

## A CRITIQUE OF THE SELF-CENTERED ECOLOGY VIS-A-VIZ THE NATIVE-CENTRIC ECOLOGY

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### **Abstract**

*One of the main challenges facing humanity today is the search for ecological sustainability and the need to support just and equitable eco-social transformations from the individualistic self to the collective self. The effect of the eco-individualistic self includes threat to humanity, contamination of water supplies, destruction or disablement of energy, and many others. Using the philosophical method of hermeneutics, this study maintains that the ethics of self has been misinterpreted and nature as viewed as personal property, has led to the ecological crisis. To avert the ecological crisis, the self must be viewed as collective. The collective self presents no ontological division in the hierarchy of beings, and it is rooted in the philosophy of the native-centric ecology. "Native-centric ecology" refers to environmental collectivism rooted in communalism, inviolability of nature and environmental contingency. It is a moral principle of realizing environmental potential without destroying self. The paper concludes that a better understanding of the self would help to avoid the destruction of the self in ecological relationships.*

**Keywords:** eco-terrorism; self-ethics; native-centric ecology; ecological universals; and eco-social transition

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the main challenges facing humanity today is the search for ecological sustainability and the need to support a just and equitable eco-social transition of the collective self in the environment. Ecological terrorism has caused much damage to humanity despite different philosophical postulations for the conservation of the environment. The enforcement of environmental laws in Nigeria, the activities of radical environmentalists and animal rights activists, yet eco-terrorists sustained (Yang, S., and I-Chin Jen, 2017; Grandin et al., 2021). In the same vein, campaigns on environmental problems are often effective in Nigeria and raise awareness among citizens, yet disappointing. Eco-terrorism is the hostility, destruction of property, and death of both plants and animals. It is also an act of violence due to the change in environmental policies that inflicts emotional and physical distress, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD reawakens traumatic memories linked to eco-terrorism (Monday, 2020). Eco-individualism is an egoistic ethic that destroys communities and the "self" in the ecosystem. It is an act of 'standing aloof' in environmental relationships that is an affirmation of personal ethics and instrumental value. This, of course, is a non-native-centric worldview (Osebor, 2023). The ethical implications of eco-terrorism are environmental sabotage, trespassing on planetary boundaries, human-centered philosophy, opposed eco-

communalism, and a poor understanding of the self in environmental relationships (Loren, 2007; Monday, 2021). How can a rational being destroy the self in an attempt to explore nature? "Evil is a consequence of ignorance; no one goes against their well-formed judgment, and such a well-formed judgment can never be truly evil" (Charles, 2021). The ecological crisis is simply a matter of ignorance among humans, who see the environment as their private property that is worth excess control and dominance. It is disheartening that destroying the self is an inadequate understanding of the self, and the projection of the self as personal, heightened by self-awareness, self-consciousness, and self-agreement without others, has led to the ecological crisis facing humanity (Osebor & Fischer, 2022). Lack of clear understanding of the primacy of the self, the negated ecological transition of posterity, means that to resist the contamination of the environment, an individual must harness the unique side of being, which consists of attributes (e.g., traits, goals, and aspirations, experiences, interests, and behaviors) that will not differentiate the person from others (Sedikides et al., 2011). The representation of non-relational bonds or groups in an ecological community is environmental egoism, differentiating one from others. The collective self is without strong anthropocentric views of nature (Monday, 2018). The ecological contradictions of the self and environmental egoism: defending the autonomy and rights of the individual without understanding the collective self and participating in relational ecology (Monday, 2018). The collective self is an act of accepting others based on their moral compass, values, and traditions (Osebor, 2023). The irrational response to the question, what can we do for the conservation of the environment? Would native centric ecology "likely to result in accelerated deterioration of the environment and have negative impacts on a wide range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, water, culture, and food, as well as the right to live in a healthy environment" (Anshu, 2020).

The eco-social transition of posterity requires a proper understanding of the collective self, not individualism, environmental subjectivism, personal ethics, or respect for the autonomy of the individual. The individual self has failed to provide the needed solution to the environmental crisis. We must subdue egocentric mindsets and become alter-centric; avoiding sentiments predicated on moral values is one of the tenets of the native-centric ecology. Personal desire is good, but it can be selfish. The incitement to change our lifestyles and personal desires is good, but it is immoral if done excessively. The conception of the environment as an individual involves the manipulation of channels and the politicization of environmental policies. We argue that the recurrent misinterpretation of the concept of self often comes with the assumption that it is irrational or weirdly misaligned with their beliefs (Grandin et al., 2021). This gap must be closed for adequate understanding through a philosophical analysis of the self in the native-centric ecological approach. This proper understanding and interpretation of the self would help address the ecological crisis.

### **The concept of the Self**

The philosophy of the self has been discussed in different philosophies, not only in Native-centric ecology. H. Bradley is a British moral philosopher who discussed "Perfectionist Ethics" (self-realization), published in the *Ethical Studies* (1876). Bradley's ethics of the self is an eco-

social transition to solving the current problem of eco-terrorism ravaging the world (Mandelli, 2022). The philosophy of the self is problematic; it inquests for meanings and its metaphysical nature (Osebor&Ogelenya, 2023). Evans (1998) maintains that the self is the development and expression of characteristic attributes and potentials in a fashion that comprehensively discloses that subjectivism is the real nature of beings. Usually, the 'self' in question is the existential being, which applies to the corporal bodies. Collective self is the process of awareness of the true nature of beings rooted in the philosophy of native-centric ecology. In a similar vein, Arne Naess's (1973) deep ecology theory and the view of the wholeness of the earth articulated in James Lovelock's (1995) Gaia hypothesis have resided among African ecological thoughts for many centuries through philosophies such as native-centric ecology (Lesley, n.d.). It is an activity to reach the ecological self. The individual must be honest and strive for excellence in all aspects of life, for there is no ontological division among beings (Identity, 2004). Though the "self" presents a complex understanding in Bradley's "Ethical Studies" but is synonymous with "I/me=myself" (the subject of the moral action, though beyond the sphere of personhood, is the cornerstone of morality) (Identity, 2004; Evans, 1998), Evans (1998) maintains that the collective self can be proposed as the means to achieve a life identified as good by some criterion independent of the self-realizing process or held to be that which defines the good. Its critics typically argue that human nature is such that any equation of 'self-realization' and 'goodness' is implausible or undesirable. Collective is the one and only "end of the moral act means that in each act or volition, the self or will realizes itself, not as a mere subject but as a whole, i.e., an ideal self or will. Each act or volition is described as self-relation: the desired object is presented to the will as its state, thus the self seeks for itself in the object that is not so far from itself but is the self-opposed to the self. So the self-wills and gets itself by itself" (Identity, 2004). The relational self is unlike the individualistic self, but the self is a community with transnational features that does not lose its roots (Mathews, 1995).

The collective self is self-disciplined and avoids attitudes that destroy the self. The grand desires of the self are the activities that "represent us as idealized persons and hold a significant role in our moral lives and shaping others (Babushkina, 2018). Morality is empathy and compassion for others, treating them with respect (Babushkina, 2018). We should cultivate humility to recognize our limitations. The attempt to become the best version of oneself is to be a part of a whole and reconnect to our roots (Shafer-Landau, 1995). Though there may be reasons for not supporting self as an absolute moral value, the current ecological crisis requires the implementation of absolute moral values as a necessary condition for the protection of the environment; otherwise, humans end up destroying themselves (Shafer-Landau, 1995).

The individual self is the assertion of moral egoism. In Bradley's ethics, the self is not ecological individualism. Ecological individualism is terrorism of nature and the dominance of man. The self is superior in the hierarchy of beings. The native-centric ethics of the self affirms no separation of beings. The environmental crisis is caused by an inadequate understanding of the self. The conception of superior and inferior beings has led to the modification of the environment, the soil, and many other species (Tilman& Lehman, 2001). The self encapsulates

others and thinking, which all participates in the absolute. The realization is not an affirmation of environmental dualism but of ecological monism.

### **Self-ethics in Native-centric Ecology**

The idea of native-centric ecology means familiarity and interdependence with nature (Osebor, 2023). The ethical question: what does it mean to be effectively familiar with nature? The effective utilization of nature is not only for the ecological self but also for the interdependence and interrelatedness of nature (Munyaradzi, 2004). It extends ties with all people, not only with present generations but also with past and future generations. The native-centric ecology is an ecological self of 'brotherhood' (humanhood), and inseparable oneness with the ancestors is brought about through ritual practices or religion but articulates the anamnestic solidarity with nature (Lesley, n.d.; Osebor, 2023). The individual self lacks the moral sphere of recognizing and preserving the self for environmental posterity. The protection and conservation of nature do not end in dualism, but ecological monism may have something meaningful to contribute to environmental relativism. The misinterpretation of "dualistic logic within the dominant knowledge system makes it difficult for environmental philosophies aiming to address the crisis to escape dualistic assumptions" (O'Connor, 2022). This is a failure to acknowledge the notion of ethical universality and absolutism in the realization of the self. The native-centric ecology is not environmental separateness among beings; it is an inexpedient action that affects the individual and society. It is an ecological self-created by communitarian that opposes individualism, and the retention of dualistic assumptions limits their efficacy in the environmental relationship (O'Connor, 2022). The native-centric ecology is void of trespassing on planetary boundaries, environmental limitations, blood ties, or familyhood. It is a central belief in living together in close family relationships that encourage birth through death and beyond. The act of living together is bound by mutual respect and love, which describe the close personal relationships that unify the extended family. This African cultural value centers on groups, communities, or clans. It is not by definition speciesist, as some have argued, but it has strong ecocentric bearings that could be understood as caring not only for oneself but also for other beings in the biophysical world (Osebor, 2023). It teaches the eco-social transition of respect for all aspects of being, including the dependence on human beings, the land as sacred and ecological responsibility for the preservation and conservation of resources for posterity's sake (Gwaravanda, 2016; Osebor, & Irabor, 2023). The indigenous environmental philosophy does not negate religion, urban-rural differences, or acculturation (Gelfand, 1981). The cultural hybridization of the native-centric ecology is guided by respect for culture, good governance, ecological solidarity, and peace in the network (Gwaravanda, 2016). This can be understood as a force of modernity, colonial capitalism, enlightenment humanism, and Judeo-Christian assertions, but they can be properly integrated with the retention of the kernels of the native-centric philosophy for peace in the network. Native-centric ecology provides the ethical anchorage for human social, spiritual, and ecological selves. "The philosophy of the oneness of humans with nature is expressed by philosophers. The ethical concern is how we can preserve the well-being of future generations through the credence of environmental posterity (biocentrism), kinship or relatedness, and the immortality of values (Munyaradzi, 2007). The

ethical concern deconstructs the Western conception of the self and anthropocentrism to affirm the well-being of nature. This moral value will promote peaceful coexistence among beings in the bionetwork and for future generations. The self is transcendental morality and the happiness of others. Environmental collectivism negates individualism to present a good sense of judgment for environmental protection. Evans (1998) maintains that the native-centric ecology is a self-realizing lifestyle that, being either the same for all or specific to a person or subgroup of people, is ultimately definable only in the context, and perhaps concerning the common purposes, of a collective social body; the 'individualist', in which a person's self-realization has no necessary connection with the ends of a particular community. It is profoundly influenced by social groups in terms of conformity and belief, motivated to elevate and protect a positive group image as they manifest favorable perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward their in-group members (Sedikides et al., 2011). The native centric philosophy is the atomic self, and a station of duty with the highest self is the being of the environment. Ideal morality is the being of good but not inferior or superior beings. An environmental relationship should not be pleasure for pleasure's sake or duty for duty, but the conviction that we are parts of a whole. The negation of duty for the sake of ecological dualism raises the problem of moral inclination. Native centric ecology is “problem-solving that provides an overarching framework that guides human interactions with nature, the foundation of the educational process, and understanding of the nature of man” (Osebor, &Irabor, 2023). The search for the ideal morality is for the ideal self of perfect morality, not personal interest. The ethics of self, or him, is a positive realism that recognizes the self and the complexity of beings for the realization of the self. The self in the native-centric ecology implies close relationships and interdependence. Interdependence is not only that between one human and another; it involves the reality that all things, including nature, are closely related and depend on one another for existence. Humans exist in a community that embraces not only the physical humans but also the community of ancestors and the natural world of plants, animals, and other elements in the universe (Osebor, 2023). The native-centric philosophy frowns at the worldviews of superiority in their hierarchies yet recognizes the intimate bond between man and the environment. This worldview encourages biodiversity conservation and sustainable development through the interdependence and interconnectedness of human beings, animals, plants, and the natural world. Kelbessa (2022) argues that African people believe that the human-nature relationship has influenced generations to preserve the environment, which is rich in biodiversity, for posterity and will continue to do so for generations to come. It also encourages cross-fertilization culture and non-separation between beings (thou and "I and thou"). This affirms that there is no ontological understanding that human beings are not separated from others.

### **Conclusion**

In the native-centric ecology, one would conclude that it is the moral end of better ecological morality. Perfect ecological morality is the preservation of the self, and the self is the necessary condition for preserving others. The ecological self has been criticized as being too metaphysical, which requires clear interpretation to encapsulate universal beings. The particular self or morality opposes the will of commonality, negating the mutual accomplishment of the interdependence of the self in society. The morality of the collective

self is often misinterpreted, but that should be the real nature of participating in the commonwealth of protecting and conserving the environment. This study recommends that the self, the native-centric point of view, if adopted by policymakers in Nigeria, would be a panacea to the current ecological terrorism.

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