropocentrism risks similar imperialist tendencies. Discursive generalisations extract "humans" from their differences to the privilege of an anthropos who chooses to dominate, and shift the problem to a new value-system ("centre") with its own regimes of exclusions. The ecocentrist's failure to recognise that the problems of domination under neoliberal capitalism concern humans and non-humans alike limits the scope of justice to *some* "Beings" *over* "others". The tendency towards anthropocentric/non-anthropocentric binaries permeates even in non-Western contexts, such as African environmental ethics, where degradation has been similarly framed as a problem of "human" domination of and corrupted relations to "nature". In seeking to develop a uniquely African ethic in line with traditional cultural values and the people's historical experiences, scholars typically evoke African conceptions of personhood as non-anthropocentric, and even ecocentric, to argue for recognition of the inherent moral worth of and obligations to nature. This non-anthropocentric discourse similarly abstracts the African "anthropos" from their unique historical cultural contexts of "being human" to fit foreign epistemic models, where the

implementation of "rights" and "obligations" do not speak to localised traditions. That is, they do not respect contexts of difference.

A decisive factor in the unfolding of "anthropogenic" environmental injustices will be humans' ability to engage "other" value systems, perspectives and beings (including nature) different from their own, that is, relating to their environment as such. The ontological position of African anthropos in Bantu thought shows ubuntu "humanness" as an *ontology and ethic of difference* ("being-through-others"). The *de-centred* African anthropos recognises its humanity in a dialogical space of *difference* that includes "other beings" *as such*. From the viewpoint of the African human, "anthropogenically-motivated" environmental protection looks different. The ontological positioning of this anthropos entails a continuous intersubjective *dialogue* with the diverse elements of their environment that, in their unique *differences*, are constitutive of Being and becoming. It is this cosmological worldview which informs Bantu local traditions and attitudes towards the constitutive elements of their environment. This re-conceptualization of "being human" (and of ubuntu as humanness) challenges hegemonic environmental discourse and proposed solutions, both eco-capitalist and ecocentrist on an international scale, as well non-anthropocentric communitarian formulations within African contexts. In transcending categorical "-isms", ubuntu offers an emancipatory dialogical ethic for "beings as such" that moves beyond Westernised understandings of humanity and morality, and associated institutions and practices.

The findings of this thesis speak to the question *Who am I?*, and the dialogical and evolving relationship of Being. In dialogue with African anthropos, I am enriched by a worldview different from mine. When the anthropos with *ubuntu* is historicized, *ubuntu* ethics encourage historicised and contextualised responses to environmental injustices, a human-*ness* that becomes relevant within and beyond imagined "boundaries". This is the contribution of African *ánthrōpos* to environmental ethics, which only comes to light once I acknowledge my "humanity" and "my" environment as incessant becoming through the "other". By acknowledging my "being *through*" the African anthropos, "I" become. Ubuntu as a philosophy of dialogue offers a starting point for preserving cultural and biological diversity, and alleviating environmental injustices.

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