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Exploring Environmental Ethics: From Exclusion of More-than-Human Beings Towards a New Materialist Paradigm

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Abstract

Environmental ethics deals with discussing the ethical framework of environmental values, their organization and regulation, and their ethical premises. One of the main cul-de-sacs that environmental ethics has is its anthropocentrism that can be observed through its diverse ethical approaches—even ecocentric ones, developed as non-anthropocentric egalitarian alternatives. This article aims to question the exclusiveness of Anthropos, the practices, values, and discourses that determine the scope and course of environmental ethics, and the exclusion of nonhuman animals or more-than human beings from its focus. It first examines the main approaches in environmental ethics (land ethic, deep ecology, social ecology, and postmodern environmental ethics)—biocentric, ecocentric, anthropocentric, socialist, postmodern—and reveals that they are but limited to the human perspective, deeply rooted in human exceptionalism. All of these approaches provide us with a critical frame that still needs to be deconstructed so that they will not project an anthropocentric orientation. This article posits that the compass of environmental ethics, recently aligning itself to embrace the more-than-human world in its ecocentric attitude, still needs to be revisited for its discourses of exclusion. At this point, new materialism functions as a prolific theoretical site as it diminishes the classical boundaries between human and animal or subject and object that anthropocentric environmental ethics relies on. With such concepts as "agential realism" (Barad), "transcorporeal ethics" (Alaimo), "vibrant matter" (Bennett), or "storied matter" (Oppermann and Iovino) the new materialist view of the

human and the nonhuman evolves to end set dualities in the discourses of environmental ethics. This article concludes that the new materialist theory destabilizes any anthropocentric position in environmental ethics and includes more-than-human beings in its ethical focus, discarding any dualities that serve anthropocentrism or human exceptionalism.

Keywords: environmental ethics, new materialisms, exclusion of more-than-humans, anthropocentrism, nonanthropocentrism

1. Introduction

Environmental ethics deals with discussing the ethical framework of environmental values, their organization and regulation, and their ethical premises. Heavily influenced by the environmental activism of the 1970s, environmental ethics promotes diverse approaches that examine the roots of our contemporary ecological problems, such as loss of biodiversity, increasing effects of global warming, or climate change. It deciphers the role(s)/ways that human beings are engaged in these ecological crises by identifying certain value systems so far developed in relation to the environment. Among these sets of values environmental ethics points to an essential divergence in their ethical orientation: anthropocentric and ecocentric. This division is basically set on privileging either environmental values that place human interests over all other beings or ecological principles that equally consider human and more-than-human beings as part of their physical environment. The dominant mode that currently leads human beings to a crossroad of ecological disasters is the anthropocentric one, ascribing "value to things of nature as they benefit man" or "regard[ing] them as instruments to man's survival" (Murdy, 1993, p. 303). This human-centered attitude involves frequently contested yet adopted ideas and practices that exclude the well-being of nonhuman beings from its ethical consideration. As environmental historian Lynn White (1967) rightly observes in his notable essay titled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," the anthropocentric belief in humans' right to exploit nature is employed through modern technology "cast in a matrix of Christian theology" (p. 1206). Examining particularly how Western philosophical and religious traditions reinforce the hierarchical order among human and nonhuman beings, White reveals the historical, cultural, and religious complexities that need to be critically attended to in relation to the concept of anthropocentrism. Botanist William H. Murdy (1993), on the other hand, alleges that anthropocentrism, though it comes as "a pejorative in many of the articles which deal with the so-called 'ecological crisis'" (p. 303), is "coexistent with a philosophy that affirms the essential interrelatedness of things and that values all items in nature since no event is without some effect on wholes of which we are parts" (p. 309). Murdy's point does not necessarily prove how anthropocentrism can accompany such

an understanding of interconnectedness; yet, it directs human beings to reconsider their relationship with nonhuman others in the sense that they have the potential to affect them. However, this view simply disregards the superior position that human beings assume in this web of interconnections. Environmental ethics, thus, searches for the ways that revise humans' perception of not only their own species but also all more-than-humans in a wider ecological lens, resulting in ecocentric and biocentric approaches. Ecocentrism grants each life and nonlife form a significance that solely depends on its existence as part of the ecosystem, while biocentrism limits this ethical concern to living beings or biotic communities on earth. Though their ethical consideration might differ in settling the value of beings (animate or inanimate), both stances acknowledge an anti-anthropocentric sentiment and become two distinct holistic attitudes in environmental ethics.

2. Environmental Ethics: Parallels and Schisms

American writer, environmentalist, and philosopher Aldo Leopold stands out as one of the leading dissenters of anthropocentrism with his land ethic, introduced in his well-known work *A Sand County Almanac* (1949). Leopold's land ethic intends to create a moral code about how to treat the land that includes "soils, waters, plants, and animals" (p. 203) with special ecological concerns about sustainability and conservation. In land ethic, the boundaries of the land are not limited to its physical or material qualities but determined through the biotic communities that it sustains. In other words, land ethic treats every living being as part of a whole system and "changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it" (p. 204). Leopold proposes the idea that it is only through this shift of human role in ecology that humans can have an equal biotic community where there is a possibility for conservation and sustainability for all beings on earth. He does not necessarily address ecology as the pinnacle of his ethics, yet what he remarkably focuses on indicates a web of interconnections that might be better managed through the dictum: "We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in" (Leopold, 1949, p. 214). Leopold's land ethic, as is evident here, adheres to a special notion of love, respect, and care that should be developed for all life forms and attributed to human beings. To be ethical in his terms requires an environmentally conscious attendance to humans' relationship with their biotic community members. In this respect, his ethics underlines that human beings need to go through a change of perception about their place in the hierarchical anthropocentric ladder of beings, and their ways to dominate the natural world should be replaced with an approach that is built on care and respect for the environment. It is possible to observe that the critical interest of land ethic is manifested not only in the land itself but also in all its beings via evolutionary and ecological

explanations. Leopold points to the rooted anthropocentric view that dominated the relationship between human beings and all other life forms, and leads the way for a holistic and anti-anthropocentric ethics.

Deep ecology, developed by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in the 1970s, provides another noteworthy framework to discuss the new direction that environmental ethics takes, as it is similarly dedicated to creating a "more ecocentric environmental ethics" (Naess, 1995, p. 66). As "a philosophical and scientific social/political movement during the so-called Ecological Revolution of the 1960s" (Sessions, 1995, p. ix), deep ecology aims to "bring about a major paradigm shift—a shift in perception, values, and lifestyles—as a basis for redirecting the ecologically destructive path of modern industrial growth societies" (Sessions, 1995, p. ix). Deep ecologist critical agenda combines the ideas of such significant figures from Western philosophy or social criticism as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Robinson Jeffers, Theodore Roszak, or historian Lewis Mumford with the inspirational practices of Eastern religions (Taoism and Zen Buddhism) (Sessions, 1995, p. ix). Both lines of ecocentric thinking contribute to Naess's development of a new set of environmental values that should replace "the dominant anthropocentric orientation of Western civilization" (Sessions, 1995, p. x) in order to overcome the contemporary ecological crisis. Naess counter-develops his deep ecology approach versus what he labels as shallow ecology, which basically refers to environmentalist attitudes and practices human beings embrace due to anthropocentric reasons. For instance, while shallow ecology puts emphasis on "resources for humans, especially the present generation in affluent societies" (Naess, 1995, p. 72), deep ecology concerns itself with "resources and habitats for all life-forms for their own sake" (Naess, 1995, p. 72). At the target of deep ecology's criticism stand all anthropocentric conceptions about the environment and all beings within it.

With an aim to clarify deep ecological philosophy, Naess and Sessions collaboratively establish eight tenets of deep ecology that offer "a new ethic, embracing plants and animals as well as people" (Naess, 1995, p. 66). The tenets start with the confirmation of the idea that every being has its own intrinsic or internal value, "independent of any awareness, interest, or appreciation of it by any conscious being" (Naess, 1995, p. 69). This is a key concept in deep ecology that is frequently highlighted and asserted by deep ecologists, and it dissolves the hierarchical relation between human and nonhuman beings. The second principle introduces the idea that "[r]ichness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves" (Naess, 1995, p. 68). With each tenet Naess and Sessions secure a stronger ecocentric standpoint in their ethics and put human beings at the centre of their criticism. The third and fourth tenets are solid examples of such criticism as they strictly claim that "[h]umans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs" and "[t]he flourishing of non-human life *requires*

a smaller human population" (Naess, 1995, p. 68; emphasis in original). It is evident that deep ecology aims to uncover the damaging consequences of human beings' activities on earth and the reduction of biodiversity via those practices and overpopulation. Deep ecologists rightly point to the radical transformation on earth due to anthropogenic effects, which will eventually lead environmental scientists and geologists to identify this impact as the essence of the age of the Anthropocene (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000). Instead of avoiding understanding the fundamental reasons of the modern global environmental crisis, deep ecologists explore them, even though the exploration seems misanthropic at times since all these causes stem from an anthropocentric view of nature. Deep ecological thinkers promote a deeper understanding of the relationship between human and more-than-human life forms, rejecting "the man-in-environment concept," which prioritizes human beings in this relationship, and offering "the biospherical egalitarianism-in principle," which indicates "a deep-seated respect" for each life form (Naess, 1995, p. 151). In other words, deep ecology entirely dismisses any view that entails "homocentrism, anthropocentrism, and human chauvinism" (Naess, 1995, p. 76). Deep ecology's contribution to a non-anthropocentric ethics is essential to note since it requires reconsidering the ethical consequences of certain ecological principles, voiced ardently by Sessions and Naess in the deep ecologist platform.

Another notable aspect that deep ecology imports into environmental ethics is its attempt to establish certain norms as a derivational system and enable people to form their individual ecosophies as "*general* philosophies, in the sense of total views, inspired in part by the science of ecology" (Naess, 1995, p. 79; emphasis in original). An ecosophy does not rely on dogmatic rules or notions but is intended to be "openly normative, as it contains both norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements and hypotheses concerning the state of affairs in our universe" (Dregson & Inoue, 1995, p. 8). It functions like an ethic does through certain norms which are already derived from "other norms and hypotheses" (Naess, 1989, p. 43) based on a relational and derivational system. This indicates rejecting dominant environmental values that strictly favor human beings' existence, values, and practices over all nonhuman others. In Naess's deep ecological philosophy no life form remains excluded from the realm of ethical consideration as he supports "the relational field image," which corresponds to "the totality of our interrelated experience" (Naess, 1989, p. 55). He further works on an individual philosophy called Ecosophy T[1], which "has only one ultimate norm: 'Self-realization'" (Naess, 1995, p. 80). This idea of the self refers to a greater, ecological self that perceives its interconnectedness with the entire environment around it (Naess, 1989, p. 168). Leading with his exemplary ecosophy, Naess opens new possibilities in environmental ethics, noting

[1] Naess is deeply influenced by Norwegian *friluftsliv* (a movement to experience living in the outdoors), Gandhian non-violence, Mahayana, Buddhism, and Spinozan pantheism. *T* refers to his mountain hut where he worked on his ecosophy (Drengson, 1997).

the significance of "ecospheric belonging" (Naess, 1989, p. 168). Overthrowing the hierarchical superiority of *Homo sapiens*, this sense of belonging certainly promotes "cooperation and togetherness" in the world (Naess, 1989, p. 168). What deep ecology offers here is a philosophical, social, political, and ethical response to the modern ecological crisis, which American deep ecologist Fritjof Capra (1995) identifies as "a crisis of perception" (p. 19). Capra believes that this new paradigm shows a way out with its ecological platform that aims to change humans' perception of nature from a mechanistic, dualistic, and deterministic one towards an interconnected, nonanthropocentric, and pluralistic view[2].

Social ecology, highly critical of deep ecological ideas, presents another notable anti-anthropocentric attitude in environmental ethics, which addresses ecological issues as part of the agenda of social problems and refers to "wedding the social to the ecological without denying the integrity of each" (Bookchin, 1996, p. 92). Responding to how individualistic and spiritual deep ecology's philosophical emphasis becomes, social ecology rather contends that it is humans' social practices that radically transform the environment and lead to ecological catastrophes. The leading theorist of social ecology Murray Bookchin (1986) notes this idea in the following manner: "The imbalances man has produced in the natural are caused by the imbalances he has produced in the social world" (p. 84). Building on such fundamental correlation, social ecologists explore how hierarchical organization among not only all beings but also that of human beings leads to certain forms of environmental and social injustice. The ethics that can be framed through social ecology, then, critically examines major social dynamics that cause ecological problems, revealing that the market economy of capitalism is the most influential factor among these social forces. John Clark, another prominent social ecologist, identifies "the horror of economistic-technocratic globalism" (2000, p. 29) as the antagonist in modern environmental history as it simply holds its control over the ecological, social, and economic relations through the means of capitalism. Particularly, social ecologists point out that ecology is above all others threatened by human practices that prioritize economy, profit, or capital over any other ethical value. As a result, as Bookchin strongly suggests, "[t]he greatest danger we face—apart from nuclear immolation—is the homogenization of the world by a market society and its objectification of all human relationships and experiences into commodities"

[2] One of the main inspirational sources for not only deep ecology but also for other nonanthropocentric and ecocentric environmental ethics is indigenous people's lifestyle and practices that are in harmony with their natural surroundings. Their ecological consciousness is considered to be a telling example of where our environmental concerns should lie. However, indigenous peoples around the world have been among the victims of the exploitative anthropocentric practices as their "world of balance and renewal" keeps "rapidly eroding under modern conditions and circumstances" (Segundad, 2004, p. 165). As Özkan clearly states, "The secular anthropocentric human-nature relationship disrupts [the indigenous people's] sacred attachment to the land and environment," considered merely as "a capital, property, and subordinate just like the [indigenous] people" (Özkan, 2021, p. 64).

(1996, p. 85). Social ecology in this manner voices environmental concerns through a Marxist criticism of social values that reflects on the entanglement of the social, the ecological, the political, and the ideological.

The profound emphasis social ecology puts on human society as the main actor of ecological crisis is made evident in its ethical frame, and it is crucial to configure how it treats more-than-human beings in this social and ecological entanglement. Albeit environmental values related to the nonhuman are not forged through a personal connection with or individual appreciation of them in social ecological thought—as is promoted by deep ecology—they are considered to be the primary part of the ecological whole. Human beings in social ecology's philosophical realm serve as complements to them. This is called "ethics of complementarity," an ethics in which "human beings would complement nonhuman beings with their own capacities to produce a richer, creative, and developmental whole—not as a 'dominant' species but as supportive one" (Bookchin, 1964, para. 5). Bookchin's ethics of complementarity recontextualizes human and nonhuman relationships in a non-hierarchical order, pointing to their mutual evolutionary processes, which might eventually lead to freedom, complexity, and diversity for both. It not only rejects the exclusion of more-than-human beings from the ethical realm but also promotes the idea that human beings are there to complement all other beings in this complex web of interconnections. Therefore, it presents a non- and anti-anthropocentric attitude in environmental ethics and displays how social structures or material conditions equally affect values attached to both human and more-than-human beings.

To add onto the flourishing new nonanthropocentric ethical insights in environmental philosophy, postmodern environmental ethics sets out to dismantle the long-established boundaries between human and nonhuman beings in traditional epistemologies and offers "a radical epistemic shift in perspective from a mechanistic to an ecocentric paradigm" (Oppermann, 2012, p. 38). Following the same path of ecocentrism as land ethics, deep ecology, and social ecology, postmodern environmental thinkers such as Jim Cheney, David Ray Griffin, or Charlene Spretnak highlight the need to realize how anthropocentric practices and discourses have created destructive effects for the environment. As a strategy, they endorse postmodern deconstruction of dominant environmental values that are discursively produced within a Cartesian, scientific, mechanistic, and anthropocentric worldview and put to use through capitalist practices. As an example, Jim Cheney makes a compelling point about how human beings initially need to deconstruct their existing values about the environment and replace those after a reconstruction that is based on a contextual process. In a basic sense, Cheney sets "an agenda for conceiving environmental ethics in contextual and postmodern terms" (1993, p. 88), drawing attention to the transformative power of narrative. He roots his ethics in the idea that narrative has the key potential to govern human beings' relations to their environment and

that recontextualizing narrative elements in a nonathropocentric manner is what postmodern environmental ethics should aim for (Cheney, 1993, p. 88). Leopold's conception of biotic community and Holmes Rolston III's notion of storied residence are Cheney's main sources of inspiration for his theory on bioregional narrative, for both views indicate a human-land connection as well as a contextualization or narration of it. Cheney (1993) further explains his suggestion of endorsing postmodern bioregional narratives as alternative ecocentric paradigms: "Bioregions provide a way of grounding narrative without essentializing the idea of the self, a way of mitigating the need for 'constant recontextualization' to undercut the oppressive and distorting overlays of cultural institutions" (p. 89). In other words, Cheney highlights the need to build a contextual relationship to the land and its biotic community members through stories or narratives that are produced and reproduced about them. Although bioregional narratives are "normative," "they are [at the same time] the subject of social negation" (1993, p. 93) for Cheney, and they should be always revisited and reconstructed without totalization. In Cheney's postmodern ethics, the more-than-human world is not excluded from the ethical realm as this world connotes the whole that human beings attach themselves to via stories. Notably, postmodern environmental ethics focuses on the question of justice for all beings in bioregions, engaging in a deconstruction and reconstruction of discursive practices that establish values for both human and nonhuman beings.

American environmental ethics philosopher J. Baird Callicott redirects the postmodern route that investigates the essential role of human beings in recent ecological crisis towards constructing a viable ethics that embraces both biological similarities and cultural differences in relation to *Homo sapiens*. Callicott's multicultural environmental ethics posits that previous forms of ethics—he labels them simply ecological and hegemonic—fall short merely because they fail to recognize the multicultural aspects of the ecological problems, and offers "an orchestral approach" (2001, p. 83) among various environmentally conscious ethics and practices. In a basic sense, Callicott (2001) notes that though based on principles of ecology, an ethics cannot function globally without acknowledging "the paradoxical duality of humanity" (p. 85), which indicates that "we are surely many peoples, but just as certainly we are one species; correspondingly, we are each now also bicultural—members of at least two cultures simultaneously, a traditional, regional culture and the new international, global culture" (p. 85). He contends that any viable frame for global environmental ethics should coordinate these different cultural realms in such a way that they are harmoniously synchronized like an orchestra, and he grants the role of the conductor to "a postmodern reconstruction of scientific epistemological privilege" (Callicott, 2001, p. 91). This ethical view sustains "the unity-in-multiplicity" (Callicott, 2001, p. 84) as its principle, anticipating that "the one globally intelligible and acceptable ecological ethic and the many culture-specific ecological ethics may mutually reflect, validate, and correct one another—so they

may exist in a reciprocal, fair, equal, and mutually sustaining partnership" (Callicott, 2001, p. 95). Consistent with such ethical pursuit, multicultural environmental ethics embraces a postmodern revisiting of scientific discourse and Leopold's land ethic, both of which contradict the traditional hegemonic hierarchies among human and nonhuman beings. In this manner, this form of ethics attempts to shape an environmental vision with its "temperately pluralistic" (Callicott, 2001, p. 78) stance that refrains from setting absolute boundaries between the human and more-than-human world.

3. New Materialist Insights into Environmental Ethics

Postmodern attendance to environmental ethics has thus an enormous impact on the way human beings think about such dualisms as nature and culture, human and nonhuman, or mind and matter that have so far dominated the ethical realm. More notably, the linguistic turn of poststructuralist thought started to bring attention to the discursive aspect of ecological problems, which endorsed a questioning view of the existing epistemologies about human and nonhuman nature. Yet, this gradual transition from anthropocentric to nonanthropocentric ethics has reached its pivotal point with the New Materialist theory as it brings back the critical focus on the material side of the environment and argues for the inseparability of "matter and meaning" (Oppermann, 2012, p. 43). Indicating the material turn in science and ethics, new materialisms encompass a groundbreaking set of values to accompany ecological thought, rooted neither in Cartesian dualisms of body and mind nor limited to postmodern revisions of such binaries. Instead, the new materialist philosophical route leads to embracing the idea that it is impossible to treat matter and discourse separately as they constantly generate one another. This perspective emphasizes that "the linguistic, social, political and biological are inseparable" (Hekman, 2010, p. 25). The previous postmodern emphasis on the discursive aspect of nature is thus challenged within the new materialist framework, attributing a capacity both to the human and more-than-human world in the construction of environmental discourses.

Karen Barad's theory of agential realism best explains the locus of new materialisms as their theory identifies "the nature of nature" (2007, p. 132) as "the entangled material practices of knowing and becoming" (2007, p. 133). Building their theory upon Niels Bohr's philosophy-physics, Barad concurs that "we are part of the world that we observe" (2007, p. 133) and rejects the traditional positions that the dominant Western epistemology is built on: the tripartite division of "knowledge, the knower, and the known" (2007, p. 132). In the same manner, Barad overthrows the human-centered superiority or anthropocentric privilege that the traditional scientific discourses promote and draws attention to corporeality or materiality as an ontological and epistemological precursor

of both human and more-than-human beings. In Barad's perception of corporeality, "all bodies, not merely human bodies, come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity—its performativity" (2007, p. 139). Instead of interaction, which potentially hints at the separateness of two things, Barad (2007) intentionally coins the term as "intra-action," which "presumes the prior existence of independent entities" (p. 139). Intra-activity denotes indeterminacy about the positions of the agencies involved within. Barad defines agency that matters in her theory of performativity as such:

> Agency is not aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity. Nor does it merely entail resignification or other specific kinds of moves within a social geometry of antihumanism. Agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has. Agency cannot be designated as an attribute of "subjects" or "objects" (since they do not preexist as such). Agency is not an attribute whatsoever—it is "doing"/"being" in its intra-activity. Agency is the enactment of iterative changes to particular practices through the dynamics of intra-activity. (2008, p. 144)

Barad's quantum-physics-based model of agency makes it possible to reconsider how the so far ascribed role of the subject to human beings has excluded the nonhuman from this position and limited their presence to passive objects. However, Barad's agential realism presents a compelling account of environmental ethics, notably discarding the representationalism inherent in traditional scientific practices and discourses based on the notion of an external knowing subject (2007, p. 48). This theory replaces the "basic premises of representationalism" (2007, p. 49) in science with the idea of performativity, which refers to "thinking, observing, and theorizing as practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being" (2007, p. 134). In a performative understanding of the world, there are agencies that belong to all life and nonlife forms, actively involved in the "world's becoming, in its on-going intra-activity" (Barad, 2007, p. 136). This agential view in performative theory, contesting the "anthropocentrisms of humanism and antihumanism," reflects a posthumanist attitude, denying the calibrated role of the human at the center (Barad, 2007, p. 136). In other words, Barad situates humans as performative agencies, simultaneously produced by and producing all other agencies through intra-action.

In light of Barad's new materialist ontology, Stacy Alaimo (2008) discusses ethical configurations of posthumanist agency, concentrating on "the material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world, and at the same time acknowledging that material agency necessitates more capacious epistemologies" (p. 238). Alaimo incorporates posthumanist agency in her discussion of "the ethical space of nature" (2008, p. 237), which is an imminent issue to attend to in environmental ethics. She treats transcorporeality as an essential term that helps us "reconceptualize bodies and natures in ways that

recognize their actions" (2008, pp. 244–45). Without reserving an active, humanist, rational, external position of the knower for human beings, Alaimo's transcorporeal ethics endorses agencies at work or in intra-activity, to use Barad's term, as the center of the ethical realm. Alaimo further explains how this reconceptualization works for her understanding of environmental ethics:

> I would suggest, however, that dwelling within trans-corporeal space, where "body" and "nature" are comprised of the same material, which has been constituted, simultaneously, by the forces of evolution, natural and human history, political inequities, cultural contestations, biological and chemical processes, and other factors too numerous to list, renders rigid distinctions between "mind" and "matter" impossibly simplistic. Thus, by recasting the terms of the debate, something as unlikely a candidate for glory as dirt may be understood as an agent, rather than as (solely) the ground for the action of something else. (2008, p. 257)

Alaimo here reiterates the critical function of trans-corporeal space that concurrently incorporates all processes: evolutionary, material, natural, historical, biological, social, or chemical for the human and non-human world. This is the space that should lead the debate in environmental ethics. Alaimo's transcorporeal environmental ethics, as a posthumanist performative theory, thus invites critics to address the current environmental problems within a new materialist paradigm that functions as a catalyst of all divisions between mind and matter or the human and the more-than-human.

In a similar new materialist approach, Jane Bennett (2010) turns her critical focus to the materiality of nature, more specifically, to what she calls "vitality of matter" (p. 53). She posits that humans need to remind themselves of appreciating matter's vibrant quality as "[t]he figure of an intrinsically inanimate matter may be one of the impediments to the emergence of more ecological and more materially sustainable modes of production and consumption" (Bennett, 2010, p. ix). Treating the nonhuman world as pure matter with no vitality is a residue of the Cartesian ideology within environmental ethics, and Bennett endows matter with vitality, an essential force used to prioritize human beings over more-than-human members of the world. For Bennett (2010), vitality signifies "the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (p. viii). Vital materialism, in this sense, functions as another notable response to the "crisis of perception" (Capra, 1995, p. 19) in ecology, and it effectively replaces the environment with vital materiality, which "better captures an 'alien' quality of our own flesh, and in so doing reminds humans of the very radical character of the (fractious) kinship between the human and the nonhuman" (Bennett, 2010, p. 112). What emerges from this new materialist realization is the fact that human beings should recognize the so-far denied materiality of their bodies and incorporate the excluded aspects of both materialities: human

and nonhuman. Vital materialism thus connects all life and nonlife forms through a capacity or potential to create a change or an effect in their activities. This view brings about a notable shift of perspective in relation to the ethical significance of nonhuman others as it suggests an active involvement of human and more-than-human agencies in such ways that deny human exceptionalism in ethics.

It is significant to introduce Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino's concept of "storied matter" into the ethical discussion of new materialist projections of all agencies. Oppermann and Iovino (2014) compellingly argue that it is urgent "for humans to declare their agentic independence in a hybrid, vibrant, and *living* world" (p. 3). The necessity arises from "the new materialist paradigm [that] is premised on the integral ways of thinking language and reality, meaning and matter together" (Oppermann and Iovino, 2014, p. 4). In their theory, matter has a narrative agency that reminds humans of "the emergent nature of the world's phenomena, the awareness that we inhabit a dimension criss-crossed by vibrant forces that hybridize human and nonhuman matters, and finally the persuasion that matter and meaning constitute the fabric of our storied world" (Oppermann and Iovino, 2014, p. 4). With such an understanding of matter and the world (entirely rejecting the traditional boundaries between the knower and the known) it is possible to re-envision our human nature and more-than human nature as Oppermann and Iovino further posit that:

> Even though no preordered plot can rigorously distinguish these stories of matter, what characterizes them is a narrative performance, a dynamic process of material expressions seen in bodies, things, and phenomena co-emerging from these networks of intra-acting forces and entities. Seen in this light, every living creature, from humans to fungi, tells evolutionary stories of coexistence, interdependence, adaptation and hybridization, extinctions and survivals. (2014, p. 7)

This new materialist insight into "the nature of nature" (Barad, 2007, p. 24) and "the entanglement of matter and meaning" (Barad, 2007, p. 1) encourages humans to revisit their environmental ethics that has so far either excluded the non-human or relied on a traditional binary of the human and more-than-human world.

4. Conclusions

The quest of environmental ethics for eradicating human-centered views of more-than-human natures, ruling over them with their exceptionalism, necessitates reframing the basic notions about what is human and what is more-than-human. Paving the way towards the inclusion of all life and nonlife forms within the ethical realm, Leopold's land ethic envisions a more inclusive image of the world, that is, the biotic community of the land. The exclusion of the members of the biotic community, so far commonly accepted by the dominant

ideologies, is first challenged with the land ethic, which demands care and respect for every member of the biotic community. Deep ecologists take this renewed connection of human beings with their environment further and argue for the intrinsic or inherent value of each being as part of the greater ecological whole. Aligning themselves almost at the verge of misanthropy, deep ecologists also advance the idea that environmental ethics should lead individuals to construct their own individual ecosophies. Following a similar nonanthropocentric view and a political agenda, social ecology thinkers direct the debate into the mutual exploitation of human and nonhuman beings within modern capitalism. They make a compelling point about the inseparability of the ecological and the social, which demands searching for the liberation of both human and more-than-human beings from the hierarchy of profitability. Similarly, skeptical in attitude towards the social construction of environmental values, postmodern environmental ethics conducts a linguistic examination of these values and points to their discursivity, promoting a reconstruction of our ethical considerations about the environment in a liberating, nonanthropocentric manner. The material turn, however, brings about a breakthrough for environmental ethics as it overthrows all boundaries that any anthropocentric view holds onto in relation to the nonhuman world, merging the two into "performative agencies," "transcorporeal beings," "vibrant matter," or "storied matter." Within the new materialist paradigm, nonhuman beings are as actively involved in the meaning-making processes as are human beings. What dissolves in this performative, transcorporeal or vibrant realm is the ethical position of human beings: situated no longer as superior or dominant but in an active becoming of all agencies. The new materialist understanding of this ethical role has the potential to cultivate more sustainable relations with the nonhuman world since the discredited notions of the humanistic subject and object are replaced by the idea of new materialist agency. The entanglement of matter and meaning in the new materialist sense opens an unexplored path for environmental ethics that still seeks the way out of any hint at anthropocentrism or exclusion of nonhuman beings from the ethical realm. The ethical configurations of the recent new materialist theories might produce more conundrums than elucidations on environmental concerns as they require humans to radically shift their perception of what it means to be human and nonhuman. Yet, it is an imminent call that environmental ethics should respond to in order to address the current environmental crisis.

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