

Yale FOX INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP

**CAN HUMANS AND
NATURE BE
RECONCILED?
LESSONS FROM PHILOSOPHY**

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THE GOAL AND THE METHOD OF THIS RESEARCH

One of the most pressing challenges facing humanity in the 21st century concerns our ability, and potential, to engage with nature in ways that promote synergies rather than countervailing interactions.

The purpose of my research is to reflect on these-issues from the field of philosophy, rather than today's mainstream approaches that apply economics, political science, and sociology.

However unlike some philosophy scholars who eschew economics such as cost-benefit analysis, I seek to assess whether a philosophical approach might help us uncover, and identify an optimal relationship between humans and nature to build a harmonious reciprocity for both of the entities to flourish for generations to come. In achieving this goal, I argue it is important to reconfigure humans' perception created not only toward nature but also the perception toward humans themselves.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental problems of a global scale, which gradually drew attention in the late twentieth century, have been a crucial issue for humans, widely acknowledged in the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human and Environment. Since then, the global community, based on initiatives of the United Nations, has been proposing various conventions and treaties which total twelve hundred¹ altogether, covering broad areas of the environment. Responding to rising concerns, we have seen the introduction of new political frameworks and the use of measures such as economic instruments (Feed-In-Tariff, environmental tax, green procurement, etc.), regulations (target setting, top-runner standards, environmental laws, etc.) and public engagement (eco-label, carbon footprints, etc.) to enhance environmental protection. However we have not seen significant progress in terms of mitigating environmental degradation. In spite of the fact that numerous scholars in science, economics and policy analysis have been working vigorously on this problem, we see little progress in tackling the global environmental problems we face today. Why are the rising concerns and reactions to environmental problems not leading to their actual resolution or mitigation?

To understand this phenomenon, the humanities may need to focus on the very bases of human perceptions of nature. By utilizing philosophical methodology, my research is an attempt to reconsider the relationship between human and nature, in order to reveal a reciprocal path. It is an attempt to uncover a universal and fundamental understanding that lies at the base of the characteristic attitude of humans toward nature. By revealing such underlying tendencies toward

¹ As for April 2016, 1260 Multilateral Agreement and 1599 Bilateral Agreement exist. For more detail refer to the following website. Last accessed April 21st, 2016. <http://iea.uoregon.edu/page.php?file=home.htm&query=static>

nature, which can be commonly found, I argue, regardless of cultural differences, my ultimate research objective is to draw out the policy implications for the creation of innovative and effective environmental policies that aim to build an environmentally sound and resilient society.

OVERVIEW

My research sheds light on the contested debates about humans and nature. Although recent scientific research has revealed the fundamental link and the mutual dependency between humans and nature, humans still conceive nature as something external to human culture as a whole. Nature per se is still seen, by many, as a source of raw materials and as a free provider of environmental services.² In order to enhance rational common ground to reduce conflicts among players (actors) in environmental governance, I argue that there is a necessity for humans to have different narrative of nature. This shift will lead to changes in the shaping of our policy in protection and solving the environmental problems we face today. In due course, humans may need to redefine themselves, not as a species superior to other living beings, but as a member of the universe of species.

My argument is that the very externalizing nature from humans is leading us to the deterioration of the global environment we see over the last 50 years. The history of global environmental problems has drawn significant attention to problems such as forestry (deforestation), fishery (over-fishing), ozone depletion, extinction of species (the impact of biodiversity losses are now recognised as the sixth great extinction of the planet earth) and climate change. In order to change this tendency, humans have introduced a range of methodologies from economic, law and policy to tackle the environmental problems. However the unfortunate reality is that those measures have only a limited impact regarding the policies introduced by local, national governments, and the decisions made in the global governance. This may derive from the problem of human perception of nature that only addresses a certain object from nature when addressing a certain problem: such as addressing GHGs (Green House Gases) for climate change per se. A range of science disciplines have agreed that short-sighted solution will not be helpful to fundamentally solve the problems we face today, and thus we cannot go back to the same kind of solutions that we have been proposing in the last 50 years since the acknowledgement of global environmental problems in 1972.

² The environmental services performed by nature provide products such as food crops, natural medicines, fibres, fuels, water, oxygen, and so on. Environmental services also includes the functioning of natural systems, for example, climate control, water purification, rainfall cycles, oxygen supply, soil fertility and the recycling of the nutrients essential to agriculture. In other words, environmental services are the activities, products and processes that nature provides us and that enables life to thrive. These environmental services are taken for granted by humans without much careful consideration of how much the humans owe to its free given service.

What has been less translated is how the nature is conceived in a hidden and subtle way unnoticed for its importance from the majority of the humans. In order to change this tendency we see, regarding the weak impacts in terms of environmental governance, there is an urgent need to change our fundamental perception of nature. By looking into the philosophy from East to West not only sheds light to how humans have perceived nature, but discovers the origins of Human-Nature relationship through philosophical implications. By shifting the fundamental perspective, which can be found in common regardless of cultural differences toward nature that 1) humans are external yet internal to nature, 2) humans and nature are strongly inter-dependent on each other's presence, and 3) to show the new narrative of the humans as the member of the community of the Universe, the possibility will open for humans to reconstruct our society in a way which is more caring and reciprocal for both humans and nature to thrive, which will lead us to think and act more carefully taking in consideration of the nature's existence and humans as a member of the planet earth community.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Humans are facing a critical moment in Earth's history of the Anthropocene. This is a time when humanity must collaborate to choose its future, a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, for policy makers to improve our community of life and to take into account the responsibility for future generations, the followings could be presented as policy implications derived from my research:

PREAMBLE:

My effort to draw in philosophical foundations important to the human environment interface results in the uncovering of several often hidden influences that policy makers may want to be aware. Specifically policy makers may want to take into consideration the following Principles when making policies but at the same time be cautious to avoid the deterministic fallacy and fallacy of *appeal to nature*.³

PRINCIPLES:

- 1) To pay attention to the *finite* natural resources and the *finite* space on the mother Earth in comparison with the *infinity* of time.**

³ I want to differentiate the fallacy of *appeal to nature* and *naturalistic fallacy*. Fallacy of *appeal to nature* is a rhetoric used to admit everything deriving from nature as good, non-natural as bad. For example, the strong sense of oppositions to genetically modified organics (GMOs) derives from the notion of *appeal to nature*. On the other hand, *naturalistic fallacy* is originally the argument made by George E. Moore in his book *Principia Ethica* written in 1903, inquiring on how we know what is *good*. That when one finds a good quality in an object A, then one easily assumes that object A is good. Moore argued that when one makes this simple assumption in defining *good*, one is already admitting that one has fallen into the *naturalistic fallacy*.

Policy makers are advised to be conscious of the use of the natural resources and space, of their finiteness. At the same time, there is a strong need to take into consideration the future generations' right to flourish given the resources of what the current generation is going to leave behind. Because of the infinity of time, policy makers should also be cautious of harnessing technology uses at the initial point of introduction of the technology. As the history has witnessed in the nuclear technology field, every technology has its pros and cons at its use.⁴ Therefore for the sake of the generations to come, policy makers should be cautious in the plausible analysis, keeping in mind not only the bright side but also the possible ill-effect of the technologies' use.

2) To be more cautious of the *dualism aspect of humans being external yet internal to the nature.*

Policy makers are advised to change their mind set from anthropocentrism to an anthropocosmic view.⁵ Humans should be redefined as anthropocosmic beings in relationship to other living and non-living beings of the universe, not as anthropocentric individuals in isolation.⁶ The policies should incorporate the ideology of mutual reciprocity, interdependence, and inter-relatedness to enhance the harmonious and peaceful relationship with other living and non-living things. Recently nature-based approach or nature-based solutions are being proposed as a counter proposal to engineer-based approaches or engineer-based solutions. Policy makers should not always follow the conventional approach but be open to new approaches in solving the environmental problems.

3) To be aware of the *change in 'value' systems over time, not only through cultural and historical dimensions, but also through scientific dimensions.*

Throughout history, humans have observed the change in norms from time to time. Slavery and the racism once were common are now thought as a dark

⁴ Needless to mention, for nuclear technology, it can be used as nuclear bombs to destroy the humanities and the non-human living things in a single second leaving serious scars for decades to come. When used under control it can be a useful energy source for millions of humans to flourish with electricity supplies. However the peaceful usage of such powerful technology also cause problems as humans have experienced since 1960s; the radiation, the radiation waste problem, and the nuclear reactor accidents.

⁵ The term "anthropocosmic" is used by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim.

⁶ This is a phrase used among Thomas Berry, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim. In honour of their hard work in inspiring the spiritual importance of nature, I would like to specifically use this phrase for my policy brief.

side of humanity. Throughout the history we can observe the expansion of the rights (for example, basic human rights to live a decent life, right to vote, right to get education) and inclusion of rights to other humans (for example to other races and to other gender). The attempts in giving rights to non-human living beings such as animal rights and nature rights have been argued since 1970s.⁷ Therefore it is only natural for policy makers to include rights of the non-human and non-living to preserve what we want to leave behind for the next generations to pass along in the future. Norms are also apt to change. Recently we have seen the norm change to admit gay marriage. Norms and perceptions can change from time to time in tandem with social awareness and learning process. Science also does not provide a static view on humans' worldview. Copernicus and Galileo's fight against the cosmic view of the churches show the difficulties in changing peoples' perception of a certain worldview. However when such change occurs, it happens quickly.⁸ Policy makers should be flexible in their mind sets and be open and be ready for such changes and should be leaders in promoting them when and if such shifts in value systems benefit society as a whole.

4) To be aware of the limited impact of policies with short-sighted or short-term views based on anthropocentrism.

Policies such as economic measures and regulations might effectively work as a short-term policy. However what is crucial to change peoples' behaviour is in the longer-term to signal and address the importance of reciprocity between humans and nature. The emphasis should be paid more to policies addressing longer time spans. Long-term policies such as education and awareness-raising, mid-term policies such as research and technology development (and improvement) should be given more careful attention for citizens to gradually change their behavioural patterns. Policies should not only be the method to

⁷ In 1972, an American lawyer Christopher Stone wrote a paper titled "Should Tree have Standing?" arguing that trees should also be given a right to sue the developers in case the trees were in danger from development. In 1973, Endangered Species Act was signed into law to protect critically threatened species from extinction. Using ESA, in 1978, endangered bird Palila filed suit against Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources to remove permanently all feral sheep and goats from their habitat. Details can be found in "Palila v. Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources: State Governments Fall Prey to the Endangered Species Act of 1973". Last accessed February 14, 2016.
<http://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1219&context=elq>

⁸ Thomas Kuhn describes such phenomena as *paradigm shift*.

exclusively eliminate the bad and wrong doings but also could be inclusive in a way to enhance peoples' collective action to better society.

5) To pay attention to humans' tendency in terms of developing insights based on the narrative and translation of given information.

Policy makers are advised to be aware of the narrow-sightedness tendency of humans. Humans tend to make judgements based on how we translate and understand given information. Policy makers should be aware of such tendency and be willing to self-reflect on whatever judgements made are based on the given information. Policy makers should simultaneously be cautious in whatever decisions they make and should be open-minded to new ideas so as to enhance a social discussion when adopting new ideas. Progress can only be made through new attempts and new insights; therefore they should be the most open-minded and the most willing persons to discuss the possibility of new ideas with a strong sense of justice and ethics.