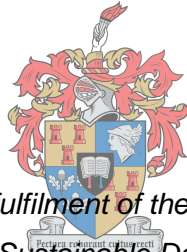


# **Environment, Ethics and Religion: Can Religious Philosophies Enhance Environmental Ethics?**

by

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of Master of Philosophy in Sustainable Development in the Faculty of  
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## **Declaration**

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Date: December 2018

## **Abstract**

The environment we live in is plagued with pollution, over-population and various other forms of degradation. The existing philosophies within environmental ethics have been found inadequate to deal with the state of the environment today. In this thesis the various forms of environmental degradation will be discussed, and environmental philosophies will be reviewed to ascertain whether they are indeed inadequate to deal with such degradation and to bring about attitudinal and behavioural change with regards to the environment. In recent times there has been a call for a new ethic that will help change the attitudes humans have towards the environment, with the hope of minimising or reducing the negative impact of these attitudes. One possible source to transform this status quo is religion. This thesis will argue that religious philosophies and principles can be adopted to complement existing environmental philosophies, thereby enhancing the protection of the environment. In particular, the religious principles of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and Buddhism will be discussed and will be compared to existing environmental philosophies such as deep ecology, with a view to developing a new environmental ethical framework.

## Opsomming

Die omgewing waarin ons leef word geteister deur besoedeling, oorbevolking en verskeie ander vorme van agteruitgang. Die bestaande filosofieë binne omgewingsetiek is onvoldoende gevind om vandag se toestand van die omgewing te hanteer. In hierdie tesis word die verskillende vorme van omgewingsverval bespreek, en omgewingsfilosofieë sal hersien word om vas te stel of hulle inderdaad onvoldoende is om sulke agteruitgang te hanteer en om houdings en gedragsverandering met betrekking tot die omgewing teweeg te bring. In die afgelope tyd was daar n oproep vir 'n nuwe etiek wat die houding van mense teenoor die omgewing sal help verander, met die hoop om die negatiewe impak van hierdie houdings te minimaliseer of te verminder. Een moontelike bron om hierdie status quo te transformer, is godsdiens. Hierdie tesis sal argumenteer dat godsdienstige filosofieë en beginsels aangeneem kan word om bestaande omgewingsfilosofieë aan te vul en sodoende die beskerming van die omgewing te verbeter. Spesifiek sal die godsdienstige beginsels van Gaudiya Vaishnavism en Boeddhisme bespreek word en vergelyk word met bestaande omgewingsfilosofieë soos diep-ekologie, met n oog op die ontwikkelinge van 'n nuwe omgewing-etiese raamwerk.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

“If you want to know how rich you are, try to find out how many things you have that money cannot buy.” – Proverb

In life we often base value on items that have a monetary value: the higher the monetary value, the greater the value. This attitude has also encroached over many years onto our perception of the natural environment and its value to humanity – unfortunately, at the expense of all other life forms in the environment. The result has been environmental degradation that is placing great strain on the natural world, eradicating many life forms, and causing catastrophic damage and changes to the climate.

“Nature has always been nourishing, protective, sheltering, life giving, creative and maternal” (Intongpan n.d:1). Humans, on the other hand, have always tried to manipulate and control nature for their own needs. From time immemorial the general relationship between humanity and nature has always been one of domination. Humanity, in this so-called mastering of nature, has abused and polluted nature purely to achieve their own ends.

As a result the environment is currently under great stress, from the atmosphere to water resources and the soils. Each aspect of the environment is facing a degree of degradation that is surpassing nature’s ability to regenerate itself. The depletion of the ozone layer and increased air pollution near ground level are becoming the norms of daily living. Heedless exploitation of depletable water resources and the loss of soil productivity are endangering food supply (Van De Veer & Pierce, 2003: xxvii).

There is no shortage of books and articles documenting the environmental degradation we are facing today. They all speak of the actions of humans that are causing this damage to the environment. Although humans need to use the natural world to a degree for food, clothing, and shelter, the greed of humans leads to problems such as global warming, the extinction of species, depletion of natural resources – all raising questions for reflection on how we should be living our life (Attfield, 2003:2). Ghandi once said: “There is enough on earth for man’s need but not enough for man’s greed.” This situation is being exacerbated by our advancing technological abilities, which allows humankind to alter the environment in previously unimaginable ways. As Holmes Rolston III puts it: “We are now twelve years into a unique century, the first century in the 35 million centuries (3.5 billion years) of

life on Earth in which one species can jeopardize the planet's future" (2012:1). Earth is facing the largest number of extinctions since the dinosaur era. There are some assessments that at least 100 species are becoming extinct on a daily basis, and that this number could triple in the next few decades.

This is as a result of the depletion of the natural resources that sustain the planet's life. Due to the disturbing rate at which these resources are being depleted, changed or contaminated, species cannot adapt in time, and die. Another contributing factor is the exponential rate at which the human population is growing. This means a greater need for land and resources to sustain the population (Desjardins, 2013:6). Wherever we look we see a planet in trouble.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND**

I have been practicing a form of Hinduism called Gaudiya Vaishnavism (more commonly known as the Hare Krishna movement) for the past 28 years. Coming from a spiritual family life, I have studied the Vedic literatures in detail. This has also exposed me to a wide variety of other religious philosophies. Having this spiritual background has always allowed me to look at things from a different perspective, looking beyond the physics of life to the metaphysics.

During the environmental ethics module (in MPhil: environmental management at the USB business leadership school) in 2016, the introduction to diverse environmental philosophies widened my viewpoint on life. The contrast between anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric philosophies, and the values – or lack thereof – put on nature, the environment, and animals, were what inspired me to look at combining two philosophies: environmental and religious.

With other modules of study in 2016, I could tie together the environmental damage being done by humanity's selfish needs and the ethical philosophies adopted. Combined with my background, my thought processes went 'outside the box' to include and look at the situation from a spiritual perspective. From time immemorial, the relationship between humanity and nature has been one of suppression, caused by humanity's need to control nature. This is more and more evident every year, as the depletion of nature leaves little for future generations. It is clear, given today's moral beliefs and values, why the environment is suffering and has deteriorated to the extent that it has. The various religions are regarded as a primary source of values in every culture. It is inferred, therefore, that these values and cultures have an underlying relationship with the decisions and actions that humans take concerning the environment. These religious philosophies may consequently offer some solutions to mitigate the destructive patterns and behaviours of humans.

From a personal perspective, it was clear that religious philosophies could change or improve environmental ethical philosophies and enhance environmental management. This was what inspired me to look at this research topic – to investigate whether there is any relationship between religious philosophies and environmental ethical philosophies, and how they might influence each other.

### **1.2.1 Humanity and the environment**

According to scientific understanding, the earth is roughly four-and-a-half billion years old. This is around a quarter-and-a-half of the age of the universe. As far as is currently known, ours is the only planet in the universe that supports life.

Clayton and Radcliffe state in their article, 'Sustainability: A systems approach', that biological life began on earth nearly four billion years ago – only a little less than the age of the planet itself. Humans, however, are of substantially more recent origin: our presence represents only about 0.005% of the existence of biological life on this planet, which is equivalent to one day in a 55-year lifespan (Clayton & Radcliffe, 1996:1).

If one accepts a Darwinian theory of evolution, human beings or homo sapiens began to evolve from the hominids some seven million years ago, and Homo sapiens emerged about 200 000 years ago. According to Clayton and Radcliffe, the earliest clear-cut evidence for some form of cultural behaviour dates back to only 40 000 years ago. However, there are certain examples that date even further back such as the Blombos caves. The domestication of both plants and animals began a mere 12 000 years ago, the first form of farming began about 8 000 years ago, and the first small city was developed 6 000 years ago (Clayton & Radcliffe, 1996:2).

However, humanity has struggled to master the natural world. We have studied the earth, but only in an attempt to discover its fundamental building blocks so that we can manipulate them for our own needs and wants. We act as if we are separate from nature, as if we are superior and made of better stuff (Macy, 1998:40). The result is that, during this extremely short time of humanity's existence alongside other living beings, humans have caused much destruction.

This ongoing dissonance between humanity and nature has resulted in environmental degradation and dilapidation that is spreading so rapidly that solutions cannot be left to environmentalists alone. The tendency of human culture is to treat such matters as simply scientific, technological, or political problems, when actually they are problems for both the whole of humanity and every individual.

Each person needs to examine him/herself from within if this planet is to be saved. In the words of the Iranian-American philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “the environmental crisis is fundamentally a crisis of values” (Ngwu, 2013: 55). The value we place on the environment – including animals – is the reason that we are facing the environmental situation we are in today. Human activities threaten our planet’s very existence

A case in point is the meat industry, which is growing at an exponential rate. “As environmental science has advanced, it has become apparent that the human appetite for animal flesh is a driving force behind virtually every major category of environmental damage now threatening the human future: deforestation, erosion, fresh water scarcity, air and water pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, social injustice, the destabilization of communities, and the spread of disease” (World Watch, 2004:1).

The concept of ‘value’ discussed above stems primarily from policies and philosophies that have been adopted over the centuries. These environmental philosophies, although they have evolved, are still greatly influenced by the original notion that the environment is here for humankind’s enjoyment.

The values that guide humanity’s relationship with the environment are born from underlying philosophies. These include environmental ethical philosophies and the various religious philosophies (Biel & Nilsson, 2005:1); and these will be the focus of this thesis.

### **1.2.2 Philosophy and the environment**

The history of philosophy and environmental ethics is a very long one. The earliest recorded Western philosophy expressed a concern about the correct understanding of the non-human world. The Socratic philosophers of ancient Greece scrutinised the role of humanity in relation to the natural world and the order of the universe (Katz, 1991:79). There is thus a strong link between Western philosophy and environmental philosophy.

In more recent times, the focus has been more on direct ethical principles concerning human actions with regard to the environment and the natural world. This ‘new’ view is in response to the increasing awareness of the environmental crisis, and dates back to the 1960s, to philosophers such as Leopold, White, and Muir (Katz, 1991:80). These environmental debates raise pertinent questions about what we as individuals’ value, what kind of beings we are, and what kind of lives we live. “In short, environmental questions raise fundamental questions of ethics and philosophy” (Desjardins, 2013:24).

Today's environmental policies have often arisen out of older and outmoded philosophies and have shaped how we do things. To a large degree the crisis we face today is a result of decisions made in the past. However, it is important to note that these decisions were not malicious or made to damage the environment. They were made for what were considered beneficial reasons at the time. They were also supported by the 'philosophy' of that time (Desjardins, 2013:7).

This decision-making process, therefore, is what needs to be examined before we can begin to act differently. Factors such as the needs and requirements of the time, the availability of resources in the environment, population size, and prevalent philosophies are what influenced the decision-making process. According to Weston (1999:6), philosophy is a means by which humanity can give a voice to those that cannot speak or whom generally will not be heard. Philosophy and ethics thereby provide the opportunity for reflecting on decision-making, and the type of life we want to, and should live. It questions what we do and what we ought to do (Desjardins, 2013:7).

It was only in 1971 that the first environmental philosophy conference was held. In 1973, Richard Sylvan presented a paper, 'Is there a need for a new environmental ethic?'. From then on, a greater focus was put on environmental philosophy and on how we view the natural world (Light & Holmes, 2003:16). However, the question remained: What was the source of the arguments that had arisen? On what basis was it decided that something has intrinsic value, and by whom?

The question, then, is: What influences philosophy? The values that arise from the environmental philosophies have been adopted over the ages. One needs to ask, however, where these philosophies and values were derived from. One of the sources of values held by humans is religion. Religious principles tend to steer humans in the direction of how to behave, what is acceptable or unacceptable. We can therefore conclude that it would be useful to explore the relationship between environmental philosophy and religion.

### **1.2.3 Religion and the environment**

For many centuries, religions have included the environment in their philosophies. The supposition that environmental concerns and religion share a relationship has been raised by many writers. Unfortunately, many of the current ecological problems are being blamed on Christianity, and particularly on the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation (Attfield, 1994:13).

An example of this is found in Lynn White's comment in a controversial article (1967:1205): "Since the roots of our troubles are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious". Religion is seen as the superstructure on which all things are based, and from which all things are derived. The way one shapes one's value system is based on, and fundamentally sourced from,

religion – so much so that this superstructure shapes our cultural systems, laws, ethics, and common sense (Greely, 2001:21).

There has been debate about whether the relationship between the two entities of religion and the environment is positive or negative. Writings range from White's view that anthropocentric Western Christianity has impacted negatively on the environment, to Buddhist teaching that everything on earth is sacred and not to be harmed, which potentially results in a more positive view of the relationship between religion and the environment. If it has been through anthropocentric thinking about nature that Western religion has caused environmental degradation, then the question can be asked: Can the Eastern religions be used as a positive resource for getting us out of this troubling situation (Gill, 1998:408-412)?

Many of his peers have accepted John Passmore's view on Western religions and traditional ethics in relation to nature as authoritative. There has been a general consensus that the central Christian position has been autocratic and anthropocentric. This position holds that everything in creation is for the benefit and use of humankind, and that no moral constraints are applicable to our relationships with non-humans. Passmore argued that Christianity fortified humanity to believe that we were nature's absolute master (Attfield, 1994:41). Many have argued against this view; but consensus has never been reached.

Other religions have held different opinions. Ultimately the environmental crisis is the crisis of the mind; and the only way to change the mind is generate fear about what must inevitably happen to us if change does not happen. We are what we think; and what we think is defined by our beliefs, our faith, our culture. A new call is being made for humanity to change how it treats the environment; but to ensure that this change happens, it must address people's values and beliefs, which are often derived from religion. Today, environmentalists and philosophers are increasingly reaching out to religious organisations to join forces in the fight against environmental degradation.

Many philosophers have acknowledged that the moral consensus that is required in the face of this global environmental crisis will not be the result of reason alone. This moral consensus may also have to include narratives from religion.

This thesis will look at how history has shaped the generally adopted anthropocentric environmental ethic, and how it has contributed to the environmental crisis we face today. After discussing the philosophies and principles of two religions, I will propose a solution – one that will explain how religious philosophies from the two religions, namely Gaudiya Vaishnavism and Buddhism, can be

used to enhance and improve the dominant anthropocentric philosophy. This will result in a framework that could assist in changing our outlook on the environment.

## **1.3 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

### **1.3.1 Aim**

To develop a new framework for policy-makers by adopting religious principles and philosophies in order to correct and improve upon existing environmental ethical philosophies

The purpose of the research is to determine whether religious philosophies can enhance or correct existing environmental ethical philosophies in order to reduce environmental degradation. This will result in a framework for a new environmental ethical philosophy that can be used to manage the environment in future.

### **1.3.2 Objectives**

- Review the two identified religious philosophies and principles, and give an overview of anthropocentric environmental ethics.
- Discuss the context of the environment and the current extent of degradation.
- Determine what insights the philosophies of environmental ethics and the identified religions offer.
- Explore the relationships between environmental and the two religious philosophies of Hinduism and Buddhism.
- Develop a theoretical framework for policy-makers on the basis of the above discussions.

### **1.3.3 Research design and methodology**

Given the nature of the thesis, it will adopt a purely exploratory approach. The thesis will include a literature review, which will include, but not be limited to, the following writings:

- Books;
- Journals;
- Previous articles on related subjects;
- Magazines;
- Web articles; and
- Conference proceedings

The outcomes of this literature review will be the basis of a philosophical analysis of the following:



- The religious philosophies and principles;
- The ethical philosophies and principles, and
- Similarities between the religious philosophies and the environmental ethical philosophies.

#### **1.3.4 Outline of chapters**

Chapter one: Introduction/Background and motivation: This chapter will lay the foundation for the rest of the thesis. It will contain the background to this thesis, drawing on my personal experiences and lifestyle. It will look at the reasons for choosing the topic, and summarise the research objective and aims. This chapter will also give an overview of different religions and of the areas of the religious and ethical philosophies that will be focused on. For the sake of completeness, the reasons for excluding other religious and ethical philosophies will also be briefly touched on.

Chapter two: The environmental crisis: This chapter will focus on what 'the environment' is by discussing the various types of environment and their constituent parts. Each of the types of environment will be discussed, especially with regard to the degradation that is affecting them and, to some extent, what has caused this degradation

Chapter three: Ethics: In this chapter a history of philosophy will be discussed, along with a broad overview of philosophical material. This will show the evolution of the anthropocentric environmental ethic and its adoption in society. The anthropocentric philosophy will be discussed in detail, as this will be the environmental ethical philosophy of focus. The relationship that this ethical philosophy has with the environment, and its impact on it, will be discussed to show how adopting this philosophy leads to the degradation of the environment.

Chapter four: Religious views and philosophies: The two religious views and philosophies that have been selected will be discussed in detail, including the religious teachings, principles, background, and philosophies of each. In addition, the relationship between these religions and environment ethics will be discussed, particularly the environmental ethical philosophy of 'deep ecology'.

Chapter five: Spiritual solutions to material problems: This chapter and the next are the two most important aspects of the thesis. They will address the relationships and insights of religious principles and philosophies in respect of:

- Environmental ethics, and
- Environmental degradation.

How religious principles can be used to improve environmental ethics will also be discussed.

Chapter six: Development of the theoretical framework: This chapter will focus on the teachings from the religious philosophies that can be adapted to form the building blocks of a new environmental ethic that can be later developed and adopted in an effort to mitigate or minimise environmental degradation.

Chapter seven: Conclusion and recommendations: The final chapter of the study will discuss the applicability of the developed theoretical framework. It will also indicate the challenges and opportunities of the framework, as well as also offer recommendations for its further development. Concluding comments will summarise the thesis and its outcome.

## **1.4 Exclusions**

For the purposes of this thesis, religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism have been omitted, due to the great variety of traditions within each. It is not possible, within the scope of this thesis, to include discussion of all religions.

Several systems of environmental ethics have also been excluded from this study, due to the nature of their ethics. There are numerous forms of environmental ethics, and capturing them all would have not been feasible or practicable.

## CHAPTER TWO: A PLANET IN TROUBLE - THE ENVIRONMENT AND ITS DEGRADATION

*“As seen from space, our planet, the shared natural environment of humanity and fellow creatures is both valuable and vulnerable” (Attfield, 1999:1).*

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will discuss the environment and environmental degradation. The natural environment both precedes and transcends human existence: humanity is part of the all-encompassing system (Attfield, 1983:15). This makes the environment – which is the shared natural environment of humanity and all other creatures – both valuable and vulnerable: valuable as the setting for maintaining life, and vulnerable by being open to mistreatment by its inhabitants. Over the years, we have seen humanity regard the environment as an endless source of precious resources, and as a bottomless pit for all our waste and pollution (Attfield, 1983: 19).

These effects of human behaviours and actions are being felt worldwide. The rise in the growth rate of the human population, and the expansion of economies, rely on large quantities of natural resources. The environment cannot continue to be viewed as independent from the economy: they are interdependent, and the destruction of the environment has dire consequences for all living beings. The impact of human presence within the environment is now being felt throughout nature (Taylor, 1986:5).

Weston (1999), in supporting this thought, states that when humans see themselves as separate or independent of nature, we introduce the possibility of exploitation and destruction. Humans irrationally feel that the world environment will always provide for and be renewed to meet our needs (Weston, 1999:2).

Humans are wired or designed to use the natural world for survival. However, there is a fine line between using it to survive and abusing it for selfish ends. This mindset of abuse, and the false idea that resources are unlimited – coupled with humanity’s unchecked actions – cause problems such as global warming, the mass extinction of species, and many other major consequences, resulting in environmental degradation (Attfield, 2003:1).

Various organisations have documented the types and extent of environmental degradation. Environmental degradation is defined as a change or disruption to the environment that is deemed

to be objectionable or detrimental. 'Degradation' is a negative change in the quality and quantity of resources. Loosely interpreted, it is the deterioration of the environment as a result of the depletion of natural resources and the destruction of the ecosystem. Environmental degradation has increased to such an extent that it is now one of the ten threats officially identified by the High Level Threat Panel of the United Nations (Tyagi et al., 2014:1491). As mentioned above, the primary cause of environmental degradation has been attributed to human disturbance.

This is not a new phenomenon; and if society thinks that we have time, it is sorely misinformed. This has been happening for centuries, and is now reaching critical levels. In 1594 Verrazano reported smelling cedar a hundred leagues (one league is 5,556 km) from land, while some spoke of sailing through beds of floating flowers. Poultry, deer, and lynx greeted people in inconceivable copiousness. Whales congested and occupied the seas so densely that they were a navigational hazard. Cape cod filled the waters, and salmon ran wild in the Atlantic Ocean. Lobster were so prevalent that they were used as pig food, fish bait, and potato fertilizer. They were the staple diet for the navy, which consumed it five times a week. Islands were packed shore to shore with seals, walrus, and seabirds. A mere 45 years later, many of these beings have been slaughtered, driven out, over-farmed, or over-fished to extinction (Weston, 1999:43). Some subspecies of animals become extinct before we even became aware of them. Tracts of rainforest housing untold and innumerable species are in flames. The spotted owl, willow flycatcher, lynx, rhinoceros, elephant, bobcat, scarlet tanager and many more are all on the endangered list or neared extinct. Blue whales are one if not the largest living creature on earth and in 200 years have been reduced from half a million to around 3000 worldwide. Many species are now being faced with a threat of extinction, due to their habitats being destroyed (Weston, 1999:4).

The gloomy results continue to mount up: other forms of environmental degradation continue, diminished resources are being plundered, and humans are fundamentally endangering the life support system of the planet.

In order to understand environmental degradation and its extent; one needs to fully understand what the term "environment" includes. This chapter will therefore firstly look at different conceptions of the environment offered by various authors, and will offer a definition of this term, before moving on to discuss different forms of environmental degradation.

## **2.2 DEFINING THE ENVIRONMENT**

Most of the time, the definition of the environment is taken largely from granted. However, to date there is no agreement on exactly what the concept of the environment includes. The word

environment can be used to mean many different things. When one speaks of the environment, many may think of grass, trees, mountains, or even a room or one's surroundings. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'environment' means "the circumstances, objects or conditions by which one is surrounded; the complex of physical, chemical and biotic factors (such as climate, soil and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecologic community and ultimately determine its form and survival" (1998).

There are therefore innumerable environments, but only one global environment, and that is irreplaceable. An environment is inhabited or occupied. The environment can then be understood to be an encompassing system, with interacting living organisms (Attfield, 1983: 9).

Why is it, then, that when people think of the environment, they often exclude the 'living things' that are integral to the environment? Additionally, the intertwined relationship of all beings, living and non-living, making up the environment is often overlooked. Why is it so important to understand the environment? Consider that if we do not understand the environment in its entirety, we cannot begin to learn to treat it in the correct manner and to fully comprehend the impact of our actions on it. In order to discuss the problems associated with the environment, it is therefore necessary to properly define this term.

There are two main ways in which the environment can be defined. It can be defined purely from a "green" viewpoint, or from a viewpoint which combines "greening" with social, economic and cultural matters (Strydom & King, 2014:2).

The green viewpoint is concerned only with components of the "green" environment - that is, living and non-living entities of the ecosystem. These include animal, humans, plants, micro-organisms, water, land air, soil and energy, and their interactions with one another in a closed system and in line with natural conservation laws. Strydom and King cite a typical definition of this kind given by Colby: "the environment is the complex of biotic, climatic, soil and other conditions, which comprise the immediate habitat of an organism; the physical, chemical and biological surroundings of an organism at any time" (2014: 2).

The alternative to this conception of the environment is a "brown" perspective, which expands on the green conception to include not only the ecosystem, but also humans and the interactions between them. This conception of the environment also includes social issues, which under this view may not be separated from the environment. These social issues include matters such as social imbalances and inequities. These imbalances are in production and consumption patterns that result in unequal access to services and resources. They also include poverty, disease, unemployment,

and crime, as well as issues related to environmental justice (Strydom & King, 2014: 3). The “brown” environment thus includes humans as an integral part of the environment.

This latter conception of the environment is aligned to the NEMA definition. According to the National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998 (NEMA) the environment is defined as the surroundings within which humans exist which is made up of:

- The land, water and atmosphere of the earth;
- Micro-organisms, plant and animal life;
- Any part or combination of (i) and (ii) and the interrelationships among and between them; and
- The physical, chemical, aesthetic and cultural properties and conditions of the foregoing that influences human health and well-being (NEMA, 1998:8).

The Environmental Conservation Act 73 of 1989 (ECA) also provides a brown definition of the environment, which seems to suggest that government has adopted this brown perspective. According to ECA, the environment means “the aggregate of surroundings objects, conditions and influences that influence the life and habits of man or any other organism or collection of organisms” (ECA: 1989, 2). Human beings are integral to the environment, according to this definition.

According to O’Neil et al (2008:2), the environment is more than a thing. It is a broad gamut that we live in. We live in this broad gamut, build in its valleys, harvest its crops and mine its resources. From the definitions and notes above it is clear that the environment is not just one’s surroundings. It is everything we need to survive and everything we interact with.

Attfield (1983) declares that the environment only exists because an organism or a variety of organisms occupies it. In other words, an environment comes into existence when it is occupied by various living organisms and beings. Attfield (1994) describes the environment as an all “encompassing system”. He defines the environment further as the ecosystems in which living organisms interact with non-living elements. The environment is not a single ecosystem but a network of systems (Attfield, 1983:9).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it is crucial for us to understand the concept of the environment in order to tackle its problems. It would be irresponsible and naïve to exclude humans as an integral part of the ecosystem. Not only do they co-exist with other beings in this environment, but they also have a profound impact on it. It is concerning when human beings do not see themselves as an integral part of the environment, and do not recognise the dependence of human

beings upon the environment and other beings within it. Taking the above into account, this study will recognise that humans and their interactions are part of the environment, and will therefore adhere to the “brown” conception of the environment. I will now go on to discuss the environmental degradation that often arises as a result of human interactions in and with the environment as a whole.

## **2.3 ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION**

O’Neil et al explains his idea of our three interactions with the world (2008: 1). We live from the world, we live in the world and we live with the world. We live from the world in the sense that we make use of environment by mining and cutting down the earth’s resources and harvesting its fruit. In this regard, every action man takes, every economic choice that is made, and the productivity thereof is dependent on the natural and the ecological systems we live in. We are dependent on the ecological system, from its ability to provide raw materials, to its ability to absorb waste.

Apart from living from the world as mentioned above, we also live in the world. Not only do we require the resources of the world to sustain ourselves, but the world is also where humans and all other species “live” their lives. The natural world is the setting for all cultural, aesthetic, and even social activities, which can be said to be recreational at times. Areas of the world in which humans live and play are beaches, forests, mountains and rivers (O’Neil et al, 2008: 2 & 3).

Thus far we have explained O’Neil’s description of living from the world and living in the world. From what we have explained above it makes sense that for this relationship to continue we have to learn to live with the world. Living with the world will mean living in harmony with the world - living consciously in every action and decision we make. Currently the conscious decisions we make about our actions and decisions are often not about the conservation of the natural world, but rather about the loss of the natural world as an object of value for humans.

Environmental degradation starts with the daily actions and activities of human beings as individuals and as a collective. Human activity has caused a great deal of negative changes to the natural world and still, with all the attention placed on this currently, it continues. These negative changes include the destruction of the ozone layer, deforestation, depletion of natural resources, destruction of wildlife and wilderness, land degradation, elimination of numerous species, and the pollution of rivers, atmosphere and oceans (Attfield, 1983: 1-3).

However, humans fail to see their daily actions, such as driving vehicles and building houses on undeveloped land, as damaging. It is in these actions and the drive for prosperity that environmental

degradation proliferates (Wapner, 2009:216). Ongoing environmental degradation is also characterized by the uneven consumption of resources in pursuit of such prosperity. First world countries, for example, have predominantly been blamed for the current state of degradation due to their patterns of consumption, while poorer countries claim that they are not responsible for the historical depletion of resources, and are therefore entitled to consume a greater proportion of these resources in the future in their quest for economic development. However, consumption of resources continues to be unevenly distributed across class, gender and ethnicity.

Environmental harm is also unevenly distributed, and tends to generally fall disproportionately on the poor. Toxic waste dumps and incinerators all impact communities living in and around them. This has been supported by a World Health Organization (WHO) study done in 2010, which showed that poorer people were more exposed to pollution, especially air pollution. This study revealed a general pattern whereby people of lower socio-economic status were routinely exposed to greater amounts of air pollution (Deguen & Zmirou-Navier, 2010:5).

The challenge, however, is that concern with the uneven distribution of the harms of environmental degradation is often only viewed in terms of human impact, rather than the impact that actions have on the natural world (O'Neil, 2008: 49). This view, which considers the human impact of environmental degradation only, does no justice to the natural world. This attitude may also contribute to the fact that the environment is being degraded at such a rapid rate, such that if this is not corrected, all human beings will suffer, irrespective of the distribution of environmental harms.

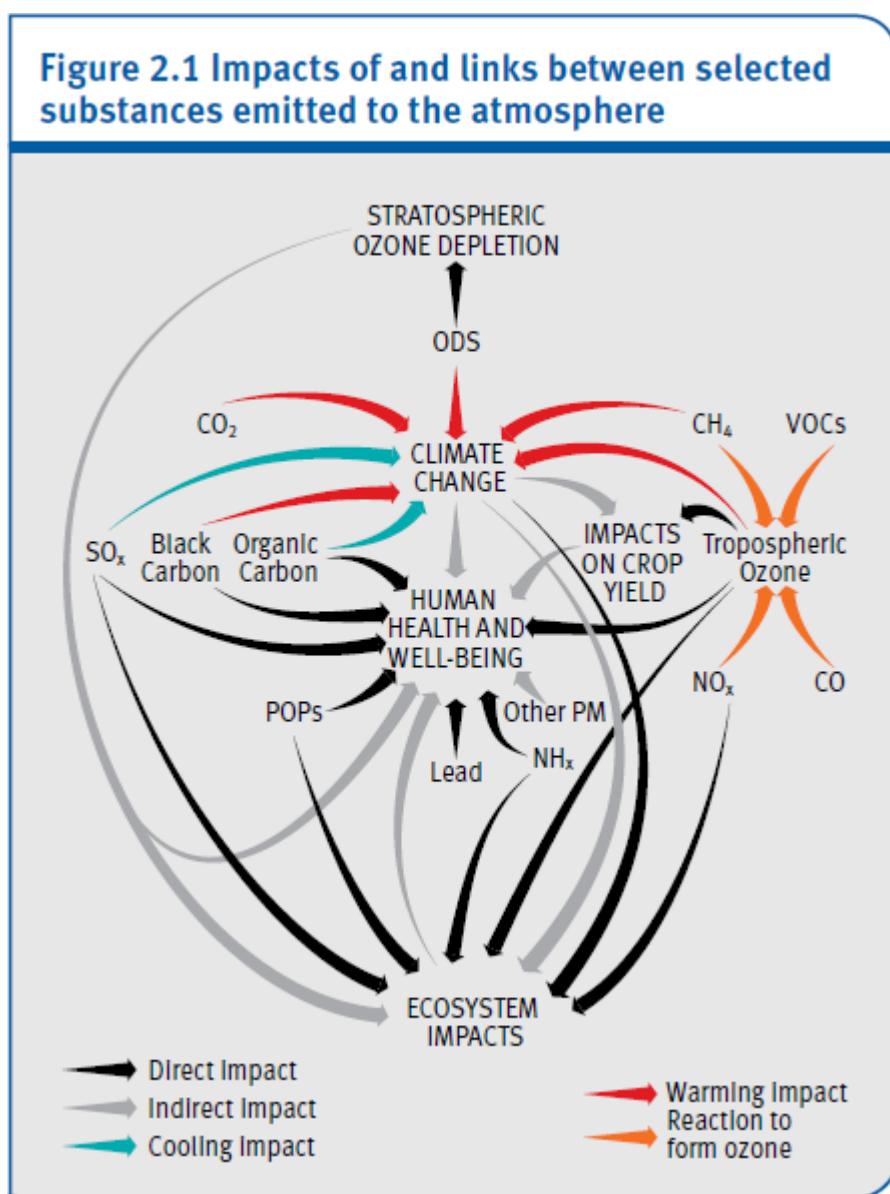
There are three sets of challenges that pivot around environmental concerns. First is the challenge of resources. People are concerned that they will no longer have things that they require and depend on, such as fresh water, minerals, and so on. The second challenge has to do with "sinks". Humans have the false perception that the earth's ecosystem can adequately absorb our waste at the rate we dispose of it. We expect blindly or rather ignorantly that the earth will continue to clean itself and regenerate itself at the pace that we throw waste away (Wapner, 2009:207). What we fail to realise, however, is that the human population is expanding and developing at such an alarming rate that the earth cannot cope and neutralize the toxins and waste we contaminate it with. We have overwhelmed the earth's absorptive capacity. The last challenge is "urbanizing", or transformation of the natural environment. The world we live in is being depleted to a great extent as a result of industrialization, urbanization and so-called modernization (Wapner, 2009:208).

Detailed examples of environmental degradation are documented below:



### 2.3.1 Air pollution

Emissions released into the environment as a result of human activities result in air pollution, which results in millions of people dying prematurely each year. Gases emitted by vehicles and industrial facilities increase the toxicity of the air by raising the levels of poisonous gases. Air pollution is, unfortunately, the most common form of environmental degradation. It has been estimated that air pollution causes around two million premature deaths annually worldwide (Tyagi et al., 2014:1493). Most forms of air pollution result in the inhalation of particulate matter and ambient lead, which affect not only the atmosphere but all living beings. Below is a figure showing the impact of and links between substances released into the environment (Ajero et al, 2012:33).



**Figure 1: Impact of and links between substances released into the environment**

Source: UNEPA GEO 5 Report, 2012

Above and beyond the greenhouse effect<sup>1</sup>, the exposure of human beings to toxins in the air is great. Humans consume 2 quarts of water a day, but we breathe in 15 to 20 thousand quarts of air a day. Motor vehicles are the largest contributors towards air pollution. A study done by the United Nations and the World Health Organization showed that two-thirds of the urban population lives in a polluted atmospheric environment. Residents of Bombay are breathing air so heavily polluted that it is equated to smoking ten cigarettes a day (Cremona & McDonough, 1995:10).

Concentrations and emissions of most greenhouse gases have increased during recent years. Figures 2 and 3 below show the statistics with regard to the increase in the emission of greenhouse gases. Growth rates are significant for several hydrofluorocarbon and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions between 2005 and 2010 (Ajero et al, 2012:38).

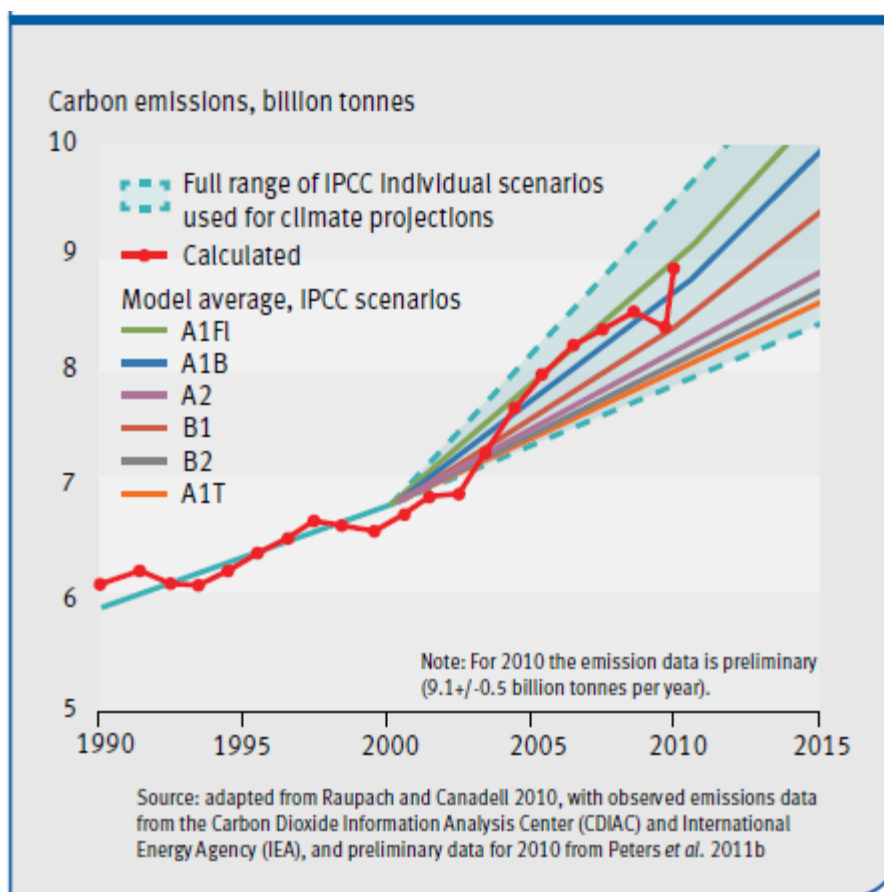
**Table 1: Concentration of greenhouse gases**

Source: UNEPA GEO 5 report, 2012

	2005	2009	2010
CO <sub>2</sub> (ppm)	378.7	386.3	388.5
CH <sub>4</sub> (ppb)	1 774.5	1 794.2	1 799.1
N <sub>2</sub> O (ppb)	319.2	322.5	323.1
CFC-11 (ppt)	251.5	243.1	240.5
CFC-12 (ppt)	541.5	532.6	530.8
HCFC-22 (ppt)	168.3	198.4	206.2
HFC-134a (ppt)	34.4	52.4	57.8

Source: NOAA GMD 2011a

<sup>1</sup> Greenhouse gas is the gas in the atmosphere that absorbs the infrared radiation in the atmosphere and emits it in all directions. Common examples are: water vapor, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, ozone, and any fluorocarbons.



**Figure 2: Trends in fossil fuel emissions**

Source: UNEPA GEO 5 report, 2012

Ozone depletion is another concerning consequence of air pollution. This is caused by the use of products or items containing chlorofluorocarbons which destroy the ozone layer. This layer protects us from harmful ultraviolet light, which causes burning and blistering of human skin, and can be damaging and even lethal for many species and life forms (Cremo & McDonough, 1995:12). Another problem affecting the atmosphere is acid rain. This is caused by commercial operations that use fossil fuels and coal. This acid rain kills crops, trees, fish and other aquatic life.

### 2.3.2 Climate change

Another significant form of environmental degradation today is global warming, which is causing degradation and natural disasters. The constantly rising temperatures have the potential to break the ecosystem. The latest IPCC report claims that the rise in the average surface temperature globally between 1990 and 2100 will be between 1.8 and 4 degrees Celsius. Sea levels rose in the period from 1993 to 2003 at a rate of 3.1 millimetres per year, due to melting ice caps. Evident around the world is the increased occurrences of drought in areas where it is not normally expected,

and flash flooding in others. Cyclones and hurricanes have also increased in frequency, and ocean temperatures are on the rise. Global warming is clearly causing extreme weather events as a result of the change in surface temperatures. In the last few decades, 90 percent of natural disasters have been attributed to climate change and global warming (Tyagi et al., 2014:1495).

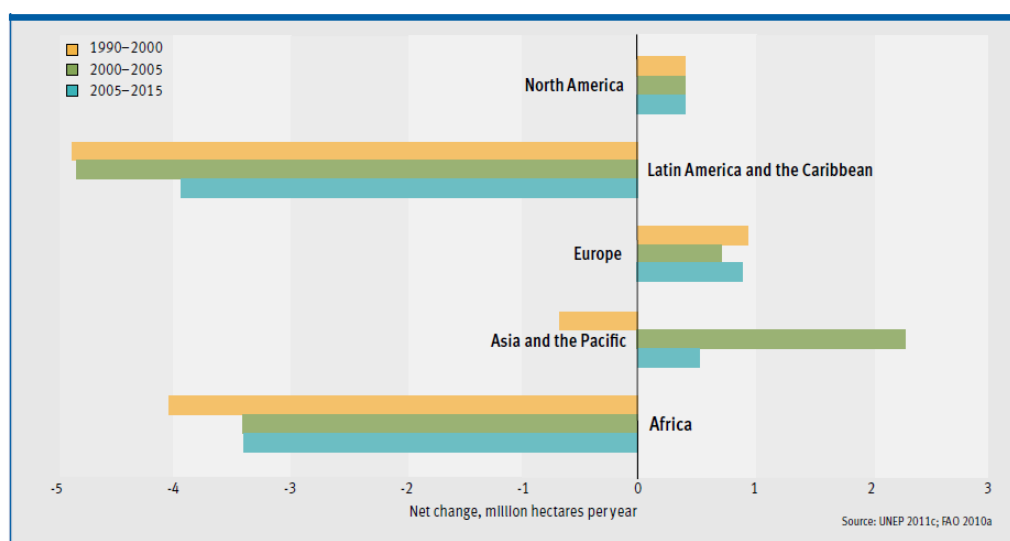
### 2.3.3 Wildlife

Unrestricted hunting and poaching of animals for fun, fur or food is threatening the existence of many species. Ongoing species loss, if not stopped, will cause one-third of species living now to be extinct by 2100. Today there are over 1000 species that are officially declared endangered. The loss of these species affects the robustness of the world's biological system. The implications of such could be the collapse of critical biological systems that are so dependent upon one another (Cremona & McDonough, 1995:3).

### 2.3.4 Forests

Forests play a pivotal role in the ecosystem, can provide shelter and fuel, and assist in regulating freshwater supplies and storing carbon.

Tropical rainforests are being destroyed at a rapid rate. Some vital forest types could be completely eliminated in a few years. The survival of many species of life that inhabit these forests is also threatened. The lumber and meat industries contribute towards the destruction of the rain forests. Forests are cleared and stripped to graze cattle for meat and to grow soy to feed the cattle. It has been estimated that in the next 80 years all the rain forests will be gone (Cremona & McDonough, 1995:6).



**Figure 3: Depiction of the changes in forest area per region**

Source: UNEPA GEO5 report, 2012

### **2.3.5 Soil**

The single crop method of farming is frequently the cause of topsoil loss. Since 1945, 11% of the earth's vegetative surface has been eroded or degraded (Van de Veer & Pierce, 2003: xxvii). Single crop farming also includes the intensive use of fertilizers that leach into and devitalize the soil. In addition, in order to maintain high profit margins, factory farming uses chemical pesticides to protect crops. These pesticides affect the soil as well as groundwater. Animals and small children may also be affected (Cremonesi & McDonough, 1995:8).

### **2.3.6 Oceans**

The oceans are severely pressured due to overfishing. This is predominantly true for the coastal regions that produce most of the fish for consumption. The total marine catch is above the maximum sustainable yield, and in fact with some fisheries already showing signs of collapse.

### **2.3.7 Water pollution**

The contamination or pollution of water poses a serious risk to living beings, human and non-human. Today 40 per cent of water is unfit for aquatic life or for swimming. Untreated or inadequately treated effluent, the by-products of chemical, petrochemical, leather, tanning and other industries, is the foremost contributor to water contamination. Seventy-five per cent of all fish stocks in the world are impacted by pollution (Tyagi et al., 2014:1495). The most talked about water pollution is that caused by oil drilling. Drilling for crude oil causes the largest and most costly spills and contaminations. The Gulf of Mexico has twice been the recipient of such disasters, causing massive pollution and threatening hundreds of aquatic life forms. Drilling is not the only cause of pollution – transportation, and the cleaning of vessels are also contributory factors (Cremonesi & McDonough, 1995:9).

Other industries also play a role in the pollution of waters (including lakes, rivers, and so on) and this is often associated with incorrect waste disposal methods. Approximately 1.75 billion of people in the world have inadequate or contaminated water. Ground water exploitation endangers the food production process and it is often claimed that fracking will contaminate this depletable resource (Van de Veer & Pierce: 2003, xxvii).

### **2.3.8 Trash and toxic waste**

The earth is finite. Its ability to absorb waste is limited, and is no longer what it once was due to increasing environmental damage, which also adds an additional burden to the ecosystem. This is especially true for waste that contains toxic chemicals. Common heavy metals like lead, chromium,

nickel, and mercury all have a poisonous effect on the ecosystem and on both humans and non-humans. Toxic waste pollution occurs when there are accidents but more often when industries do not have proper standards in place and disregard the environment when disposing of their waste or by-products.

## 2.4 CONCLUSION

The above examples are but a few of the types of environmental degradation the planet is facing, but despite the extent of this damage, we still fail to face up to the crisis we are causing. We are often only concerned with how humans are impacted or will be impacted. According to Hoffman (2004), the environmental crisis we confront today is different both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. This implies that the environmental crisis today is very different from historically. This is both from the extent or degree of environmental damage and the types of damage. This is due to so many people inflicting damage on the ecosystem as a whole (Hoffman, 2004:11). Despite the discovery of the magnitude of the universe, and the resulting displacement of humanity from their dominant position, in the last few centuries, humankind remains self-absorbed. It has been discovered that the universe is far larger than previously thought by humans, and therefore cannot be seen as something to be dominated by humans, as previously believed. However, this knowledge comes a little too late as our human attitude towards the environment has already caused the crisis we face.

We have as a society a momentous decision to make, because it is widely agreed that if we do not change our behaviour, we will be facing a situation from which we cannot recover. The question is how we can enact this behavioural change, and what ethical foundation we base our decisions in order to ensure that we are doing the right thing. Some believe that the environmental crisis stems from a crisis in consciousness. How then do we bring about a change of consciousness in order to create a healthy environment?

In this chapter I have discussed the environment and the various definitions of the environment that is available in literature and legislation today. I further explained the degradation to the environment and the various types of degradation to the various aspects of the environment. I discussed and provided statistics in terms of the extent of the environmental degradation we are facing today.

In the next chapter I will be discussing philosophies, specifically environmental philosophies and how they have contributed to the environmental degradation we are seeing above.

## CHAPTER THREE: PHILOSOPHY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Aldo Leopold's famous essay, "The Land Ethic", argues that environmental problems are fundamentally philosophical in nature, and require a resolution that has a philosophical foundation (1949). In this chapter, I will briefly discuss the connections between environmental problems and philosophy by giving a brief history of philosophy, and an overview of environmental ethics. I will also discuss the various theories within environmental ethics and their advantages and disadvantages. I will focus in particular on different theories of value, and explain why anthropocentrism is not an appropriate foundation for determining our responsibilities towards the environment.

### 3.2 PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS

Records show though that in western culture, philosophy goes back at least 2700 years, while some eastern philosophies go back even further (Scherer et al, 1979:1). There are many sub-disciplines of philosophy, but there are two eras which have been most influential in shaping philosophical attitudes, especially with regards to the environment. These are classical Greek philosophy and early modern European philosophy (Hargrove, 1988:16).

The era of Greek philosophy is further divided into two parts: the two hundred years before Socrates, and all the philosophies that followed until the Roman conquest. Pre-Socratic philosophy, one could say, was largely pre-occupied with speculation about the natural world. Philosophers such as Empedocles, Anaximander, and Thales speculated about nature and its substance. However simplistic the concepts of these philosophies might appear to us, they seemed to have evolved into the studies that helped make possible the kind of physics we know today. The theory of matter in Thales' philosophy has been one of the most prominent influences of Greek thought on Western philosophy (Hargrove, 1988:20).

From the Western perspective, Greek philosopher Socrates is seen as the father of philosophy. It was this influence that explains why Greek philosophy has shaped Western philosophy and civilization to such a large degree. Socrates, known as the father of philosophy, who lived from c.470 to c.399 BCE, was said to be a thorn in the side of the leaders of ancient Athens: he was seen as a corrupter of young men due to his uncompromising search for the objective understanding of moral virtues such as piety, courage, and – most importantly – justice. He was strongly focused on self-examination and on the notion of tending to the soul, becoming renowned for his saying, "Know thyself". Even Socrates knew that all solutions started with oneself (Prabhupada , 2011:271).

The two most prominent ancient Greek philosophers after Socrates were Plato and Aristotle, who were considered to be more diverse and richer in thought than any of the pre-Socratic thinkers. Plato gave the world the idea that the “universality of concepts suggested that there were forms or ideas that govern our perceptions of the world and our thought” (Hargrove, 1988:20).

The second period of philosophy that needs our attention is the modern era in philosophy, which began in the early 17th century and includes most of the 20th century. Although Greek philosophy is still regarded as the primary source of philosophical perspectives, modern philosophy has played a similar role.

The key philosopher at the start of the modern philosophy era was René Descartes, whose legacy lasted through almost the entire modern period. It was as a result of his work that modern philosophy was given its distinguishing form. Like the majority of the philosophers during this period, Descartes was a rationalist (Hargrove, 1988:36).

According to Nuttall (2002:1), philosophy aims to help us see our place in this world - philosophy stems from wondering about the world and our place in it. Nuttall also claims that philosophy is an activity rather than a subject. You “do” philosophy rather than learn about it. Both Nuttall (2002:2) and Scherer et al (1979:5) agree that philosophy entails logical thinking. Philosophy involves conceptual analysis and reflecting on how we actually think about things. Ethics, as a subdiscipline of philosophy, attempts to resolve moral matters through the use of reasoning, by reflecting upon, and theorizing about, what is right and wrong. Such ethical reflection provides the building blocks for developing ethical theories. Applied Ethics uses the normative standards derived from these theories in argumentation around practical moral issues. This shows the link between ethics and philosophy. Ethics reflects on how we think about things with regard to what is right and wrong. Applied Ethics has immediate implications for human behaviour, and thus bridges the gap between theory and practice (Scherer et al, 1979: 78).

Bennett (2010:xi) argues that logical arguments are central to philosophy. He argues that if one purely based one’s beliefs about what is right or wrong on strong feelings, then there would be no requirement for investigation of moral questions. He argues that we need to instead rely on arguments when we make claims about right and wrong and about how we should behave. Arguments set out the reasons for reaching particular conclusions. Arguments can moreover lead us to question our ethical beliefs and behaviours in relation to these conclusions. According to Bennett (2010:xii), the aim of moral philosophy is to construct a theory that explains in a systematic



and consistent manner what the right thing is to do in any situation. The aim of this thesis is to argue for a framework for environmental philosophy that can help to address these kinds of questions.

There are generally four main areas of philosophy. These are metaphysics, aesthetics, epistemology, and moral or political philosophies. The area of metaphysics examines the ultimate reality of nature: is the world real and if not then what is real? Aesthetics is a stream of philosophy that deals with the study of matter of beauty and taste. Epistemology deals with knowledge - its origin as well as its limitations. Finally moral or political philosophy considers how we should conduct ourselves in the world. What guides this conduct in the world, and is such guidance adequate? In this thesis, I will touch upon both epistemological and moral questions.

### **3.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCIENCE AND ETHICS**

Many may question whether philosophy and ethics are still important fields of study in a context where science is highly valued and often regarded as a potential solution to all of our problems. Science is seen as something which can tell us what our place in the world is and which can make the natural world and its workings transparent to us. Ethics and science seem to have something in common, in that they both attempt to provide an unbiased and rational source of information (Desjardins 2013:8), and therefore to provide a suitable platform for decision-making. One could therefore ask whether science is capable of providing the kind of guidance that ethics tries to offer, and therefore whether ethical study is still necessary. However, this argument is flawed. It is worth noting that blind trust in science that has led to some of the worst environmental challenges that we now face. It is then necessary to ask if science is enough, and if it alone can indeed provide adequate guidance for making decisions. According to Desjardins (2013), leaving decisions to science alone and attempting to take up an objective and value-neutral perspective without considering ethical issues, can cause problems. We cannot simply study nature or the environment, without considering its value. This raises the next question: what then needs to be considered when determining the value of the environment, and how do we address these issues, if science is not the answer?

### **3.4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS**

Environmental ethics can potentially be employed to answer these questions, and to develop guidelines around our treatment of the environment. Environmental ethics is a tributary of philosophy and ethics that considers the moral obligations that humans have towards their environment. It can be defined as an endeavour to communicate and categorise different values, and to guide people in their treatment of the natural world. In other words, it is “a comprehensive reasoned view about how we ought to be dealing with our non-human environment” (Van De Veer and Pierce, 2003: xviii).

There are many decisions that humans make with respect to the environment that are ethical in nature, such as:

- Should we cut down forests for housing for humans?
- Should we continue making gasoline powered vehicles?
- What are our environmental obligations and do we need to provide for future generations?
- Should we consume animals as a food source for the pleasure of humans?
- How can we best use space and the environment for securing and expanding life?

Asking such questions about our moral responsibility towards the environment, coupled with increasing environmental degradation, has caused many to think differently about how we act towards the environment. This, one could say, was the birth of environmental ethics.

As mentioned previously, the push for a new way of perceiving our moral duties towards the environment was predominately due to the environmental crisis. Previously, the focus had been on economic and social development. Decisions made by previous generations to foster such development are responsible for the environmental degradation we are seeing today, even though this was not deliberate. Environmental ethics, in the spirit of philosophical reflection, prompts us to question these decisions (Desjardins, 2013:6).

Simplistically, environmental ethics is a structured account of the moral relation between humans and their natural environment which relies on the fact that ethical norms can and do govern human behaviour with regard to the natural world. Environmental ethics in layman's terms concerns the relationship between humankind and the environment, and the responsibilities of the former toward the latter.

Academics and philosophers such as Singer, Regan, Leopold and White paved the way for a different way of thinking about this relationship. Aldo Leopold's *Land Ethic* (1949) argued for the extension of ethics to include the land, construed broadly to mean the biotic community as a whole, and humanity's relationship with it. The development of environmental ethics was further supported by papers such as Lynn White's *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis* (March 1967), and Garrett Hardin's *Tragedy of the Commons* (December 1968). These thinkers laid the foundation for a rethinking of our perception and treatment of the environment and non-human life.

The academic field of environmental ethics developed further in reaction to works such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, and events such as Earth Day in 1970, when environmentalists started urging

philosophers to consider the philosophical aspects of environmental problems. These events were supported by the publication of reports like *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 1972) and *A Blueprint for Survival* (Goldsmith and Allen 1972), which questioned whether the human race could survive if we continued with business as usual. Increasing environmental degradation, and talk of a looming environmental crisis, continued to build momentum for the development of the field of environmental ethics. The main message of these reports was that if humankind does not cease to abuse the natural environment, this would ultimately lead to the extinction of the human species. This also entailed a warning - that scientific progress must be balanced with ethics.

The relationship between science and ethics has been discussed above, and the importance of this relationship is supported by Goldsmith and Allen in their *Blueprint for Survival*. They argued that scientific and ethical insights should be used in combination to develop a standard of social living which would enable us to prevent extinction; namely, small, decentralised and deindustrialised communities.

*The Limits to Growth* speaks of the rate of economic and population growth, and argues that this continuing growth cannot be supported by available natural resources. Meadows et al. believed that the long terms problems that would this would cause are a result of “the arms race, environmental deterioration, the population explosion, and economic stagnation” (1972:17). This problem is not only exacerbated by the rate of growth, but also by the unfair and unequal distribution of economic growth, where the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. Using a computer model to simulate the outcomes of the continuing growth of the world economy, this report attempted to show that unless growth stops, the earth will not be able to sustain human needs, leading to extinction.

These concerns about an impending environmental crisis laid the foundation for the development of environmental ethics, which was unrepresented in Western philosophy until the mid-1970s (Rolston 2012:19). This has drastically changed in the last three decades. However, it has proved difficult to find a unified valued theory in this field - many of the disagreement within environmental ethics have to do with divergent attitudes and opinions as to what holds intrinsic value and what doesn't. One such question that has been around since the earliest forms of philosophy, and that is still debated, is that of value, and what constitutes value (Rolston & Light, 2003:16).

### **3.5 VALUE THEORIES IN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS**

Environmental ethics argues for the extension of traditional ethical boundaries to include humans as well as non-humans and the environment as a whole, but there is disagreement about the justification for this extension, specifically around the question as to what has intrinsic value and

what does not. Throughout history, it has always been a challenge to find common ground with regard to beliefs about what is right or wrong, or what has value and what does not have value. There are in existence many theories within environmental ethics that take different positions on the value of the environment. These positions are derived from a variety of ethical traditions, ranging from Plato to John Stuart Mill and G.E. Moore. These various segments of environmental philosophy can be depicted below.



**Figure 4: Positions on the environment in contemporary philosophy**

Source: Hattingh, 2015

In each of the segments, the meaning of the word 'value' varies in relation to the theory or philosophical viewpoint. These are broken down into three: instrumental values, intrinsic values, and the transformational agenda. Each of these three spheres has a different focus. The instrumental focus is on the instrumental value of the environment for human use: humans transcend nature and are superior to it. This is generally an anthropocentric sphere of environmental ethics. The intrinsic focus holds that nature has an inherent value, that nature and other living beings have interests that are not dependent on human needs. This includes the concept of extending rights to nature. Finally, the transformational agenda, as the name suggests, advocates for radical change in our way of life and the way in which we view the relationship between human beings and nature. Deep ecology, for example, adopts a more spiritual perspective on nature and on the interconnectedness of nature and humans.

Instrumental value is determined by the worth placed on an item, based on its usefulness to an end-user. For example, water has instrumental value for humans, as it is required for many aspects of life.

Non-instrumental value is when value is placed on a thing or being itself, and this is not derived from its being seen as a means to an end. This is also known as intrinsic value – the term used above. The discussion about intrinsic value raises further questions about the source of such value. Can humans be trusted to define or allocate such value? Are they qualified to define such value?

The prevalent argument of environmentalists is about what actually constitutes intrinsic value, and how far it extends. Does it include the attributes of individual living organisms, or does it only relate to more abstract qualities such as diversity, naturalness, richness, or balance (Rolston & Light, 2003:17)? Rolston (2012) argues that value in nature existed before humans, and so humans cannot be the ones to determine its value. He adds that the natural world is not only valuable in as much as it is useful to humans: it is also valuable to other living beings and to the greater aspects of nature and the whole created order (Rolston, 2012:24).

These various arguments about the value of nature have led many to believe that humans cannot decide what should be considered intrinsically valuable. However, it is agreed that any environmental ethical belief system must be based on some value theory, as the two are inseparable.

The drive to base this value theory on another source is the current position of environmental ethics. In the opinion of the author, the predominant environmental ethic that is adopted is anthropocentric (or human-centred) in nature. This approach is that the non-human world is deemed valuable to humans as a means to an end. It is seen as offering humans spiritual, aesthetic, and physical value. Even if this was not its intention, the anthropocentric mind-set has resulted in the exploitation of the natural non-human world. Some argue that the anthropocentric ethic is meant to preserve natural resources and to manage them carefully, even if this is purely for human benefit.

A broadly anthropocentric view underpins much international environmental policy decision-making. Coupled with the current environmental degradation, this is the primary reason why more and more environmentalists and environmental philosophers are asking for a new environmental ethic.

An environmental ethic and philosophy should be viewed as the philosophers' opportunity to mend the common philosophical error of disregarding the environment, thereby failing to provide a foundation for the evaluation of environmental matters.

The nature and extent of our responsibilities towards the environment depends on which of the various theories of environmental ethics we accept. These responsibilities are fundamentally broken down into two types: direct responsibilities and indirect responsibilities. Indirect responsibilities are to preserve resources, keep the environment clean and so on, as this will be of benefit to humans, and these are therefore duties that we owe to humans. In this case, we are seen as having responsibilities regarding the natural world but not to the natural world. Theories, which hold that we have only indirect duties to the environment are considered to be anthropocentric (Desjardins, 2013:16). As noted above, anthropocentrism regards the environment as having instrumental value for human beings.

The converse set of theories maintain that we have direct responsibilities to the natural world. These theories are referred to as non-anthropocentric. They grant moral standing to aspects of the natural world, such as animals and plants, and this moral standing is not based on human needs or desires. In other words, non-anthropocentrism typically makes reference to the intrinsic value of the environment. Holism, or holistic ethics, is a branch of non-anthropocentrism which focuses not on the moral value of individual humans, plants or animals, but on the moral value of collectives or “wholes”, such as species, populations or ecosystems (Desjardins, 2013:17).

For the purposes of this thesis, the following definitions of anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism will be used:

**Anthropocentrism:** Only human life has value. The non-human world's value is derived from the fact that it serves human interests. This kind of value is typically formulated as instrumental value.

**Non-Anthropocentrism:** The natural world (including humans and non-humans) has intrinsic value. This value is inherent, and is not based directly or indirectly on human needs. This raises the question as to the foundation of this value, if it is not associated with human interest.

In what follows, I will consider the notions of instrumental and intrinsic value in more detail, before going on to discuss the different forms of anthropocentrism, and in particular, whether any form of anthropocentrism can be an adequate foundation of environmental ethics.

### 3.5.1 Instrumental value

Anthropocentric ethics, as noted above, is typically associated with the idea that the non-human environment is instrumentally valuable. Desjardins (2013:131) explains that instrumental value is a “function of usefulness”. Something is deemed to have such value only when it can be used to obtain something of greater value, or when it is a means to an end for human beings. The instrumental

value of something therefore lies not in the object itself, but rather in what it can be used for. When the uses of the object are exhausted or expunged, the object can be replaced. In anthropocentric ethics, objects with instrumental value typically include all non-human entities, and not only manmade physical objects.

Many believe that the environmental situation that we are faced with today is a result of regarding the environment and non-human entities as having instrumental value only. Desjardins (2013:130) proclaims that basing an environmental ethic purely on instrumental value is likely to be problematic. This is due to the fact that human needs are constantly varying and changing. There is therefore no overarching method of deciding what has instrumental value other than determining what humans consider at a point in time to be of value from an anthropocentric perspective. Given that human needs are diverse, fluid and subject to change, and that perspectives on what has value will therefore necessarily alter over time, there is no guarantee that instrumental value will provide the environment with enduring protection, and this could have (and has had) disastrous consequences. Bestowing instrumental value also does not necessarily foster an attitude of respect towards the non-human environment in itself. Rather, the value of non-human entities is determined by human beliefs about what has value in the here and now. These beliefs are neither objective, nor are they determined by some authoritative source.

### **3.5.2 Intrinsic value**

Because of the problems discussed above, many environmental ethicists have argued that we should reject the idea that the value of the non-human environment is only derived from the contribution it makes to meeting the needs of humans. McShane (2007), for example, in her definition of non-anthropocentrism, argues that the core of this group of theories is that the centre of moral concern should not be based solely upon human interests. She argues that this approach is necessary, as such self-centeredness is likely to incur significant environmental costs. However, she leaves as an open question what the centre of value should be instead (2007, 171). Does it make sense to say, for example, that the environment has intrinsic value, and, if so, what does this mean?

Hargrove (1992:185) notes that what humankind and society has traditionally perceived as intrinsic value, for example, the intrinsic value that humans find in art, is seen as inadequate by environmentalists, who instead look for non-anthropocentric intrinsic value in the environment that is entirely independent of human beings. Intrinsic value to the environmentalist is therefore typically something beyond the kind of intrinsic value that we think art has, because this kind of value remains associated with human judgement, and therefore anthropocentrism. Hargrove (1989), however, argues against the idea that anthropocentrism necessarily involves the idea that the environment only has instrumental value. He defines anthropocentrism as simply seeing things from the standpoint of



humans (1992:183), and believes that weak anthropocentrism can accommodate both intrinsic value and instrumental value. In other words, he argues that the bestowal of anthropocentric intrinsic value is possible, and is all that environmental ethics requires (1992:184). In this regard, Hargrove (1989) draws attention to the distinction made by Taylor (2005) between what is “intrinsically valued” and what has “inherent worth”. According to Taylor (2005):

*[A]n entity is intrinsically valued...only in relation to its being valued in a certain way by some human valuer. The entity may be a person, animal, or plant, a physical object, a place or even a social practice. Any such entity is intrinsically valued insofar as some person cherishes it, holds it dear or precious, loves, admires, or appreciates it for what it is in itself, or so places intrinsic value on its existence. This value is independent of whatever instrumental or commercial value it might have. When something is intrinsically valued by someone, it is deemed by that person to be worthy of being preserved and protected because it is the particular thing that it is (cited in Hargrove 1992, 188).*

This is the kind of anthropocentric intrinsic value that Hargrove (1992) thinks is sufficient for environmental ethics. Taylor (2005), however, denies that it is enough to intrinsically value the environment. Instead, he argues that the environment has a kind of intrinsic value that supersedes human judgement altogether. He calls this kind of intrinsic value “inherent worth” (cited in Hargrove 1992, 188).

Inherent worth, according to Taylor (2005), is:

*[T]he value something has simply in virtue of the fact that it has a good of its own. To say that an entity has inherent worth is to say that its good (welfare, well-being) is deserving of the concern and consideration of all moral agents and that the realization of its good is something to be promoted or protected as an end in itself and for the sake of the being whose good it is (cited in Hargrove 1992: 189).*

In other words, beings that have inherent worth deserve protection, and their interests ought to be promoted, not only because humans intrinsically value them, but for their own sake – because it is in their best interest, and because their good is an end in itself. It is this latter definition of intrinsic value as intrinsic worth that I will argue for in this thesis, and that is closest to the definition of intrinsic value generally found in the philosophies of the eastern religions that I will explore.

At this point it is necessary to explore anthropocentric philosophy in a little more detail. If, as Hargrove (1989) argues above, it is possible to accommodate intrinsic value within an



anthropocentric position, is this not sufficient as a foundation for environmental ethics? I will argue against this idea, and will instead explain why anthropocentrism alone is not well-suited to serve as such a foundation. It is my opinion that this type of ethic, that has dominated our historical relationship with the environment, is the cause of existing environmental degradation.

### 3.5.3 Anthropocentrism

According to its Greek origins, the word anthropocentrism can be broken down into two concepts: “human” and “centre”, meaning that humans are seen as being at the centre of things. Humans are therefore regarded, under this view, as the most significant species, and as possessing a moral status higher than any other species or component of the natural world. This kind of anthropocentric attitude is deeply embedded in many cultures, and lies at the foundation of many of the behaviours that are accepted in contemporary society. It lies at the heart of humankind’s attempts to dominate nature and all her living and non-living entities. Wapner (2009) claims that this attitude entails that people care less about non-humans and nature than they do about themselves, and that nature is viewed in instrumental terms. He stresses that this failing is primarily a moral one, whereby humans fail to adequately appreciate the worth of the environment (2009: 205).

For at least the past thirty years, there has been an ongoing debate amongst environmentalists about whether anthropocentrism can serve as an adequate foundation for environmental ethics. As noted above, the fundamental difference between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism is the value and interests that are ascribed to humans and non-humans. Critics of anthropocentrism point out that, having given anthropocentrism the benefit of the doubt, we find ourselves thirty years later facing the worst environmental crisis of our history, due to the fact that this form of environmental ethics has not been adopted in a responsible manner (McShane 2007:170).

It is important to note that anthropocentrism can take two forms: strong anthropocentrism and weak anthropocentrism. Strong anthropocentrism, as defined by Norton, entails that value is determined by the degree of satisfaction of human beings’ “felt preferences” (1994:135). Norton defines a “felt preference” as “any desire or need of a human individual that can at least temporarily be sated by some specifiable experience of that individual” (1984: 134). Weak anthropocentrism, on the other hand, entails that value is determined by the degree of satisfaction of human beings’ considered preferences. Considered preferences are preferences that would be expressed after careful thought and deliberation. This deliberation would include considering whether a desire or need is consistent with a rationally adopted worldview that is fully supported by scientific evidence.

A common conjecture has been that for an environmental ethic to be adequate, it must be non-anthropocentric. However, some philosophers challenge this viewpoint. Authors such as Norton

(1984) and Hargrove (1992), for example, argue that weak anthropocentrism can be adopted as a successful environmental ethic. Norton (1984) claims in this respect that weak anthropocentrism can provide the platform to challenge the value systems which lead to the exploitation of nature. Weak anthropocentrism, he claims, calls for a new worldview whereby harmony with nature, and the relationship between humans and the environment, is valued (Norton, 1984: 135). This worldview is compatible with the considered preferences of human beings, as this will lead to the protection of the natural environment indefinitely, where such protection is ultimately directed towards the serving of human interests in perpetuity.

However, one may question whether this version of anthropocentrism is likely to be successful in excluding the possibility of the exploitation of nature. Ultimately, it is still humans that bestow value on nature, whether on the basis of felt or considered preferences. These methods of determining value are therefore based purely on human experiences, rather than on any higher authoritative source. One may question here why a higher authority than human experiences is necessary. The foremost reason is that history has shown that what humans typically prefer is their own benefit or gain – humans tend to be inherently selfish and focused on their own self-preservation. Given that they are the dominant species, this focus is likely to lead to the abuse of the natural environment.

In addition, while Norton (1984) argues that considered preferences should take into account scientific insights, this does not take into account that science itself is an ever-evolving arena that has not necessarily reached final or ultimate truth, and that scientific practice is carried out by humans who are necessarily influenced by their own subjective experiences. What is needed is a source that transcends a narrow focus on human thought and influence. Some may argue that such a source does not exist, but many scholars, philosophers, and surprisingly enough, some scientists, have argued that religion could provide such a possible source. This argument, for example, is put forward by John Passmore, who claims that an ethic for environmental responsibility must come from the intellectual traditions of religion and culture (cited in Katz, 1991:81).

The call for weak anthropocentrism as a foundation for environmental ethics is not unique to Norton (1984). Such a call has also been made by environmental ethicists such as Hargrove (1992) Light & Katz (1991) and Minter (2006), as noted by Wapner (2009:206). The primary reason for such a call was dissatisfaction with arguments focusing on instrumental value alone. Hargrove (1992), for example, denies that anthropocentrism necessarily implies that the environment only has instrumental value, or that it only has instrumental value for human beings. He distinguishes between two forms of non-anthropocentric value. Firstly, aspects of the non-human environment are instrumentally valuable to other non-human organisms (for example, in prey-predator relationships), and secondly, the non-human environment holds intrinsic value, in that individual organisms have

goods of their own and pursue their own self-realization. However, for Hargrove (1989), “the fact that a particular creature has a good of its own is not enough automatically to produce moral behaviour on behalf of the creature. After discovering that something has a good of its own, the human or humans must decide to intrinsically value it” (1992:191). Hargrove’s (1992) version of weak anthropocentrism therefore calls for human beings precisely to recognise and respect this non-anthropocentric value by valuing the non-human environment intrinsically, or for its own sake. Human valuation of the environment is necessary under this form of anthropocentrism in order to produce human moral obligations towards the environment, but this valuation does not focus on the instrumental value of the environment alone, and acknowledges a form of non-anthropocentric intrinsic value. Hargrove (1989) also does not think that this makes human valuations of the environment entirely subjective in that they are left up to the individual. Rather, culture shapes our values, and the decision to value nature intrinsically is therefore also necessarily influenced by cultural and, notably, religious considerations.

I agree that there is a possibility of adopting such a form of weak anthropocentrism, but not Norton’s (1984) definition, as I find that these definitions and arguments fall short of having a suitable independence from human ideals and perceptions. There have been some criticisms supporting this. Frasz (1987), for example, argues that Norton’s (1984) weak anthropocentrism can collapse into strong anthropocentrism if all values are ultimately reduced to the satisfaction of human preferences (1978:17). Even in his version of weak anthropocentrism, the worldview and judgments are all dependent on humans and human consciousness, and no possibility of non-anthropocentric intrinsic value is acknowledged. This leaves Norton’s (1984) weak anthropocentrism open for much debate with regard to its adequacy as an environmental ethic. On the converse though, there is much merit in the consideration of Hargrove’s (1992) combination of non-anthropocentrism and weak anthropocentrism. However, I would argue that even Hargrove’s (1992) form of weak anthropocentrism is inadequate, as it still relies on the notion of a human valuer, and that a more authoritative source is needed as the value decision maker.

In summary, the reality is that existing practices and philosophies are biased towards anthropocentrism, and that even in the case of weak anthropocentrism, the end is for human benefit. Morals, ethics, and judgments are all relative to human behaviour, thoughts, beliefs, and to a degree, culture.

Humans have used moral philosophy and western religious principles in their justification for considering the human population to be of more importance. This is a position that continues to guide and govern human conduct (Grey 2007:464). However, the greatest problem with anthropocentric ethics is that they are directed towards the benefit of humans and not all living

beings. McShane (2007) argues this point by saying that anthropocentrism will constrain our attitudes to the natural world, and thereby place limits on how we care about it, especially with relation to non-human beings (McShane, 2007:178).

Sessions (1974:71), supports this position in his article, 'Anthropocentrism and the Environmental Crisis', when he refers to an increasing number of scholars who have determined that anthropocentrism, as derived from Western religious beliefs and philosophical traditions, has played a large role in the environmental crisis. In the light of human behaviours today, can we still confidently say that we are the correct species to make moral decisions without some form of higher guidance? Where does moral philosophy and our "moral compass" come from, or is it left to society and social norms to set the standards of acceptable behaviour? Even if we claim that morality can be based on rational, objective argument, human beings are limited in their thinking capacity as a result of their inherent biases. This vicious cycle continues, in that again we leave human beings to make decisions about the value of nature that are not based on a strong, higher foundation. We make these decisions taking only human interests into consideration as we have always done (Grey 2007:464).

As noted above, intrinsic value can be summed up as having a value in itself. Simply put, something has intrinsic value when it is valuable in itself and not valued only for its usefulness. The value of the existence of such a thing is independent of human judgment. However no academic, philosopher or theologian has managed to find that silver thread which will allow environmental ethics to be independent of human input, thereby conquering the criticisms of weak anthropocentrism.

### **3.6 CONCLUSION**

How then do we get out of the vicious circle and base a decision on a framework that takes all of creation into consideration? How do we find a neutral and unbiased platform upon which to base moral philosophy? Grey (2007:464) proposes scientific technologies as offering the possibility of finding a solution. But I have argued above that science does not have all the solutions. Where then do we turn? Religion may be a useful source here.

In this chapter I have discussed philosophy, ethics, and more specifically, environmental philosophy and ethics. I have touched on various types of environmental ethics and their benefits and disadvantages.

In the next chapter I will discuss religion and their philosophies. The purpose will be to show how the principles of religion can supplement the shortfalls in environmental philosophies.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RELIGION AND ITS PHILOSOPHIES

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Does religious belief or faith have a role to play in the environmental debate? Could religious foundations, teachings, and principles be the basis for the new environmental ethic that is being called for (Gill, 1998:412)?

I will argue that religion may help, be it a specific religion or all religions collectively, to determine our proper relation to the natural world. Religion is an idiosyncratic institutional, cultural, and moral resource that can contribute to environmentalism in a way that is unlikely to be found in any other source. Religion is intended to be a strong motivator of behaviour that may be of assistance if we wish to reverse the environmental crisis, pushing people to act and think, beyond health, self, and economy. Knowingly or not, religious philosophies are intricately linked to an environmental consciousness. They all speak to some degree to the importance and care of the environment (Farrell, 2006:15).

- In Christianity, the primary source is the Bible. Christianity has had a concern for the environment from the start. One of the 10 commandments is “Thou shall not kill” (Holy Bible). A number of Christian institutes promote spirituality and environmentalism (Hessel and Ruether, 2000)
- In Islam, the messages from the Quran and the prophets are that the environment is sacred and that it was not created for any random reason or for humanity. It was depicted as a reflection of truth. Many of the chapters of the Quran make reference to the beauties of nature and of its importance. (Holy Quran)
- In Judaism the environment plays a vital role in its regulations, literature, and philosophy. There is much focus on the relationship and interaction between humans and the environment. Judaism is primarily anthropocentric in its outlook.
- Buddhism idealises and stresses the interconnection between humanity and the environment. It creates a mind-set of cooperation between humans and the environment by focusing on compassion and a sense of balance. Buddhism is a strong believer in non-violence towards all living beings, and condemns consuming meat for this reason.
- Hinduism – Gaudiya Vaishnava – is a religion that believes that every living entity is a spirit soul, and that each spirit soul is valuable. All living beings have a right to live and have a purpose in life. The purpose is its own, and not to meet human needs. Similar to Buddhism, Hindus believe that damage to others is damage to oneself.

One may ask whether Lynn White's article (mentioned in Chapter 1) has forced people to rethink, to face the harsh truths about the negative roots of the environmental crisis within religion, and also to lead them to explore a more positive relationship between religion and environmental ethics. I will argue that religion can assist in establishing this relationship. There has been a long-standing and documented relationship between religion and the environment. Worldwide, within many religions, questions are surfacing about the relationship between humans and nature – more specifically, the impact that humans have on nature.

We have seen the common tendency to view the human-nature relationship via the Christian religious viewpoint or belief system (Melin, 2006:358). This in turn has brought about the general belief that humans have dominion over the earth and nature, including other living beings. Yet, the Hebrew roots of the word 'dominion' are to manage and care (Melin, 2006:359). Melin (2006) adds that, even if humans were meant to have dominion over the earth, this in no way implied or inferred that they had the right to exploit it.

Other religions have shared the viewpoint that nature was not meant to be exploited or dominated. Buddhist teaching on the interconnectedness of all things meant that all creatures and living beings were closely linked for a higher purpose. Buddhists share a greater awareness than most religions of the relationship between humans and nature (Melin, 2006:362).

Hindu teachings and philosophy, especially those of the Gaudiya Vaishnavism movement, explain that all living entities, whatever their form, belong to a superior spiritual energy. As such, human beings do not have the right to lay claim over non-human beings. Hindus do not make any distinction between species, seeing all as equally part of the superior spiritual energy. They also believe that all living beings, human and non-human, are on this earth to fulfil a specific duty; and if humans interfere with this cycle, it impacts the karma of non-humans and humans alike. They practise self-restraint, founded on the ethic of limiting consumption, simple living, and higher thinking. The Gaudiya Vaishnava movement shares a common ideology with deep ecology: it touches on the self and nature, while simultaneously introducing a way of life that is in harmony with nature.

In this chapter I will discuss the two religions that I have chosen to focus on, namely the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement and Buddhism. The beliefs of these two religions will be discussed in detail, and in further chapters I will try to show how they may use to supplement or strengthen environmental ethics. In what follows, I will explain the history of the religions, their teaching and philosophies.

When one thinks of religion, images of angelic figures dressed in long robes might come to mind. Generally, when one asks what 'religion' is, people tend to think of churches, temples, statues, the Kabah in Mecca, shrines in India, and other places of worship. This, however, is not what religion is; rather, these are images associated with religion. There are many views of religion, such as those focusing on ancestry, the sacred, and the supernatural. The faith of a person may be Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, or something else; and they might accept their faith and reject the others. Some think of religion primarily as an emotional relationship, while others perceive it as a moral guide.

History shows a perplexing variety of religions, spiritual movements, cults, denominations and sects of every type. This variety reflects the geographic, linguistic, and social diversity of the planet. Those that have studied the various religions seek to find some commonality in order to arrive at an overarching definition. However, given the vast range of religious expressions, commonalities become near-impossible to find (Idinopulos, 1998: 366). The exact meaning of the word 'religion' is therefore hard to pin down as it is difficult to arrive at a common definition. This leads to many people not knowing how to use the word, or even what misuses of the word entail (Idinopulos, 1998: 368).

Even among the experts, there is disagreement about the definition of religion (Crawford, 2002:4). Where, then, should one find a definition of religion? Given that religion is often associated with Holy Scriptures, that could be taken as the basis for a definition. One spiritual movement, Gaudiya Vaishnava, defines real religion based on their spiritual teachings: "Real religion means to know God, our relation with God and our duties in relation to him and to know our destination after leaving this material body" (Prabhupada; 1972; 600).

## **4.2 GAUDIYA VAISHNAVA INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS (ISKCON) – INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY**

The spiritual movement using the title above is the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement. The Gaudiya Vaishnavism society believes that religion connects us with God. If any practice is incapable of connecting us with God, then it is not considered to be religion. Religion, according to Gaudiya Vaishnavism, involves searching for, understanding, and establishing a relationship with God. This will be one of the religious frameworks used in this thesis, discussed in conjunction with Buddhism. Hinduism is undoubtedly a way of life; however it has many varieties. The Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition is part of the larger branch of Hinduism known as Vaishnavism, and is the type of yoga practice that is referred to as 'Bhakti-Yoga'.



The Gaudiya Vaishnava movement, which is more commonly known today as the Hare Krishna movement, was originally founded by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1534) in India. Mahaprabhu began the revitalization of this movement in West Bengal, where it originally began. ‘Gaudiya’ in fact refers to the Indian region of West Bengal, and ‘Vaishnavism’ refers to the worship of Krishna. The scriptural foundations of this movement are the four Vedas, the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavad-Gita<sup>2</sup>. Their main focus is on devotional service or the worship of Radha and Krishna, or what is known as Bhakti Yoga (Prabhupada, 2011: 3).

Bhakti Yoga is the practical process of devotional life. The two main elements are devotional service through the practice of rules and regulations, and worship of the deity. Both processes, however, are simply to teach people the process of bhakti, or how to attain perfection of life by living one’s life in loving devotion to God. The Gaudiya Vaishnavism movement was later reinstated as the movement that is more commonly known today as the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), or the Hare Krishna, by his Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Srila Prabhupada, who ensured that all the rules and regulations, practices and principles and teachings of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu were adopted. The Hare Krishna movement was established in 1966 when Srila Prabhupada left India to spread the message of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. According to Prabhupada, this Gaudiya Vaishnava movement is not a blind religious organization, but rather an authorised, scientific approach to the matter of our eternal necessity in relation to God (1998:2). As with the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement, Srila Prabhupada based the teaching and traditions on the Bhagavad-Gita, but on only one Veda, the Srimad Bhagavatam.

Srila Prabhupada developed seven purposes for the Hare Krishna or Gaudiya Vaishnava movement. These seven purposes are:

**1. “To systematically propagate spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all people in the techniques of spiritual life in order to check the imbalance of values in life and to achieve real unity and peace in the world.”**

Srila Prabhupada’s fundamental desire was to impart spiritual knowledge and techniques “in order to correct the imbalance of values in life and achieve real unity and peace in the world”. He taught that, when we realise a higher sense of ourselves as individuals, and our uniqueness beyond the bodily concept, a platform of equality can be achieved. This then breeds a culture of respect – the cornerstone of peace and unity.

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<sup>2</sup> These four Vedas, the Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita are bodies of spiritual knowledge, philosophies and rituals. The contents of these scriptures are considered to be words of God.



**2. “To propagate a consciousness of Krishna (God), as it is revealed in the great scriptures of India, Bhagavad-Gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam.”**

**3. “To bring the members of the Society together with each other and nearer to Krishna, the prime entity, thus developing the idea within the members, and humanity at large, that each soul is part and parcel of the quality of Godhead (Krishna).”**

**4. “To teach and encourage the sankirtana movement, congregational chanting of the holy name of God, as revealed in the teachings of Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu”.**

**5. “To erect for the members and for society at large a holy place of transcendental pastimes dedicated to the personality of Krishna.”**

**6. “To bring the members closer together for the purpose of teaching a simpler, more natural way of life.”**

The foundation of this purpose was to bring the supporters together to live a “simpler and more natural way of life”. The context of our lives is the earth and its elements – earth, water, fire, air, and ether. We share that with other humans, plants, and animals. This involves a call to move away from manufacturing and consuming artificial, unnatural and unnecessary things, and to move towards simpler and more sustainable lifestyles.

**7. “With a view towards achieving the aforementioned purposes, to publish and distribute periodicals, magazines, books and other writings.”**

The philosophy of this movement is based on the Vedas (which, literally translated, means ‘knowledge’). The Vedas are not compilations of human knowledge, but according to those who subscribe to them, emanate from the spiritual world. In the Vedic literature, devotional service is recommended.

Prabhupada taught that “[t]he basic principle of the living condition is that we have a general propensity to love someone” (2011: 5). However, our ‘loving propensity’ has become obscured, and has turned towards self-love and self-centeredness. Gaudiya Vaishnavism believes that, by the practice of bhakti yoga, we learn to develop pure love – that is, love for all living entities. This in turn creates a peaceful and harmonious society.

An analogy is used to explain this. When the roots of a tree are watered, the entire tree, including every leaf, is nourished, and energy is created. It is not possible to water a leaf and expect the entire tree to be nourished. The Hare Krishna or Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy believes that through understanding one's constitutional position, and one's purpose, a peaceful and harmonious environment can be achieved. When one understands what one's true purpose is on earth, one will live by the regulative principles stipulated in the scriptures (no harm, regarding all living entities and beings as part and parcel of the Supreme, no meat eating and living a life of service).

### **4.3 BUDDHISM: INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY**

Buddhism is a spiritual teaching or religion founded in India by Prince Siddhartha about 2,500 years ago. Siddhartha Gautama was born in India in 485 BCE (Erricker, 2015:ix). The Buddha ("the awakened or enlightened one") was the name given to Siddhartha Gautama, when he gained the insight to see through the misconceptions of life to reveal things as they really are (Erricker, 2015:x).

Siddhartha Gautama (or Buddha) was born at a time when Indian society resounded with religious ideas. The elite Brahmans practised the oldest religious scriptures, the Vedas, at that time. Brahmanism was the earliest practice of Hinduism, and the predominant religion at the time of Siddhartha Gautama (Harris, 2011:12). It was during his childhood that many other sects or variations on religions began to emerge.

Siddhartha Gautama was born into the Shalaya clan, and his father was a king. Theirs was the Kshatriya or warrior caste. He was, according to tradition, conceived via a dream, denoting his purity. His entire childhood was sheltered and protected. Five days after his birth, a clairvoyant or prophet visited Siddhartha Gautama and recognised all the signs of a mahapurusha or 'great man'. These consisted of 32 major signs and 80 minor signs (Harris, 2011:16). The sage also predicted that there was a high probability that Siddhartha Gautama would leave the clan in search of spiritual enlightenment. His father, who did not want that, undertook to protect him from life's uglier threats such as ageing, illness, disease, poverty, and death. He believed that, if he sheltered his son from this, he would not leave to seek spiritual enlightenment, as he would not be exposed to negativity and hence not seek an alternative (Harris, 2011:18). Siddhartha Gautama lived a life of luxury, studying 64 spiritual art forms, and expressing unusual sensitivity to the suffering of humans and animals.

Siddhartha Gautama married Yashodhara at the age of 16, and later had a son, Rahula. In his youth, Siddhartha Gautama managed to leave the shelter of the palace walls, and witnessed the realities of life, the concepts of old age, disease, suffering, and death. He returned to the palace perturbed

by what he saw and by the burden of humankind. This was the birth of Siddhartha's quest for a solution to stop or explain the burden of humankind, and thus of his spiritual enlightenment (Harris, 2011:19).

On his 29th birthday, Siddhartha Gautama left behind the palace and the life of luxury, including his wife and son, taking up the life of renunciation via meditation. By the age of 30 it was believed that Siddhartha Gautama had achieved enlightenment (Harris, 2011:33). According to documented scripture, Siddhartha's enlightenment was achieved in three phases. Stage one was the deep stage of meditation; stage two was the recollection of his past life and the past life of others; and the third stage was understanding the dharma (the universal law or truth), explaining the effects that cause the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (Harris, 2011:21).

After attaining this enlightenment, Siddhartha Gautama was called Buddha or 'the enlightened one'. After obtaining the state of enlightenment, Buddha could have left the world; instead he remained to teach the law or dharma he had discovered. This was the birth of Buddhism.

Buddhism moved from India to central Asia and eastern China. Today it is the dominant religion of the East, with about 360 million followers currently, of whom one million are Americans (Harris, 2011:6, 10). In fact, it is said that Buddhism is the fifth largest world religion. The largest drawback to Buddhism is its teachings, which are considered to be non-dogmatic and to encourage believers to question everything.

## **4.4 PHILOSOPHIES**

### **4.4.1 Gaudiya Vaishnavism**

The Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy or spiritual knowledge is derived via a process called 'disciplic succession'. This disciplic succession starts from Krishna, and is passed down through the various teachers or representatives. The representatives of the disciplic succession cannot change, add, or subtract anything. If this is done, then it is considered that the disciplic succession has been broken, and their preaching will have no potency (Prabupada, 1972:31).

THE DISCIPLIC SUCCESSION	
<i>Evam paramparā-prāptam imam rājarṣayo viduḥ (Bhagavad-gītā 4.2). This Bhagavad-gītā As It Is is received through this disciplic succession:</i>	
1. Kṛṣṇa	17. Brahmaṇya Tīrtha
2. Brahmā	18. Vyāsa Tīrtha
3. Nārada	19. Lakṣmīpati
4. Vyāsa	20. Mādhavendra Purī
5. Madhva	21. Īśvara Purī, (Nityānanda, Advaita)
6. Padmanābha	22. Lord Caitanya
7. Nṛhari	23. Rūpa, (Svarūpa, Sanātana)
8. Mādhava	24. Raghunātha, Jīva
9. Akṣobhya	25. Kṛṣṇadāsa
10. Jaya Tīrtha	26. Narottama
11. Jñānasindhu	27. Viśvanātha
12. Dayānidhi	28. (Baladeva) Jagannātha
13. Vidyānidhi	29. Bhaktivinoda
14. Rājendra	30. Gaurakīśora
15. Jayadharma	31. Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī
16. Puruṣottama Prabhupāda	32. A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

**Figure 5: Depicting the disciplic succession**

Source: Bhagavad-Gita: As it is, 1991

The Hare Krishna or Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy is only adopted today because it adheres to the disciplic succession. The foundational philosophy of the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement is that we are not this body. This means that the body is for this material world only. Our true identity is that we are the soul. This body is a mere vehicle for conducting our duties in this life based on our karma of our previous life. Followers of this religion believe that human life is not meant for whimsical mindless living, but for understanding God. To understand God, there are laws - as there are laws in science and governance, there are, according to Vedic literature, higher order laws that direct the interaction of conscious entities.

These laws are collectively known as 'karma'. The Gaudiya Vaishnava movement describes karma as action and reaction. For example, if one causes unnecessary suffering to another living entity, one will undergo suffering in return. Of all of the documented 'laws' of God, such as the Vedas and

Upanisads<sup>3</sup>, the Isopanisad<sup>4</sup> is deemed to be the leading one. The Isopanisad explains the philosophy of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and the truth about Krishna and his laws governing the material and spiritual worlds.

Who then is Krishna? According to the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement, Krishna is regarded as the supreme personality of the Godhead, who appeared on earth approximately 5,000 years ago (Prabhupada, 2013:9.) He stayed for 125 years on earth, enjoying various pastimes and never aging beyond youth. According to scripture, Krishna is all-powerful and all-attractive. In this world people are attracted to those who are very wealthy, renowned, famous, powerful, beautiful, or wise. Krishna is said to possess all these qualities in full at the same time, whereas a human can only have one or two of these and in limited quantities. One who possesses all six in full, without limit, and simultaneously, is defined as the Supreme Personality of Godhead (Veda: 10). According to Isopanisad, Krishna is perfect and complete. He is also Sac Cid Ananda, which means eternal, full of knowledge, and blissful. It is stated in this scripture that the purpose of this material world is the process of its creation, maintenance, and destruction. It further explains that every living being present in this world has a fixed schedule of six phases or changes: birth, growth, upkeep, production of by-products, diminution, and death. Like the presence of other laws, this is the law of material nature (Prabhupada, 1991: 1).

This law of material nature and the life cycle cannot be stopped or avoided. Both animals and humans are living under this law of material nature. However, humans have a responsibility to live in a different manner. According to the Bhagavad-Gita, there are 8,400,000 species of life. One has to go through each of these 8,400,000 species in order to attain birth in human form. Everything in nature moves in a cycle. According to Gaudiya Vaishnavism, a human being is the same as an animal when they live in accordance to the material nature only, and is considered a conditioned soul (Prabhupada, 1999: 2). Conditioned souls have four kinds of defects. The first defect is that they commit mistakes. The next defect is that they live in the illusion that their bodies are theirs, and that their life is meant for enjoyment. The third defect is to have a propensity for cheating others – human and non-human. The fourth defect is that of imperfect senses. Humans believe that their senses are complete, and so often challenge things based on their senses – e.g., “Can you see God?” With their imperfect senses and other defects, conditioned souls cannot give perfect knowledge to anyone. This is why the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement fully accepts the Vedas as a source of knowledge (Prabhupada, 1999: 2).

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<sup>3</sup> These Upanisad and Isopanisad are bodies of spiritual knowledge, philosophies and rituals. The contents of these scriptures are considered to be words of God.

<sup>4</sup> These Upanisad and Isopanisad are bodies of spiritual knowledge, philosophies and rituals. The contents of these scriptures are considered to be words of God.

Within the philosophy of the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement is Sankhya philosophy. These teachings deal with the fundamental principles or categories of the physical universe. Sankhya philosophy is the equivalent of western metaphysics. The meaning of the word 'Sankhya' is that which explains very clearly the analysis of material elements according to the Vedas. According to this philosophy, material nature can be broken down into 24 material elements:

- Five gross or great elements: earth, water, fire, air, and ether
- Five knowledge-acquiring senses: ears, tongue, eyes, skin, and nose
- Five sense objects: taste, touch, form, sound, and smell
- Five working senses: hands, voice, anus, genitals, and legs
- Three subtle elements: mind, intelligence, and ego

The 24th element is the unmanifested stage of the three modes of nature in which the above elements exist. When this creation or material world comes into being, these elements work together to form life (Prabhupada, 1999: 16).

All of these elements are found in both humans and non-humans. It further explains that the life-giving force for these material elements is the soul. It is explained that, when a body is dead, it still has all twenty-three material elements listed above, but it is useless and cannot continue the natural cycle. The senses above listed above are strong, reckless, and influential and as such can be considered as the false ego. Many times humans are led by their false ego, which identifies wrongly with this body. It thinks of itself as the doer, proprietor, and enjoyer of everything, and forgets its eternal relationship with Krishna.

The Gaudiya Vaishnava's teachings believe that, like the twenty-three material elements, this material world is also temporary. They also believe that this material world is the cause of perpetual misery. It is documented in scripture, Srimad Bhagavatam, that every living entity undergoes the three-fold miseries:

1. Adhidaivika-klesa – this is suffering caused by demigods, such as droughts, earthquakes, and storms;
2. Adhibhautika-klesa – suffering caused by other living entities such as insects or enemies;
3. Adhyatmika-klesa – suffering caused by one's own body (Prabhupada; 1972: 336)

According to Gaudiya Vaishnavism beliefs, the whole world is captivated by these modes of material nature, mentioned above (Adhidaivika-klesa, Adhibhautika-klesa, Adhyatmika-klesa) and as a result

every living entity has a particular body or form with a particular psychological and biological activity. Human beings fall under four classes of material mode:

1. Goodness: the mode of goodness is when one lives in the mode of purity. They are free from sinful activities and in this mode one can be more open to following the path of spiritual progression.
2. Ignorance and passion: the mode of ignorance and passion is when one is absorbed and engaged in desires and longings. People in this mode are generally attached to material activities and sense gratification. When they are also in the mode of ignorance, they are deluded about their true nature as the soul.
3. Passion only: a person in the mode of passion is hankering after material items and activities. They are interested in sense gratification which results in karmic reaction.
4. Ignorance only: People in the mode of ignorance are generally lazy, uninterested in spiritual life and have no chance of liberation

Those operating under modes other than those above are the forms of animal life. What is critical to note, according to Gaudiya Vaishnavism, is that all of this is temporary, including the bodily form. It is stated in the Bhagavad-Gita that there are many different kinds of living entities – human beings, demigods, animals, etc. – all living under the modes of material nature. In this way every living entity passes through the 8,400,000 species. These various life forms are further broken down into:

- 900,000 aquatics
- 2,000,000 plants and trees
- 1,100,000 insects
- 1,000,000 birds
- 3,000,000 beasts and
- 400,000 humans (Prabhupada, 1972: 341)

What else is there, then, besides the four modes that differentiate the human forms of life? According to the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement, it is consciousness. They believe that human consciousness is more developed, and that it allows one to enquire about our constitutional position: questions such as “Who am I?” and “What is the goal of my life?”

Within this set of beliefs, there are two positions: occupational position and constitutional position. Occupational position is the activities or duties we conduct in this material world as a result of our position. An example of such is that if we are a parent, our activities would include taking care of our children and house, and so on. An occupational position at our place of employment means we



engage in activities that our employer requires of us. Our constitutional position, however, is our spiritual position or duty, in other words, our spiritual position and duty in respect of God.

According to the spiritual teachings of the Hare Krishna, all living entities, no matter their form, belong to a superior spiritual energy. Their philosophy believes that there are three types of body:

- The gross body (the body as we know it and with which we identify) made up of blood, flesh, bone, skin, fur, etc.
- The subtle body, or what we generally refer to as the mind, false ego, and intelligence. The function of the subtle body is to allow functions such as thinking, feeling, and willing (mind); decision-making and evaluating sensory objects (intelligence) and illusory identification with matter (false ego). This subtle body allows the gross body to experience emotions.
- Every living entity, including non-humans (animals, trees, etc.), have a spiritual body, or what is known as the soul. This soul consists of eternity, knowledge, and bliss. The function of the soul is to be a life force to the gross body. The Hare Krishna use the example of a hammer. The hammer, although a powerful and useful tool, can do great things only when held by a hand. The gross body can only do anything when there is the presence of the soul. According to this teaching, the fundamental problem is that people have forgotten their true self, the soul, and are preoccupied with the gross body, failing to realise that the gross body is temporary while the soul is eternal (Vishaka, 2011: 31)

Another founding piece of scripture of the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement is the Bhagavad-Gita, which describes the soul in detail in Chapter two. The essence of the Bhagavad-Gita is to teach humanity about God, the living entities, the cosmic manifestations, and how all are controlled by time. It teaches us how we should live our lives as per our constitutional position. It also explains the affairs of material nature, and how these affairs are under the direction of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. It further elaborates the position of the Supreme Personality as that of supreme consciousness. Living entities, being part and parcel of the Supreme Personality, are also conscious. Both living entities and material nature are explained as the energy of the Supreme Personality: one is conscious energy, the other is unconscious. Living entities (humans and non-humans) are conscious of their particular body. They are, however, only conscious of their own body – i.e., one person cannot feel the physical pain of the next, whereas the Supreme Personality is conscious of all bodies, as he dwells within every living entity (Prabhupada, 1972: 11).

Chapter 2 text 3 of the Bhagavad-Gita describes how the soul continuously passes within this body, from childhood to youth and old age, and similarly to another body at the time of death. Thus the soul moves through the 8,400,000 life forms. The spirit soul, although in the body during the changes



from childhood to old age, does not undergo any changes. This is the same when the soul changes bodies at the time of death (Prabhupada, 1972: 79).

The gross body is changing every moment through the process of growth and ageing. The spirit soul, however, is unchanging, and exists permanently, remaining the same throughout the process. The soul is recognised as eternal, even when the gross body no longer exists. Therefore the real nature of the soul is that it is the consciousness of the gross body. It should not be confused with being part of the body; rather, it is completely separate. It is the life-giving force for the gross body (Prabhupada, 1972: 86).

In Chapter 2, Text 17 of the Bhagavad-Gita it is said that the size of the soul is one ten-thousandth part of the upper portion of a hair tip in size. This is repeated in the Svetasvatara Upanisad (Prabhupada, 1972: 251). This makes the soul smaller than the material atom. This small spark is the basic principle of the body, whose force is felt throughout the whole body. Consciousness is not due to any material combinations, but to the presence of the spirit soul. The Bhagavad-Gita goes on to explain that the soul is indestructible. It states further that the soul is invisible, inconceivable, and immutable. The soul can only be understood by the study of the Vedas. The Gaudiya Vaishnavas strongly believe in the separate existence of the soul and its presence in each and every living entity. They liken the material gross body to a dress and the soul to a person; and as a person changes their dress, so does the soul change its body through the 8,400,000 species of life forms.

This is further supported in their philosophy, and documented in the Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter 2, Text 29, and Chapter 15, Text 15. In summary, these two verses state that the atomic soul is within the body of a gigantic animal, in the body of the gigantic trees, and also in the same form present in the microbic germ. Chapter 15, Text 15 further elaborates that the Supreme Personality of Godhead is present in the heart of each and every living entity. Hence the Gaudiya Vaishnavas believe that all living beings are equal because the same spiritual spark lives in each of them, even though covered by a different material gross body (King of Knowledge, 1973: 100).

As a result of these fundamental beliefs, and in their adoption of bhakti or devotional service, the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement practises the following four regulating principles:

- No meat eating
- No intoxication
- No illicit sex
- No gambling

These four regulating principles help Gaudiya Vaishnava devotees to minimise their karma during their life to ensure that they obtain a better birth in the next life, or ultimately obtain liberation. They believe that the less sin one commits and the more devotional service one offers, the better the next life. This material life is viewed as a preparation for the final exam, death (The Path of Perfection, 1995: 136).

Gaudiya Vaishnavas believe that the only time that this cycle can be broken is when one reaches the supreme abode. The whole Vedic principle is to be delivered from material bondage and attachments. According to the Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy, illicit sex, meat eating, gambling, and intoxication inhibit liberation, and result in material bondage and attachments (Perfect Questions, Perfect answers, 1983: 15).

Gaudiya Vaishnavas believe that, even though all living entities are equal, the human life form is attained after much suffering, and has the capacity to understand spiritually. However, humans who do not take this opportunity to understand their true purpose on earth are living like any other living entity, as the primary function of all living entities is to worry about themselves and the world around them. If the human form is not used to understand one's constitutional position, then – according to Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy – it is the greatest tragedy and a waste of life (Goswami, 2014:82).

#### **4.4.2 Buddhism**

In cultures around the world, people have conventionally believed that the intimate self of each being is an entity that is distinct from the physical body. The root of Buddhist philosophy is teaching about what reality is not. The avowed goal of Buddhism is that of attaining Nirvana and Shunyata, which, according to this doctrine, can be attained by following its teaching and practices. A direct translation of 'Nirvana' in some Buddhist books is extinction. However, upon further scrutiny, most Buddhists take this to mean that, upon reaching enlightenment, a living being realizes its oneness with all that exists. This results in its separation from all things - its uniqueness is completely destroyed, and it becomes extinct (Rosen, 2003:2). Thus the deeper meaning of attaining Nirvana is that is the entry into another mode of existence.

Shunyata or voidism is another goal of the Buddhist – a core concept that is used to describe existential emptiness. According to David R. Loy, a Buddhist professor, shunyata is a methodology used to portray the interdependency of things. He adds that nothing exists by itself because everything is part of everything else (Rosen, 2003:4).

In order to attain the ultimate goals, Buddhism encompasses a lifestyle of humility, simplicity, non-violence, and chastity. Buddhist philosophy, like Vedic philosophy, includes the concept of dharma.

The dharma that is taught by Buddha, however, is known as Buddha-Dharma. According to this philosophy, dharma is the law that governs the universe.

This philosophy contends that karma (good or bad actions) that is accumulated during the lifespan of a being establishes their next birth into a higher or lower realm. The dharma teaches that their suffering and unhappiness is only as a result of their own hurtful, negative, or destructive actions. They believe that the moral choices people consciously and wilfully make are what shape their future and their destinies (Harris 2009:43). Some Buddhists refer to karma as 'karma conditioning', and that one's life will continue the cycle of desires, ignorance, suffering, and rebirth unless one follows the path of Buddhism. The reason that karma is the central theme in the Buddha's teachings is his intense desire to liberate beings from the state of suffering and ignorance. Buddhists also tie to karma the ethical consideration of how we should live our lives. Liberating our life from disease and the cycle of karma, is embedded in our daily activities and behaviours. When we change these behaviours and activities in accordance to the path, we reduce negative actions and impacts which in turn reduces our karma (Erricker, 2015:62). According to Buddhist philosophy, ethical conduct is doing what is truly beneficial for all living beings and not only what is beneficial to oneself.

As mentioned, and based on one's activities and behaviours, one's karma is determined, leading to the next life in a higher or lower realm. These higher or lower realms are further described in the early Hinayana teachings. They see the whole universe as having three spheres. The lowest is the `sphere of senses and desires, the middle sphere the sphere of form and the highest the sphere of formlessness.

According to Buddhist teachings, a spiritual practitioner's fundamental goal is to conquer self-realisation, in order to accomplish their full potential. In order for a Buddhist to do that, it is imperative for them to understand the immediate condition they are in and the experiences they have, including suffering. The Buddhist belief is that suffering is intrinsic to human life. Nevertheless, in Buddhism, suffering goes deeper than the normal sense of the word - their concept of suffering also includes happiness (Kyabgon, 2014:10).

In the Buddhist philosophy, there are three types of suffering. The first type is the suffering of pain, known as *duhkha-dihkhata*. This is the most obvious form of human suffering, brought about by injustice, famine, war, political oppression, and so on. The second type of suffering is the suffering of change, known as *viparinama-dukhata*. This type of suffering is what one would not generally regard as real suffering, and includes the general problems of life such as stress. They are generally the kind of experiences that one could not foresee; and as a result, what was meant to be a pleasurable experience turns out to be a kind of suffering. An example might be that of taking a

holiday: but your luggage is lost in transit, and you miss a connecting flight. The holiday that was meant to be a pleasurable activity has become a stressful situation, resulting in a sense of suffering. The final form of suffering is known as the suffering of the conditioned existence, or *samsara-dukhata*. This suffering is experienced purely by virtue of being a living being. It is the suffering of birth, of all the problems associated with adolescence, with adulthood, with old age, and with disease and the weakening of the body (Kyabgon, 2014:11). In each of these scenarios we are misled to believe that there is happiness and there is a glimmer of happiness that we hold onto, however there is suffering in every aspect of life.

Of all the sufferings, the third is the only one that can be controlled and stopped. Therefore, Buddhists believe that one must face up to the pleasures in life in order to know the reality of things. They are aware that the pleasures of life entangle one in this material world and prevent one from attaining liberation and suffering. If we do not know and understand these realities, we will continue to live under the illusion of false happiness. It is more critical to identify with the process of suffering that begins within each of us – that is, the suffering that comes from the mind (Kyabgon, 2014:12).

From the Buddhist point of view, the real cause of suffering is our ignorance – not properly knowing what is beneficial to us and what is detrimental to us. This will only lead us into greater unhappiness and suffering. This does not mean that Buddhists ignore the injustices and suffering of the world; rather, they understand that suffering is a reflection of the minds of individuals, which is why they focus within. Buddhists strongly believe that our minds – and subsequently our actions resulting from the mind's thoughts – are what create the world we live in (Kyabgon, 2014:13).

Buddha provided his followers with six transcendental actions in order to control the mind and subsequently actions, and to strive towards self-realization. These actions are referred to in their scripture, the *Paramitasamasa*, as *Paramitas*, the actions that every Buddhist should take. Opposite actions should be avoided. The six *Paramitas* are (Kyabgon, 2014:50):

1. Giving
2. Conduct
3. Restraint
4. Wisdom
5. Energy
6. Patience

The action of giving refers not only to giving material items, as in charity to the needy. It also includes liberating captive animals – for example, releasing animals destined for the slaughterhouse – thereby

giving back their lives. This practice is common in many Buddhist countries. This philosophy holds that by giving, we become less attached.

Conduct is about taking responsibility for one's actions. Their teaching emphasises that when we take full responsibility, we become a full person. The aim of this is to prevent us from thinking of ourselves as victims of circumstances or society. When we feel that we are victims, we don't believe that our own actions caused our situation, and as a result there is no freedom. When we take responsibility, we understand that our circumstances are the result of our actions, and we become free.

Restraint is taught to ensure that one practices the least amount of excess. This is a reference to an excessive indulgence in the pursuit of pleasures that binds one and causes attachment. The objective of this teaching is to ensure that one understands the difference between needs and wants. If one understands the difference, one will not keep pursuing unnecessary desires.

The fourth paramita, developing wisdom, involves understanding our transient nature, in that everything is provisional and subject to change.

Energy is about willpower. Willpower is critical to Buddhists, as it is the energy that allows one to stop doing what should not be done, and to do what must be done.

Lastly, patience is taught to enable Buddhists to understand that results are not immediate, that they must not look for immediate gratification. It also teaches one not to be too hasty and to be more tolerant of disappointments. This virtue is aimed at cultivating persistence in an intelligent and relaxed manner, and not being pushy or fixated.

The six actions or paramitas by which all Buddhists must actively live are linked to their belief that what we do we will create, or cause-and-effect. All actions (karma) have consequences in the future (rebirth), in terms of personal merit (punya or good karma) or demerit (paja or bad karma). Kindness to another person, to other living beings, brings about punya or good merit, while selfish actions earn paja. Buddhists believe, however, that in earning either punya or paja, the actions in question must have been done purposefully or knowingly. At the time of death, the balance of karma (punya or paja) determines in which realm in the Buddhist universe one will be reborn. Karma, according to Buddhism, is also believed to be responsible for determining one's physical appearance, character, health, and mental abilities. Bad actions in the karma balance determine one's character and destiny after death. It is with this understanding that the Buddha taught his followers to be responsible for

their own salvation (Harris, 2009:43). Depending on the balance of karma, one will enter into one of the six spheres in the Buddhist universe.

Each sphere has different inhabitants. The lowest sphere is that of the senses and desires; above that is the sphere of form; and the highest is the sphere of formlessness. The spheres are further subdivided into 31 realms or levels, the lowest being hell and the highest being heaven. At the highest heaven level, consciousness is transcended, and only the mind exists. These spheres are depicted in the figure below (Harris, 2009:40).



**Figure 6: The six spheres: 1. Gods, 2. Titans, 3. Animals, 4. Hell, 5. Ghosts, 6 Humans (not in order)**

Source: Harris, 2009:40

It is possible to be born into any of the spheres or realms, as the cycle of rebirth takes place between the spheres. To be born in the sphere of formlessness is to be close to liberation. However, according to Buddhism, it does not mean that one born in the lower spheres cannot become enlightened. Buddhists believe that to be born a human is beneficial, as humans have ample opportunities to advance spiritually, thereby achieving enlightenment and ending the cycle of birth and death.

Buddhist philosophy believes that being born in the higher spheres for those with karma can prove to be challenging. Even though they are born with the Gods, and their existence is blissful, they too



at some stage must strive for enlightenment. This is difficult when one is surrounded by opulence. Below the human realm are the lower spheres, where beings that have accumulated a greater balance of bad karma are forced to be reborn. The lowest realms consist of hells where humans are consistently punished. The Buddhist philosophy elaborates that, once evil deeds have been atoned for, the being is then allowed to take birth into a higher realm (Harris, 2009:40).

The levels of the spheres are explained in the Buddhist scripture as follows: At the top of the spheres are the highest realms, belonging to the Gods or Devas. The topmost sphere is one of opulence, luxury, gratification, and comfort. To their right are the inhabitants of the demons or asuras, or those beings that are jealous of the Gods. They are constantly being urged by their desire to achieve the highest realm. This state of constant envy and jealousy causes their state of mind to be destructive and hence they never progress to a higher realm.

Below them is the realm of animals. Here consciousness is present, but to a lesser extent. The animals' constant activity is to find food, and to exist in accordance with their bodily needs. In the bottom realm are the beings in torment or hell. This is directly opposite the highest realm, at the extreme end of the spheres. One realm above hell is the realm of ghosts, who are said to be constantly hungry. Their hunger in this sphere can never be satisfied. In the middle is the realm of the humans. The inhabitants of this realm are feverishly absorbed with their own desires, actions (karma), daily undertakings, anxieties, and ambitions.

The levels of the spheres are: Gods at the highest, next comes the level of humans, followed by the spheres of titans, then animals, followed by ghosts and lastly the lowest sphere of hell (Harris, 2009:40).

As further explained in their scriptures, Buddhists believe that the lord of death, or Yama, holds these spheres and realms together. This lord of death ultimately has control over the fate of living beings, obviously dictated by their karma balance. Only by understanding these truths described in the Buddhist philosophy can one turn the wheel, convert the delusions of our existence, and move out of the spheres. How this can be achieved will be explained later, in the third and fourth noble truths.

Moving from realm to realm involves the concept of reincarnation or rebirth. Karma and reincarnation are deeply interwoven in Buddhist philosophy. According to the Buddhist scriptures, the two cannot be separated: they are in a symbiotic relationship. In Buddhism, everything is in relationship with everything else, and everything is indifferently dependent on everything else, be it mentally or physically. As discussed earlier, Buddhists believe that morality is dependent on karma, as it pivots on the law of cause and effect. To reiterate, their basic belief is that, if positive actions are conducted,

good, positive, wholesome impressions are left in the mind. This results in positive and salubrious experiences (Erricker, 2015:63).

Expanding their philosophy to beyond this life's experiences, Buddhists explain why, in this present day, good people suffer and, in some instances, the bad prosper. Their scriptures explain that streams of consciousness get transferred from one birth to the next. What happens to one in the present may be as a reaction to his past life activity and not only the actions of his present life (Kyabgon, 2014:30). In saying this, it must be remembered that, unlike the Vaishnava philosophy discussed above, Buddhists do not believe in the eternal soul. They have an alternative belief about the concept of 'soul': their philosophy explains that the world, and everything in it – animals, trees, people, water, and so forth – is made up of components or qualities such as colour, sight, or youth.

Their philosophy explains that humans are formed from five groups or combinations of components, known as skandhas: "These 5 components are a) the physical body (rupa); b) feelings such as pain and pleasure (vedana); c) all that can be perceived and imagined (samjana); d) character traits and motivating fears such as desire (samskara); and e) consciousness or mind (vijnana)" (Rosen, 2003:67).

Their philosophy explains that none of the five skandhas mentioned above is perpetual; and while these components all make up the self, none of them is regarded as (or will become) the soul. Buddhism believes that, although the body is part of the self, the self is more than just this physical body or even how it functions. They believe that the physical body changes with age – in fact, that all five skandhas or components change. Their viewpoint is that everyone has a personality or a self, not a soul, which like the soul, passes from one level to the next. This personality, as discussed earlier, is derived from people's actions and their karma balance.

It must be mentioned that, according to Buddhists, rebirth does not happen arbitrarily, but is governed strictly by the law of karma. A fundamental aspect of Buddhist philosophy is three traits that are intimately related: karma, cause and effect, and rebirth. All of their teachings, philosophies, rules, truths, and wisdoms were shared so that those three aspects could be controlled to achieve the ultimate goal.

In an early Buddhist scripture, the Nikayas, Buddha reiterates that one's intention is more important than one's action. By adopting the right intention with sincerity and pureness of mind, one will act in a way beneficial to the wellbeing of others and to oneself (Kyabgon, 2014:32). The concept of the law of karma is not seen as a strict one-on-one relationship between action and reaction. An example



given is that if one physically assaults another, several factors are involved: the intention, the action, and the being that was physically hurt.

All the factors have a bearing on the karmic consequence that one would experience in the future. Fundamental to this understanding is the belief that, whatever the action, one that leads to suffering for oneself or another being is called *akusala* or unskillful (bad) action. In contrast, an action that does not lead to the suffering of others or oneself is known as skillful or good action. Buddhists firmly believe that actions taken should consider others' needs, not only one's own needs. This is critical in ensuring that balance is created.

Another foundation of the Buddhist philosophy is the four noble truths. Buddha spoke these four noble truths after he had achieved enlightenment. He established these four noble truths because he understood that people were very careless about their morality. He saw that they were becoming over-indulgent in gratifying their senses and were engaged more and more in self-mortification. Thus he spoke the four noble truths to teach the importance of restraint and moderation. The four noble truths are:

1. The truth of suffering, the universality of suffering
2. The truth of the origins of suffering
3. The truth of the cessation of suffering
4. The truth of the path that is integral to the cessation of suffering

**The first truth: The truth of suffering, or dukha:**

Dukha is a Sanskrit word for suffering, and its meaning ranges from unease to sorrow. It may include physical pain, bereavement, despair, illness, or physiological pain. Buddha preached that to be born means to suffer. In their philosophy, even when one is looking for or thinking about happiness, these are lacking, as one's process for achieving them is incorrect or one is seeking for it in the incorrect places (Harris, 2009:46). In order to understand fully the first noble truth, the Buddha makes reference to the three marks of everything that exists. These three marks are impermanence, dissatisfaction or suffering, and insubstantiality. For Buddhists, understanding the first noble truth means fully understanding the three marks together with the conditioned phenomena, which is that everything in existence is equally conditioned by being created as a result of its karma, persevering, and then disintegrating (Kyabgon, 2014:4).

**The second truth: The truth of the origin of suffering:**

Once one has realised that there is no escaping suffering - that it is a part of life - Buddhist philosophy explains that one needs to understand the source of this suffering. Where does this suffering come

from? According to Buddhist wisdom, suffering comes from within. This is not to say, however, that external conditions do not create suffering as well; but the main cause of suffering is created by our own mind and attitude (Kyabgon, 2014:5).

To explain further, it is believed that the suffering from within is created as a result of one's greed and cravings. The Sanskrit word for suffering, directly translated, means thirst, desire, or attachment. This attachment is to material possessions, personal gain, sensual pleasures, and eternal youth. The result of all this seeking after sense gratification and desires distracts one's thinking and shields the mind from reality. Buddhists believe that this results in negative behaviours or actions that cause others to suffer, as most of the time these desires are unfulfilled. Buddha aimed to teach his followers this truth about how to arm themselves against self-gratification of the senses (Harris, 2009:47).

### **The third truth: The truth about the cessation of suffering:**

This truth explains that there can be an end to suffering. If all suffering stems from the need and desire to satisfy the senses through sense gratification, then the cessation of suffering will naturally be obtained by extinguishing the desires. It is acknowledged in the scripture that this is not as simple as it sounds: where there is the self, there will be desire, as it is a natural phenomenon. But when the desire is unnecessary or excessive, suffering will result; and it is this excessiveness that must be extinguished (Rossen, 2001:40).

Through rejecting excessive and unnecessary desires, suffering will cease, thereby allowing one to go back to the roots of obliterating ignorance. Once ignorance is destroyed, Buddhist philosophy explains, one dedicates one's life to the teachings and to one's path, by realising that one's bond with all that exists makes one equal to all other beings.

### **The final truth: the truth of the path:**

This truth teaches the way out of suffering. It is not enough merely to stop suffering; one must leave suffering behind altogether. This teaching emphasises the practice of doing things the right way – in the Buddhist philosophy, known as the eightfold path (Rosen, 2003:41). This eightfold path, the fourth noble truth, is the essence of Buddhist practice, and it is in this way that Buddhists believe that they will attain the goal of permanent happiness. These practices are believed to develop three things in each individual: moral sensitivity, meditation (or the concentrated mind), and wisdom (Kyabgon, 2014:17).

Through moral sensitivity, Buddhists understand that they become better persons and develop compassion towards others' needs and others' wellbeing. The eightfold path (commonly known as

the Buddhist practices) is regarded as the tool for daily living for each practitioner of Buddhism (Rosen, 2001:41).

The eightfold path consists of the following:

- |                        |   |  |
|------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Right understanding | } | Development of wisdom                  |
| 2. Right thought       |   |  |
| 3. Right speech        | } | Development of moral sensitivity       |
| 4. Right action        |   |  |
| 5. Right livelihood    |   |  |
| 6. Right effort        | } | Development of meditative capabilities |
| 7. Right mindfulness   |   |  |
| 8. Right concentration |   |  |

The eightfold path is further broken down into the five precepts. These five precepts help the Buddhist achieve the eightfold path, to lead a moral and righteous life. In this way the Buddha developed a few basic rules and regulations for conduct – the five precepts, or panasila. By vowing to observe and follow the five precepts, Buddhists will achieve the eightfold path, and subsequently reduce the actions that bring about negative karma (Harris,2009:50).

The five precepts are the following:

1. To refrain from injuring living beings: the Buddhist philosophy firmly believes that, if in pursuit of self-happiness or pleasure, one hurts or kills another living being or creature, at the time of death one will never find happiness, nor attain the realm above that of the lower spheres. This is because that action took away the happiness of a living creature; and this first precept requires Buddhists to treat all living creatures with compassion and kindness. The underlying reason is that there is a relationship between all living beings, and that each one's happiness is intertwined with that of the other.
2. To refrain from stealing: this practice teaches us to refrain from taking what is not given. It is not limited to stealing or taking physical objects, but includes time taken from others such as employers, engaging in suspicious business practices, and extra-marital affairs.
3. To refrain from sexual immorality: all Buddhists are encouraged not to become entangled in and enslaved to sexual indulgence. The attractions of the body are short-lived, and to manage these sexual urges is an important advancement in the second and third precepts, where failure to do so results in keeping one in the cycle of birth and death.

4. To refrain from lying: to practice all Buddhist teachings and philosophies effectively demands the truth at all times. This is not only relevant to what one says, but also includes one's deeds and one's thoughts. One must bring inaccuracies and exaggerations under control, which includes speaking ill of others.
5. The final precept is to refrain from intoxicants: these include alcohol, drugs, or any substance that clouds the mind. By consuming these intoxicants and clouding the mind, one prevents oneself from living in the present.

These practices, truths, paths and precepts are required in order to live a noble life and attain enlightenment – the ultimate goal.

In the following chapters, I will explore how the philosophies of these two religions can assist in enhancing an environmental philosophy.

## **4.5 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I have discussed the background and history to the two chosen religions, Gaudiya Vaishnavism and Buddhism. I then discussed the content of these two religions. In the next chapter I will show how these religions will be used in developing a new environmental ethic which will be presented in the form of a framework.

## CHAPTER FIVE: SPIRITUAL SOLUTIONS TO MATERIAL PROBLEMS

*“The desacralized world is doomed to become an obstacle inviting conquest, a mere object. Like the animal or the slave who is understood to have no soul, it becomes a thing of subhuman status to be worked, used up, and exploited.” (Roszak cited in Cremo, 1995)*

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

If the environmental crisis today could be solved simply by understanding the relevant scientific information, and having the knowledge or skill to manage the situation, we would not be in the predicament we are in today. For about the past 30 years, researchers, organisations, and NGOs have vigorously worked to capture and understand data, analyse the data, and finally realise the extent of the problem. To date, however, this has not yielded any success in mitigating the environmental crisis.

Volumes of books and chronicles and even movies have been produced to explain the dire state of affairs. But the problem is not a lack of understanding, or a lack of relevant information, or even a lack of skills. The problem lies with us as individuals and institutions. It's evident that knowledge, information, and skills are just not enough.

Environmental ethicists have tried to find a reasonable basis for the moral significance of the environment by formulating arguments in environmental ethics; but reason and rationality does not seem to be enough to produce moral convictions that lead to behavioural change (Mathews, 2011:263). There is an emerging plea to define the criteria of moral considerations that extend beyond the realm of humans to include non-human life forms. However, thus far, this plea, as it has been made by environmental ethicists, has failed to produce significant behavioural change. Mathews (2011) argues that religion might offer essential, normative, and ethical solutions, which could be of assistance. White also alludes to the argument that religion may serve us in this regard when he notes that “the spiritual truth at the heart of religion may thus be an earth–truth” (cited in Mathews, 2011:275).

When considering all of this, we need to ask two questions: How, then, do we change the world? And whose world is it, anyway? The answer to the latter question will make all the difference. If we look at the volumes of papers, articles, and literature on religion and the environment (albeit predominantly referencing Christianity), the belief generally is that humans were put on this earth to dominate all other beings. For most people this means that the earth and its inhabitants were created primarily for the pleasure of humans. The West had a particular knack for producing and spreading

intolerance for other belief systems. They based their theories not only on spiritual values, but also on economic laws. This has led to the majority of the world seeing things through a blinkered version of what is right, thus finding it difficult to accept diversity in the world. This has caused intolerance towards values other than their own (Palmer, 2003:17).

This has changed: the world is now desperate for a new way to view and treat the environment. Although currently the plea arises from the goal of human survival, it is a start, and shows an understanding that the environment and all living things impact upon one other. How, then, do we bring about a new way of living so that the environment is seen as more than a means to an end, where not only human survival is important, but the survival and flourishing of the non-human environment as well?

In this chapter, I will explain the possibility of using the religious philosophies discussed in the previous chapter as a solution for the current environmental crisis. I will also document the many academics, philosophies and others that are now calling for this new ethic based on religion and spirituality. Finally I will discuss the two chosen religions and their specific philosophies that can be used as a spiritual solution.

Several attempts have been made to draft a global framework for environmental ethics. One example is the Earth Charter, launched at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in 2000. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature later sanctioned this charter. The Earth Charter emphasised the need to protect the earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty. It called on all governments, organisations, businesses, and individuals to acknowledge and recognise that all living beings are interdependent, and that every life – regardless of its form – has a value and worth unrelated to the worth that humans place on it. This was a turning point for the global community: it was being called to acknowledge that the environment had an intrinsic value and that the global community had a vital role in maintaining life-sustaining systems (Mathews, 2011:264).

As a result, various theorists and philosophers now claim that a more spiritual or meaningful approach needs to be considered in order to correct the wrongs that humanity has inflicted on the environment. This means that we have to think about our relationship with nature – a question that is greater than ourselves. One possible source for thinking about, and reimagining this relationship, could be the various religious traditions.

Recently, a greater number of religious institutions and spiritual leaders have resuscitated the environmental wisdom of their respective faiths. The Harvard Project on Religion and Ecology (Tucker and William, 1996-1998) noted that, in one form or another, all of the world's religions contain

some element of a philosophy on the relationship between humanity and nature. Just as the golden thread of compassion is woven into all religions, so are there instructions on the human-nature relationship. “Many of the world’s faith communities have taken up the challenges posed by the environmental crisis and responded with passionate commitment. Religions have become part of the call to share good news on the environmental front – one more element in a worldwide environmental movement” (Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions, in Beringer & Douglas, 2009:185).

It was actually Lynn White’s article, “The historical roots of our ecologic crisis”, that shone the spotlight on Western religion’s influence in the causes of environmental degradation. Other philosophers, such as Singer and Leopold, although not religiously motivated, fought on the basis of a moral consideration for the environment when they spoke out about animal rights, and Leopold in particular called for harmony between humans and the land (Cowdin, 2008:164). John Passmore’s “Man’s responsibility for nature” also called for religion to be the basis of an environmental ethic.

This was understood by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). In 1986 it called a meeting of the five largest religions of the world to determine how religion can help the environment (Palmer, 2003:xiv). Thirty-two scientists also shared these sentiments at the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders in Moscow in January 1990, when an appeal was made to preserve the environment. Scientists argued at this gathering that radical changes were strongly and urgently required, not only in public policy, but also in individual behaviour. They even acknowledged that science had contributed more than anything else to the destruction of the environment (Cremo, 1995:38). A belief and sentiment shared at that forum was that, through religion, a change of behaviour could be brought about.

Why did the WWF and the scientists approach religious leaders for a solution? They believed, like so many others, that the potential solution to the crisis lies with our cultural values. This echoes Hargrove’s (1992) point that the decision to intrinsically value the non-human environment is also influenced by cultural values. It has been recognised that the environment has become one of the paramount moral quandaries of our time. Previous chapters have shown the environmental destruction we face is primarily due to humans and human activities. The cultural belief that we can dominate the world has greatly influenced the attitudes we hold towards the environment and its life forms. Many now ask whether this type of thinking really is the way to go, and whether this was really what the Western scriptures meant (Jenkins, 2009:284).

This moral dilemma now needs a solution that has not been considered before – a solution that requires human society to re-examine their value system. One way to achieve this may be to consider a spiritual solution - a change of spirit (Gill, 1998:408).

This new ethic that is being called for could be the code that helps to make the world a better place – to bind all people together, irrespective of their faith, religion, or lack of it. This could potentially be a highly contentious suggestion. However, although it is not glaringly evident to all, religion has been a major influence on most aspects of life. It has influenced, if not directly impacted, legal systems and thus constitutions and policies worldwide. The symbolic nature of religious actions offers a powerful mode for changing the world.

Critical to the adoption of a religious framework for environmentalism is the identification of manageable steps that can be taken, but with a long-term view to improvement. Such a framework should be aimed to evoke a sense of purpose in life, and to bring meaning to one's existence by emphasising oneness, connectedness, completeness, and harmony (Hedlund-De Witt, 2013:157). Cowdin (2008) quotes Hart, who claims that a religious framework for environmentalism can have this effect, by putting aside an anthropocentrism attitude and replacing this attitude with an awareness that all members of the biotic community have an inherent goodness and intrinsic value, and are to be regarded and respected as such. In addition to the above, Hart emphasizes that people need to relate positively to non-human living beings, and recognise that they share with them a common home.

Farrell (2006), also argues that religion may provide a potential answer to our environmental problems; and that it can help us both individually and collectively. He believes that religion can help humans find the correct relationship with nature. Farrell (2006) notes that religious traditions are intimately connected to our environmental consciousness. White supports this in his famous article: what people do about the environment is largely dependent on what they think or how they feel in relation to the things around them (Jenkins, 2009:285).

Farrell (2006) adds that at least ten religions speak to environmentalism and care for creation (2006: 15). White also advocated for religion as a solution, since he believed that many people rely on religion as a source to learn about how to think about things. White also argued that religious worldviews should accompany modern technological society. White advocated using religion as a solution to our environmental crisis because he thought that religious values have been the moving force of cultural history, and that these values are responsible for our current crisis, but can also offer alternatives and solutions.



Various examples can be used to show how religion and its teachings or principles have been adopted to save species and at the same time to educate and change the minds of people. In Tanzania, Muslim fishermen earn a living by fishing the waters around Zanzibar. A deeply impoverished community, they continued to fish for their sustenance the old way until someone introduced dynamite, which enabled them to catch in one week the number of fish that would have been caught in a whole year. However, this new method brought with it great challenges: it destroyed the coral, sea creatures, and the ocean bed – not to mention killing off the fish. Legislation and scientific evidence were developed to show the fishermen that their actions did not only have short-term consequences, but were destructive and detrimental to the environment and to their long-term survival.

This, however, fell on deaf ears, and the fishermen continued to use dynamite. Large numbers of Islamic leaders were called in to assist the government with this problem. They were highly respected, and had great authority in the community. Using the Quran and its teachings, as this was their foundation and what held the community together, they taught from the Quran on the appropriate use of God's creation. They emphasised that the use of dynamite was not an appropriate use of God's creation, and that what the fishermen were doing was actually wasteful, and went against their teachings and the wishes of God. The practice of using dynamite immediately ceased in this community as a method of fishing (Palmer, 2003:5).

In China, traditional medicine has been used for the past 2,000 years. But these traditional medicines have also been increasingly used throughout the world. Today virtually every metropolitan centre has a Chinese medicine clinic or shop, thanks to its increasing popularity. However, with this comes the devastating effect this has on wild species, especially on rhinos, bears, tigers, and other animals. In an attempt to curb this animal hunting, the Chinese government has made these ingredients illegal, but has not had much success.

Environmentalists approached Daoists, a Chinese spiritual movement, who offered some deeply practical and philosophical solutions. They used their inherent belief that doing harm to others brings only failure. The Daoist Association issued a communication that any traditional medication containing these ingredients, or that contravened the law, was not going to be successful in treating people. This was coupled with a return to their ancient teachings and literature to find alternatives to traditional ingredients that endangered species. What emerged was a new dimension of teaching rooted in their tradition, but addressing the issue of endangered wild species (Palmer, 2003:25). These kinds of examples of religion being used to help save or protect the environment can be found across the world, albeit there is still a long way to go.

The relationship between religion and the environment, and especially environmental protection, can also be clearly found in the two religions discussed in the previous chapter. The Gaudiya Vaishnava movement predicted the destruction of the environment in its scripture, the Bhagavad-Gita. In chapter 16, text 7 it says that humanity will see this world as unreal, with no foundation and with no God in control as a result of ignorance. It adds that people see everything as matter only, and the cosmos as a mass of ignorance with no difference between spirit and matter. It notes that humanity will take everything for granted (Prabhupada, 1972: 667).

As a result, society today is characterised and driven by a high-consumption lifestyle. This causes an increase in wants, desires, and satisfying the senses. The flipside of this is boredom. If people are not consumed by getting, they become bored. Boredom arises when we believe the messages we are given that possessions will ultimately make us happy (Akuppa, 2009: 23).

As a result of our constant hankering after material possessions, we invest much time and effort in acquiring these possessions in the hope that they will make us happy, so wasting time and energy on the wrong purpose. And still human nature is never satisfied: material items change, technological advancement brings newer and better models, faster cars are built, bigger and more modern homes are constructed, and as humans we hanker after them. This cycle continues, and we work harder to keep up the payments and insurance (Akuppa, 2009: 23).

In addition to one's time and energy being wasted, this drive for more, for better, gratifying the senses, directly causes environmental degradation. Both Buddhist and Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophies teach the concept of 'simple living, higher thinking' in order to help mitigate the environmental degradation that this so-called 'modern', 'advanced' lifestyle has created. They believe that moderation in all things is fundamental to preserving the earth – but more importantly, that it is essential to remember our constitutional position, and our purpose and that of every other living being in creation.

What, then, do these two religions propose we actually do? Besides the various examples such as practices of vegetarianism, and the concept of simple living, these two religions could hold an answer to how we treat the environment in future. One common thread, and one fundamental underlying principle they both hold, is an emphasis on the interdependency of every single thing in the universe. This can be explained in terms of their beliefs as to the relationship that humans and nature share.

## 5.2 DEEP ECOLOGY

Before going into more detail on this relationship, it is worth noting that the religious philosophies discussed have a great deal in common with one particular value theory in environmental ethics, that is, the theory of deep ecology.

Arne Naess is the father of deep ecology. According to the Norwegian philosopher, “the essence of deep ecology is to ask deeper questions. The adjective ‘deep’ stresses that we ask why and how, where others do not”(2003:260). Deep ecologists generally have views that can be associated with non-anthropocentrism. The principles of deep ecology challenge the concepts of human-centeredness, and involve radically changing our approach and the outlook that we take towards nature. Katz (1991) claims that deep ecology is about fundamentally remodelling and readdressing human consciousness (cited in Van De Veer and Pierce, 2003: 260).

According to Devall and Sessions (1974), deep ecology has two pivotal foundations: biocentric egalitarianism and self-realisation. Biocentric egalitarianism is the proclamation that living beings, both human and non-humans are of equal in value and worth. Like many eastern religions, deep ecology adopts the view that every living being has a value or worth of its own and that this good is not dependent on human input or needs. Another common principle shared between these religions and deep ecology is that of self-realisation. Naess explains that we confuse ourselves with our ego of superiority and thereby forget our oneness with diversity. Deep ecology argues for a process of human identification with the larger Self of nature and the non-human environment. This process of identification culminates in a recognition that the interests of the larger Self are your own interests, so that acting in the interests of the natural world is instinctive, and not something that people need to be pressured into doing. Naess acknowledges that he leans heavily on Hindu metaphysics, and that he has been a scholar of Gandhi since 1930. He firmly believes and adopts the philosophy of non-violence that Gandhi practiced and promulgated. This concept of self-realisation is shared by other philosophers such as Warwick Fox and Eric Katz (1991) (Van De Veer and Pierce, 2003: 261).

Devall and Sessions (1974), in their discussion of self-realisation, also note that deep ecology is against the idea of self-gratification, like the two religions discussed. They regard spiritual growth as being fundamental to deep ecology and its call to go beyond humanity in our identification with non-human beings (cited Van De Veer and Pierce, 2003:265).

Some of the critical basic principles of deep ecology are:

- Both human and non-human life on earth have value in themselves that is independent of the need to satisfy human needs or gratification.

- Diversity and the richness of these different life forms are aspects that contribute to their value.
- Human beings have no right to reduce this value except to fulfil vital requirements (Light and Rolston, 2003:264).

Deep ecologists understand that it is essential for humans to value the non-human world in order to maintain an ecosystem sustainable for all life.

### 5.3 RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHIES

Many of the insights of deep ecology are shared by the chosen religious philosophies. These insights include the idea that a renewal and rethinking of the relationship between human beings and the non-human environment is essential. When we look at relationships, we tend to think of relationships between two human beings; but we have relationships with our pets; some have relationships with plants. So why then do not think of other living beings as entities that we are in relationships with? In addition, we need to look at why there has been a breakdown in the relationship between human beings and the non-human environment.

When one person takes more than they give in a relationship, it tends to self-destruct. It is with this same idea that, when humans take more from the environment than they give back to it, we destroy not only the relationship but also – more importantly – the environment itself. Our greed, our need to have more, build bigger, want better, and satisfy our senses brings about the need to develop more technology, which – although it brings about much advancement – has also caused environmental degradation to one degree or another. One cannot blame technology, however: technology is only a by-product of human greed and desire. Humanity's insatiable desire for more might have led to progress in certain respects, but it has been destructive in many ways. It is this greed and desire that needs to change (Akuppa, 2009: 22).

When people understand the relationship and interconnectedness between humans and the rest of the environment, they might think more carefully about their actions. One of the foundational beliefs of the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement was that everything belonged to God, and that his resources should not be misused or wasted, especially if one held spiritual values. The concept that comes strongly from both religious philosophies is that of 'simple living, higher thinking'. The founder of the Hare Krishna movement, Acharya, said, "Life is never made comfortable by artificial needs but by plain living and higher thinking". The Gaudiya Vaishnava movement sees itself as an organisation that supports the 'deep ecology' theory, which addresses spiritual and philosophical matters that touch on the self and nature, and promotes a way of life that situates the self harmoniously within

nature. This sentiment is shared in the Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy, the Bhagavad-Gita, which states that “the humble sage, by virtue of true knowledge, sees with equal vision a learned and gentle brahmana, a cow, an elephant, a dog and an outcast” (BG, 5:18).

This philosophy does not discriminate between species, but rather sees all as equal. The reason is that it sees not the outer physical body but rather the eternal soul residing in the gross body, and thus each living being’s relationship with God. Gaudiya Vaishnavas believe that, if ever there was a hope that we could overcome environmental degradation, we would have to re-examine the materialistic assumptions and conceptions we hold. Gaudiya Vaishnavas call for an educational flood about the self and its origins in order for people to more directed towards self-realisation. They believe that this would lessen the environmental catastrophe, as people would understand the destruction caused by the domination and exploitation of matter (Cremo, 1995:47).

The underpinning of an environmentally healthy earth is a consciousness that incorporates the knowledge of the soul. Linked to the concept of differentiating between the material identity and the non-material identity, our spiritual identity is the Gaudiya Vaishnava concept of karma. Gaudiya Vaishnavas believe that the environmental crisis is not a technical problem with a technical solution, but rather a solution that requires deeper dimensions – the dimensions of Vedic philosophy. The law of karma, a Vedic philosophical concept, governs the interactions of all conscious entities. If anyone causes suffering to other living entities, they in turn will undergo the same suffering. The reaction may not be immediate, nor will it necessarily take the same form, but suffering will result. The greatest cause of karma is the reaction resulting from the action of killing (Cremo, 1995:56).

Every day, millions of animals are killed for the consumption of meat or dairy products. Humans fail to respect these animals as conscious entities that have a right to live out the duration of their natural life. In Gaudiya philosophy, it is just as wrong to kill an animal as it is wrong to kill humans. When this abominable activity happens, there is something more than a sense of guilt to consider: there are also karmic results, including the degradation of the environment, and the loss of compassion and mercy. This leads to human beings accumulating more negative karma and moving further and further away from realising their constitutional position and their reason for being in this material world (Cremo, 1995:57).

Just a single act of killing animals for food is destructive not only of the environment, but also of one’s own spiritual development. The Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophies protect animals, as they believe that each living entity is part and parcel of God, and has the right to live out its natural life to ensure that it can progress to the next stage, eventually obtaining human birth for self-realisation. The action of killing animals prevents that, and results in the animal taking the same form again at

birth; but it also results in humans not advancing but being reborn in a lower species of life. “Even the killer of an animal is to be considered a murderer because animal as food is never meant for the civilized man, whose prime duty is to prepare himself for going back to Godhead” (Swami B.T, 2005:202).

Another primary scripture of the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement, the Srimad Bhagavatam, speaks of the age in which we live, when people lack mercy, as a time of increased passion and ignorance. It adds that there is a direct connection between the merciless killing of animals and the destruction of the environment. Humanity today does not value other living entities, and has little or no mercy for any other entities than themselves. This results in their abusing other living entities and the environment, as they are covered by ignorance, not understanding the laws of nature and the interconnectedness of the universe (Swami B.T, 2005:204).

The meat industry is also linked to deforestation, air and water pollution, water shortages, and soil erosion. Neal D. Barnard, president of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, has stated that the consumption of meat contributes to the destruction of the environment, knowingly or not (Cremo, 1995:14). Statistics show that about 90 per cent of the grain grown and harvested in the United States is fed to animals. But for every 16 pounds of grain fed to cattle, only one pound of meat is obtained – which means that 20 vegetarians could feed off the land that it takes to feed only one consumer of meat. If America alone reduced its meat consumption by 10 per cent, 60 million people around the world could feed off the grain thus harvested. Water usage would decrease from 4,200 gallons of water a day to 1,200 gallons (Swami B.T, 2005:200).

Buddhist philosophies share the same theory of interconnectedness. Buddhism, like Gaudiya Vaishnavism, shares a link with the deep ecology principles. Today Buddhism is generally seen as a green, ‘eco-friendly’ religion, principally due to its policy of non-harm or compassion for non-humans. It is all of the above; and the practice of living a good human life makes Buddhism an environmentally conscious religion. Buddhist virtues include those of compassion, self-restraint, non-violence, and non-greed; and these provide a basis for an environmental ethic.

Buddhist philosophy states that one is instructed not to escape the natural world, but rather to learn to accept it without hankering after it. This can be achieved, according to Buddhism, by developing compassion for non-human sentient beings. This in turn promotes the health of the beings and the habitats on which they depend. It is through this process that Buddhists believe that they can awaken their true nature as human beings. Their conviction is that our situation is one of a global ‘dukkha’ or literally translated, “suffering”: and if we wish to awaken our true knowledge of interconnectedness and dependency, the first task is to accept this fact. The second task is to identify the root causes of

this dukkha; the third task is to envision its cessation; and the fourth is to take steps to bring about this cessation (James & Cooper, 2007:94).

All of the Buddhist teachings fall under the heading of 'dharma', a term used also by the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement. To both Buddhists and Gaudiya Vaishnavas, dharma is understood to mean the path to truth. The mind, ambiances, the environment are seen to be inseparable and interdependent. Buddhism shares the conviction that the health of the whole is inseparable, and that everything in life arises through causes and conditions (Palmer, 2003:77).

A Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, explains the philosophy that the more one becomes awakened, the more the reality in the interconnectedness of human beings, society, and nature is revealed. He also argues that it is ultimately up to us humans to bring about change. To do this, we must become whole; and in order to become whole, there must be a favourable environment for our healing. He emphasises that one must live and pursue a lifestyle that is free from the destruction of our humanity. This requires individuals to be in a state of equilibrium to change the environment (Palmer, 2003:78).

Buddhist philosophy explains that, in order to protect the environment, we must protect ourselves. As explained in the previous chapter, in order to protect ourselves, we must oppose selfishness and hatred, and embrace mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom, which are essential to Buddhism. This then enables us to be aware of our actions, especially towards other living entities and the environment. An expansion of the belief in the interconnectedness between humans and nature is that, if we respect the environment, then the environment will respect us. Buddhists regard nature as a part of a family. Trees are seen as parents that nourish us and provide us with all we need. They believe that the interconnectedness makes us part of a great family too – that every being has the nature of Buddha. This relationship between the Buddhist teachings and nature can be explained under the following headings: nature as a teacher; nature as a spiritual force; and nature as a way of life (Palmer, 2003:78).

Nature as a teacher: Fundamental to Buddhist teaching is that everything around us, everything in the world, is a teacher. Nature is the best teacher for human beings to attain enlightenment, as nature and non-humans live in accordance with the laws of nature, and do not diverge from the truth. Buddha thus taught that respect for life and nature is essential. Nature teaches one to enjoy without possessing, to be beneficial to each other without manipulation. The Buddhist philosophy strongly believes that in an ecosystem where trees affect climate, the soil and animals, and even water and the air, one entity's existence is no more important than any others'. Buddha recognised that it was critical that we change our attitude from dominating nature to working with nature, as we are an intrinsic part of all existence. This is the only way to attain enlightenment (Palmer, 2003:80).



Nature as a spiritual force: Masters of Buddhism constantly remind us of the importance of living in tune with nature, to respect all alike, to live simply, and to understand nature as a spiritual force. Living in nature brings us back to ourselves. It cultivates and propagates the four boundless qualities needed for enlightenment: loving-kindness, compassion, delighting in the wellbeing of others, and impartiality. It brings about healing, helps people get back to the earth and to the basics. We learn to appreciate the fragility of all we love and the capriciousness of security. Buddhists believe that retreat and solitude in nature complement our religious practice (Palmer, 2003:81).

Nature as a way of life: Lastly, we look at the Buddhist teaching of nature as a way of life. Buddha applauded the virtue of thriftiness. Living right avoids wasting, and advocates for a simpler, non-aggressive, gentler approach to nature, cultivating veneration for all forms of nature. By developing the correct actions of not killing or stealing, of avoiding misconduct, we can begin to live in harmony with nature without injuring it and the rhythm of life (Palmer, 2003:82).

This, of course, is acceptable when the lessons being learnt and the religious philosophies and teachings being expounded are part of one's life. But what does one do when this outlook is not part of people's lives, when non-believers are being asked to change their minds and views? The only feasible solution is a new ethic – an environmental ethic or philosophy that is designed to include the philosophies of these two religious practices, philosophies and traditions, to safeguard the environment. A new framework is required – one that adopts the principles of simple thinking and higher living.

## **5.4 CONCLUSION**

Herein I have discussed the call for a new ethic that is related to religion and spiritualism, as well as the similarities between deep ecology and the two chosen religious philosophies. I have also discussed how these two philosophies conceive of humanity's proper relationship to the environment. In the next chapter, I will offer a tentative framework for a new environmental ethic that draws on these philosophies.



## CHAPTER SIX: FRAMEWORK – SOLUTION FOR THE FUTURE (SIMPLER LIVING, HIGHER THINKING)

*“For if religions shape the worldviews we live by and our ways of living are in crisis, then academics of every specificity and adherents of every religion can recognize a common arena of inquiry with shared terms of reference” (Jenkins, 2009:286).*

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will outline an ethical framework which is intended to serve as a basis on which to articulate and reflect upon solutions to ethical questions and moral dilemmas from the dual perspectives of environmental ethics and religion.

### 6.2 CALL FOR A NEW ETHIC

It seems that no single ethical system or theory to date has been successful in offering effective moral guidance which has brought about the required behavioural change, especially as it relates to current environmental policies (Berunger & Douglas, 2012:187). In recognising this, prominent congregations of academics, economists, and environmentalists who share a common concern for the state of the environment and its grim future have called for a new ethic. Although it is not a recent thought that a new ethic be developed, in more recent times the drive for it has become stronger – and is now being demanded (Palmer, 2003:17). Upon further introspection, theorists and philosophers such as Leopold, Naess, Devall, and Callicott believe that a more meaningful and spiritual association with nature would be the only way to transform our worldview and attitudes towards nature<sup>5</sup>. They believed that this kind of association was fundamental to the development of a new ethic (Hedlund-De Witt, 2013:155).

Cowdin (2008) quotes Hart, who claims that a religious framework can provide such an association, where the concept of anthropocentrism is put aside and replaced by an awareness that all members of the biotic community have an inherent goodness and intrinsic value, and are to be regarded and respected as such. In addition to the above, Hart emphasizes that people need to relate positively to non-human living beings, as they share with them a common home.

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<sup>5</sup> As described in the previous chapter, Arnes Naess, the father of deep ecology, built his entire theory of deep ecology on the principle of spiritual association with nature. He acknowledges that his principles are based on Hindu Metaphysics. Aldo Leopold when asked by his wife about God replied, that "he believed there was a mystical supreme power that guided the Universe...but to him this power was not a personalized God. It was more akin to the laws of nature...his religion came from nature".

The first solemn endeavour to move away from a human-based environmental ethic was documented in Taylor's respect for nature (1986), which argued that we should accept that every living being has inherent worth, and that they seek their own good, while also denying that humanity is superior. However, the ethic for the future must also be wary of falling into the trap of individualistic theories and becoming too focused only on non-human individuals instead of the whole creation. Norton (1984) similarly expresses this concern, arguing that an ethic must be distinctive, and that no successful environmental ethic can be based on individualism, be it human or non-human. The new ethic or framework must be developed with a holistic, distinctive approach based on the moral considerations of nature as a whole, and on the interconnectedness of it all, without a discourse of self-interest (Katz, 1991:83).

The aim of the framework is to reconcile religious principles and environmental philosophies. According to Hoffman and Sandelands (2004), current environmental ethical frameworks such as anthropocentrism, non-anthropocentrism, and ecocentrism lack the ability to meet the needs of today. Perhaps the amalgamation of religious and environmental values and principles may provide a way forward (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2004:26).

## **6.3 FRAMEWORK**

Hoffman and Sandelands (2004), in their discussion of a possible theocentric environmental ethics, identify six conservation virtues that would be suitable for this kind of theocentric ethics. These are humility, respect, selflessness, moderation, mindfulness, and responsibility. While their discussion is focused on "an environmentalism embedded within Catholic teaching" (2004: 16), it is notable that these virtues can also be interpreted in the light of the two religious philosophies discussed in earlier chapters. In what follows, I will adapt and develop their framework by elaborating on each the virtues identified above in the light of the specific religious philosophies described in this study.

### **6.3.1 Humility**

Humility is a common virtue in many religious traditions, as it follows from the acknowledgement of a supreme God who has dominion over humanity and nature. The ability to see "the cultural value of nature" according to Leopold, also "boils down, in the last analysis to a question of intellectual humility" (1949: 200 cited in Hoffman & Sandelands), and this virtue is therefore central in constructing a religious framework for environmentalism.

Humility allows us to acknowledge that there is much that humanity does not understand about the universe, let alone about the world we inhabit. The complexity of the environment, in terms of the functioning and operations of creation, the limitations of resources, and the ability of the environment

to absorb pollution that is generated, is beyond the comprehension of most or all human beings. It is critical to understand that, while we know some things, we need to be humble about the fact that we do not know everything. Humility is fundamental to appreciating that our technological aptitude has overtaken our ability to assess our impact on the environment (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2004:27).

Humility allows us to appreciate the interconnectedness of all things, as Buddhism teaches. This virtue allows us to understand that we are not the centre of the universe - we do not have dominion over the created order, but rather we are merely a part of it - and, we must recognise our role in a picture that is bigger than us. When we practise humility, we take up our natural constitutional position, and we work for the betterment of society and the world, thereby fulfilling our birth right. This virtue has the potential to bring about harmony between humans and the non-human world.

### **6.3.2 Respect**

A result of practicing humility is the ability to respect others, including the non-human environment that we depend on. This includes basic respect for all living creatures and respect for God's creation - "to simply treat nature as a 'thing' without value beyond our estimate is materialism and objectification of God's creation" (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2004:28).

The virtue of respect challenges the view that the environment is for humanity alone, for human needs and human consumption. Rather, it fosters an attitude that the environment is part of God's creation; and all creatures, human and non-human, are all part of God. If we see it in that light, we will respect all beings. Would we then so easily impose suffering on non-human beings? Respecting living beings as part of God encourages us rethink how we make decisions in regards to the non-human world and our interaction with it. Conversely, by disrespecting nature, we diminish and reduce nature to a mere material value with no worth beyond what humans give it (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2004:28).

However, by this act of disrespecting nature, we disrespect God's law. In the religious philosophies we have examined, each and every living being has a purpose, reason, or journey to fulfil in order to progress to the ultimate goal of human birth. Human interference in this process interferes with God's will and law. The Gaudiya Vaishnava movement believes that disrespecting any living entity is disrespect to God as all living entities are part and parcel of God. Buddhist philosophy is to do no harm and to recognise the interconnectedness of things. Truly comprehending this interconnectedness leads to respect for all things. A pivotal religious philosophy that both religions adhere to is that of Karma. Karma is a way of ensuring all living entities are respected as if not then that same disrespect will be bestowed upon oneself.

### 6.3.3 Selflessness

The root cause of many problems, and especially problems of an environmental nature, is humanity's selfishness and the cumulative effect of actions arising out of greed. This framework calls for a new ethic to be based on the concept of simple living and higher thinking, and is a call for society to reduce its impact on the ecosystem. The accumulated impact of many individuals and many actions causes the destruction of nature. One simple act, repeated by many, such as stopping the consumption of meat, can have immensely positive effects on the environment. Other examples are given by Buddhist teachings, such as switching to green electricity, insulating homes, ethical buying, experimenting with simplicity, and so on (Akuppa, 2009: 68).

This framework calls for selflessness and self-limiting actions. This follows from an understanding that every human action in the world must be seen in relation to safeguarding the environment, and ultimately in relation to God. It is egotistical and self-centred to think that one's personal interest is separate from the interest of others, or to think that environmental parameters can be determined by oneself. Every action that is taken out of selfishness and self-centredness, and that impacts on and affects the environment, is a form of disrespect: disrespect to nature and to God's creation (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2004:29). Such actions follow from seeing the domination and exploitation of the resources provided to us as the primary goal of life. This denies one the spiritual self-realisation that is the primary goal of human life, according to a spiritually-based, God-conscious cosmology that encourages an environmentally sound life of natural simplicity (Cremo, 1995:86).

### 6.3.4 Moderation

Very closely connected with selflessness and self-limitation, the principle of moderation entails taking only what one needs and not accumulating unnecessarily. The principles of the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement and of Buddhism hold that accumulating just to gratify the senses is against religious principles. People can never find happiness through accumulating material objects; and therefore religion guides people to use only what they need, and to share available resources, thus benefitting all (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2004:29).

By campaigning for moderation, earth's resources will be used less, and production will be reduced, resulting in less pollution and fewer waste materials and by-products. The aim of a satisfactory environmental ethic must be to challenge humanity to move beyond seeking satisfaction from nature, and to realise their true nature and seek satisfaction in nature (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2004:29). Buddhism believes that moderation, and not accumulation, brings peace to one's life. This principle is based on the notion of non-attachment to material objects. Attachment leads to being bound to the material world.

Without adopting this virtue - until people reduce their desire for material consumption - the world's environmental problems will remain unsolved. To practise simpler living and higher thinking, people need to gain substantial experience of superior forms of happiness and satisfaction (Cremo, 1995:86).

### **6.3.5 Mindfulness**

“For humans to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, its water, its land, its air and its life with poisonous substances – these are sins” (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2004:30). By inference, nearly every human action entails sin: driving a car, heating a house, buying goods for sensory gratification and not out of necessity. The virtue of mindfulness calls for thoughtful choices in determining which of these actions are unavoidable, and what alternative choices we can make rather than living a life of over-consumption.

Gaudiya Vaishnava and Buddhism give us daily practices that help us to apply this principle. Their philosophies speak of bringing clear and radiant awareness into our actions. They advocate driving less and using bicycles more, adopting a vegetarian diet, using oxen for transportation and agriculture, etc. They recommend that one returns to village life. These alternative lifestyle methods must be adopted to improve the environmental situation. Being mindful leads to a re-examination of our practices (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2004:30).

### **6.3.6 Responsibility**

The entire earth's surface appears to show signs of human impact. Our unrelenting curiosity, our drive for economic development, our desire to improve technology at a rampant pace – these lead us to neglect our relationship with and impact on nature. With each leap of so-called ‘advancement’ we bring about new problems for the environment. This framework calls for a return to responsible behaviour. This will be achieved by emphasising the religious and moral principle that every resource, every creature, every material thing has a purpose, that it is all interconnected, and that we as humans do not have the right to do as we please in the name of our own progress. As the most advanced form of intelligence, we have a responsibility and duty to nature and to all living beings to live harmoniously together. We are even obliged to reverse our negative impact, whether or not it matches our needs (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2004:31).

One of the biggest responsibilities humans have to nature and to other living entities is that of protecting them. However, humans are precisely what causes harm to nature and to living entities. The meat industry is one of the biggest causes of environmental problems. By acting irresponsibly in this matter alone, we have contributed to environmental degradation. We should act in accordance with God's law, and not slaughter animals for food, fur, or leather. Killing animals violates karmic

laws, giving rise to collective and individual reactions. This irresponsible act causes humans to erode the element of compassion, which is essential in both religious philosophies for the achievement of self-realisation.

## 6.4 SUMMATION

The intention of this framework to identify virtues that recognise that every being, animate or not, has a purpose, is interconnected with others, but most importantly, has its own path to follow.

There is a famous Buddhist saying: “We are the world and the world is us”. By starting to examine ourselves internally and to question the lives we live, we may come to appreciate that the real answer to the environmental crisis begins with us. Craving and greed only bring unhappiness; simplicity, moderation, and the middle way bring liberation, and hence equanimity and happiness. Our demands for material possessions can never be satisfied: we shall always want or need to acquire more. There is not enough in the universe to satisfy us fully; and no-one, government or otherwise, can fulfil all our desires for security.

Religious teachings, when amalgamated with environmental philosophy’s knowledge and incorporated into a framework for reflection and action, have the potential to lead us away from the ethos of the individual and its bondage to materialism and consumerism. When we conquer and overcome our greed and desire, we begin to have inner peace and to be at peace with those around us. Such a framework allows us to live in a mindful, open, sensitive way, and to be focused on what is needed in a particular time, place, and circumstance.

To have the ability to defend the environment, we must possess the ability to safeguard ourselves. We do that by replacing ignorance with wisdom, selfishness with generosity, and hate with love. Wisdom, compassion and mindfulness are the essence of Buddhism. Religion teaches us to be constantly aware of our actions and of their effects, include those that destroy the environment. Peace is realised when we are mindful of each and every step we take.

By developing the right actions – not killing (compassion), following a vegetarian diet, not stealing or engaging in misconduct – we can begin to exist in nature and also become (or sense that we already are) more at one with nature. Our minds are clearer and focused on our constitutional position and on our reason for being born. If we are going to save this world, we need to pursue a new ecological order, to examine the life we lead, and to work together to ensure mutual benefit for all. It is critical that we all work together if the solution is to be practical, feasible, and implementable. By engaging in responsible living and living a simpler life, we can reduce the suffering of the world.

## **6.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has made some tentative suggestions as to virtues that should be included in a framework for environmental ethics that is based on the religious philosophies of the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement and Buddhism.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

*“It is increasingly said that civilization, Western Civilization at least, stands in need of a new ethic, setting out people’s relations, to the natural environment...” (Sylvan Richard, 2003:47).*

This plea has been made more and more in recent times. Environmental degradation has reached epidemic proportions globally, and theologians, academics, environmentalists, spiritual leaders and politicians acknowledge that a drastic change is required.

This is not to say, however, that there is no relationship between humanity and nature; but the type of that relationship is now being questioned. Questions of morality and value are of prime concern. Values are being interrogated, particularly with respect to whose values these are. The new ethic being called for requires a change in current attitudes, values, and our method of ethical evaluation.

Humanity has always done as it pleases with nature; and this is the behaviour that the new ethic wishes to change (Sylvan, 2003: 47). In fact, Sylvan makes such a change a required extension of morality.

Many authors have identified Western ‘civilisation’ as the source of environmental degradation. The reason for this is the fact that Western civilisation was the source of the development of philosophies and practices that have influenced our attitudes towards the environment. Western civilisation adopted the Judeo- Christian thinking that humanity had dominion over the created order, and that it was made for the pleasure and needs of humanity. Thus the environmental philosophies that developed were anthropocentric in their character. From these philosophies developed government policies and regulations. As a result there was not much focus on environmental preservation or conservation; nature was used for the development of economies and social upliftment.

This was not done, however, in a way that was sustainable: people thought that nature’s resources were unlimited. A famous saying of Gandhi highlights human nature: “There’s enough on earth for everyone’s need but not for everyone’s greed” (cited in Cremonesi 1995:1). This greed has had a direct result in the extensive environmental degradation we see today. Polluted rivers and fisheries, over-grazed land, unrestricted hunting, deforestation, toxic waste generation, air pollution – to name only a few – are examples of the environmental degradation caused by incessant human greed for self-benefit and so-called ‘upliftment’.

Given that Western civilisation and religion were deemed by many to be the cause of environmental degradation, we look then to the East for a solution to the environmental crisis. Fundamental to the



Eastern philosophy is to understand the natural world in its proper relationship with God, and to use natural resources in congruence with God's law. Eastern philosophy is about reducing the pollution of the human spirit, and so reducing the pollution of the material world, earth.

A polluted human spirit has the apparently relentless desire to have and enjoy more personal comforts, entertainment, and personal wealth than we really need. The Eastern attitude drives the concept of 'simpler living, higher thinking'. Due to our incessant greed for material matters, we have created a vicious cycle and an imbalance in nature.

Few try to make a difference by adopting this concept of simpler living or environmentally conscious living; and yet this is vital, especially in developed societies such as the USA, Europe and Japan, which bear the most responsibility for the current environmental crisis. According to Alan Durning of the Worldwatch Institute, "the richest billion people in the world have created a form of civilization so acquisitive and profligate that the planet is in danger. The life-style of the top echelon – the car drivers, beef eaters, soda drinkers and throwaway consumers – constitutes an ecological threat unmatched in severity" (cited in Cremona, 1995:45). We want a clean and healthy environment, but in the next breath we demand a living standard and style that unavoidably results in environmental degradation.

For humans to bring about real behavioural change, they need to understand why the natural world needs to be respected and protected. As argued in previous chapters, Eastern philosophy speaks of the interconnectedness of all life, human and non-human. They speak of our co-dependency: we all rely on each other for a mutually harmonious and beneficial existence. Beyond that, there is also the deeper and more basic concept of doing no harm to any living being. Eastern philosophy speaks of karma, the cycle of 'what goes around comes around', that every action has a reaction. Eastern philosophy is very similar to the environmental philosophical ethic of deep ecology. Deep ecologists see the need for a change in human consciousness. According to two prominent philosophers, Bill Devall and George Sessions (1974), "deep ecology is a process of ever-deeper questioning of ourselves, the assumptions of the dominant worldview in our culture and the meaning and truth of our reality" (Cremona, 1995:55). Deep ecologists also speak of the equality of all, that all things have an equal right to live, blossom, and thrive in their own individual forms. They share the teachings that even non-humans have the ability to evolve and achieve self-realisation within a larger self-realisation. This concept is essential teaching in Eastern philosophy, which believes in the evolution of the soul. The soul passes from one body to another according to its past activities, or karma. When humans interfere in non-humans' lives, not only are they interfering with the path or higher destiny of the non-humans, but they are also affecting and negatively impacting their own karma.

A new ethic needs to review and take into account the way we view nature and non-human beings, as well as their value. The virtues identified in the framework chapter of this thesis have the potential to form the basis of this new ethic. Once the new ethic has been developed, a further recommendation should be to implement it, and compare it with current institutions that live the philosophy and adopt the concept of 'simpler living, higher thinking'.

There is much more that needs to be done in furthering this new framework. There is a dire need to change behaviour. The belief that moral truth only emanates from reason needs to be reviewed in depth and the foundation of current philosophical beliefs needs to be scrutinized. The concept of simple living and higher thinking needs to be explored in terms of whether it can be practically and sustainably adopted in a world that has advanced so drastically.

## **7.1 SUMMATION**

In this thesis, I began by explaining the environmental crisis that we are faced with, detailing the various forms of environmental degradation and their possible causes. This was followed by an overview of philosophy and environmental ethics. I have focused on anthropocentrism that has been dominant in determining our attitude to the environment, and have argued that it is as a result of this particular type of environmental ethic that we find the degradation of the environment we see today.

I then discussed two religious philosophies and their principles. As I have argued in this thesis, religion may be a useful source to supplement and support environmental ethics. These religious philosophies and principles can be used in developing a framework for a new ethic. I have made some tentative suggestions as to the virtues that might constitute such an ethic. In this final chapter, I have also pointed out possibilities for future work that needs to be done in testing, refining and furthering this framework.

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