# Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue as a Foundation for Environmental Ethics

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**CONTENTS**

**For my parents.**

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# CHAPTER ONE

## ETHICS AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

**Introduction.** Humankind's failure to relate to Nature (which I define as that which is not constructed by humankind) with respect is most clearly reflected in the ongoing environmental crisis, which since the industrial revolution has been characterised by the massive industrial-scale exploitation and the concurrent destruction of natural entities such as individuals, species, and ecosystems. The modern green movement arose in reaction to the environmental crisis, and the rise of the green movement saw the construction of various environmental ethical philosophies. In this chapter I shall first conduct a brief survey of the environmental crisis. I shall then conduct a brief survey of environmental ethical philosophy. I shall conclude by introducing my objective of applying Buber's philosophy of dialogue as a foundation for environmental ethics.

**The Environmental Crisis.** It is clear that the environmental crisis has yet to be resolved. It is estimated that at least fifty thousand species go extinct each year, and three fourths of the world's bird and a quarter of the world's mammalian species face extinction.[1] Worse, this rate of extinction could be accelerated by rapid climate change.[2] This climate change is being accelerated by increasing carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, an increase which humankind has significantly contributed to,

[1] Christopher Flavin, 'The Legacy of Rio', in *State of the World 1997: A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society*, edited by Linda Starke (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), p. 13.

especially by the industrial scale burning of both fossil fuels and tropical rainforest.[3] With respect to habitat loss, the expansion of human settlement and agriculture has led to the massive destruction of natural habitats and ecosystems such as tropical and temperate rainforests, freshwater lakes and streams, coral reefs, and coastal mangroves.[4]

Singapore has not escaped the environmental crisis. Economic development has led to the clearing of Singapore's forests. Furthermore, forest fragmentation arising from such economic development has led to the loss of biodiversity.[5] Biodiversity in Singapore has also been threatened by land reclamation, for this and the resulting sedimentation have seriously threatened Singapore's coral reefs and other coastal ecosystems.[6]

**Environmental Ethics.** The emergence of the environmental crisis prompted the rise of the green movement. The popularisation of the green movement was partly spurred by environmentalist literature such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*.[7] The rise of the green movement was accompanied by the development of environmental ethics, with

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[2] ibid..
[3] Stuart J. Davies, 'Tropical Ecosystem: Environmental Impacts', in *Biodiversity Conservation in ASEAN: Emerging Issues & Regional Needs*, edited by Ghazally Ismail and Murtedza Mohamed (London: ASEAN Academic Press, 1998), p. 19.
[4] Flavin, op cit..
[5] L. M. Chou, B. P. L. Goh, and T. J. Lam, 'Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation in Singapore', in *Biodiversity Conservation in ASEAN: Emerging Issues & Regional Needs*, edited by Ghazally Ismail and Murtedza Mohamed (London: ASEAN Academic Press, 1998), pp. 224-225.
[6] ibid., p. 225
[7] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.

the construction of new environmental ethical philosophies such as Paul Taylor's ethics of respect for nature and Arne Naess' deep ecology. These environmental ethical philosophies can be grouped in different ways. The typology I will use is a division between what I call the instrumental approach, the axiological approach and the anthropological approach.

The *instrumental* approach is anthropocentric in the sense that it views an improvement in humankind's relationship with Nature as having importance for humankind alone. In other words, the instrumental approach views Nature and the protection of Nature as only having instrumental value for humankind. This position has the consequence that if humankind has no instrumental use for Nature then Nature has no ground for protection.

In contrast, the *axiological* approach argues that Nature has intrinsic value and that we should protect Nature *because* of its intrinsic value. Hence this approach has to establish what this intrinsic value consists in and where it comes from. Examples of environmental ethical philosophy falling under this approach are Paul Taylor's ethics of respect for nature and Tom Regan's ethics of animal rights.

The *anthropological* approach is primarily concerned with what being human is or what being human ought to be, and it links this understanding of the nature of humanity to what the relationship between the human self and Nature ought to be.

This approach argues that humankind will engage in a relationship of respect with Nature *if humankind feels that* Nature has intrinsic value. This approach does not require the self's feeling or sense of Nature's intrinsic value to have the epistemic status of knowledge. Environmental ethical philosophies belonging to this approach hence have the task of showing how humankind can gain such a sense of the intrinsic value of Nature. An example of an environmental ethical philosophy falling under this approach, Arne Naess' version of deep ecology, seeks to achieve this through the account of Self-realisation.

It should be noted that the anthropological approach is neither anthropocentric nor merely psychological. This approach is not anthropocentric in the same way the instrumental approach is as it recognises that Nature's value does not solely derive from its instrumental value for humankind, and hence that the importance of humankind's engaging in a relationship of respect with Nature does not solely derive from its instrumental value for humankind. (However it can be considered to be anthropocentric in the weaker sense in that it focuses on what being human is or ought to be.) This approach is also not merely psychological as it goes beyond providing a mere account of the psychological states of the agent by also providing a normative account of how humankind should live and engage with Nature.

**The Buberian Approach.** I propose an application of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue as a foundation for environmental ethics. By *foundation for environmental ethics* I refer to a philosophy upon which a complete environmental ethic can be constructed. By *Buberian approach* I refer to the set of complete environmental ethical accounts that can be constructed upon the foundation provided by Buber's philosophy of dialogue. The Buberian approach belongs to the anthropological approach as it argues that the human being is a relational being, and that the self who relates to Nature with respect has realised its relational and hence its human potential.

A successful foundation for environmental ethics has to fulfill two tasks. First, it has to be able to explain how humankind's relationship with Nature has degraded to the environmental crisis we face today. Second, it has to explain how humankind's relationship with Nature can be improved to one of respect. I argue that my proposed foundation for environmental ethics based on Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue fulfills both these tasks. My argument will span the remainder of this thesis, an outline of which is as follows.

In chapter two, *Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue and the Relationship between Self and Nature*, I shall first provide an account of Buber's philosophy of dialogue and then I shall discuss the Buberian view of how the self relates to Nature. In chapter three, *The I-It Relation and Environmental Ethics*, I shall use Buber's I-It relation to provide a genealogical account of the environmental crisis. In chapter four,

*The I-Thou Relation and Environmental Ethics*, I shall explain how the self's relating to Nature in the I-Thou mode can bring the self to engage with Nature in a relationship of respect. Since the I-It relation can explain the environmental crisis, and the I-Thou relation can bring humankind to respect Nature, Buber's philosophy of dialogue can serve as a foundation for environmental ethics. In the remainder of chapter four I shall argue that the Buberian approach is at least as good as and has advantages over established environmental ethical accounts.

## CHAPTER TWO

## MARTIN BUBER'S PHILOSOPHY OF DIALOGUE AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF AND NATURE

**Introduction.** In this chapter I will provide an account of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue which is free from his theology. This minimalist account is all that is required for the construction of a foundation for environmental ethics. I shall then examine how the relationship between self and Nature can be accounted for by Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue.

**Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue.** Buber's philosophy of dialogue studies the relationships which can hold between the self and the other. I interpret the other as any being which is not identical with the self. In 'Replies to My Critics', Buber states:

> I proceed from a simple real situation: two men are engrossed in a genuine dialogue. I want to appraise the facts of this situation. It turns out that the customary categories do not suffice for it. I mark: first the 'physical' phenomena of the two speaking and gesturing men, second the 'psychic' phenomena of it, what goes on 'in them'. But the meaningful dialogue itself that proceeds between the two men and into which the acoustic and optical events fit, the dialogue that arises out of the souls and is reflected in them, this remains unregistered. What is its nature, what is its place?[1]

[1] Martin Buber, 'Replies to My Critics', in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1967), pp. 706-707.

His philosophy of dialogue hence can be viewed as an account of the relationships that can hold between the self and the other: the I-It and the I-Thou relationships.

Buber's philosophy of dialogue views the self as a hermeneutic agent, for the type of relationship that occurs between the self and the other depends on how the self interprets the other: if the self interprets the other as an It, the relationship between the self and the other will be an I-It relationship; if the self interprets the other as a Thou, the relationship between the self and the other will be an I-Thou relationship. In 'Distance and Relation' this hermeneutic act is analysed in terms of what Buber describes as a 'twofold movement' consisting of the 'primal setting at a distance' and 'entering into relation'.[2] The primal setting at a distance involves the self setting itself apart from the being which is not the self; this is the movement where the self identifies the other as the other. Identifying the other as the other allows the self to enter into a relation with it.[3]

The I-It and the I-Thou relationships hence come into being when the self interprets the other either as an It or as a Thou. The self is in the I-It attitude when it interprets the other as an It, and the self is in the I-Thou attitude when it interprets the other as a Thou. The I-It and the I-Thou relationships hence correspond to the I-It and the I-Thou attitudes: when the self is in the I-It attitude, it is in the I-It relationship

[2] Martin Buber, 'Distance and Relation', in *The Knowledge of Man*, translated by Maurice Friedman and Ronald Gregor Smith (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), p. 60.
[3] ibid..

with the other; when the self is in the I-Thou attitude, it is in the I-Thou relationship with the other.[4] What should be noted here is that whether the self and the other are in the I-It or the I-Thou relationship depends on the self and not on the other.[5]

This suggests that the self is transformed whenever it alternates between the I-It and the I-Thou attitudes, since both belong to the self and are different.[6] Furthermore, Buber argues that the I-It and the I-Thou attitudes are different with regard to how the self possesses them: the I-It attitude 'can never be spoken with one's whole being', whereas the I-Thou attitude 'can only be spoken with one's whole being'.[7] I understand this to mean that the existential comportment of the self to the other in the I-Thou attitude is on a scale greater than that when the self is in the I-It attitude. When the self is in the I-Thou attitude, it is wholly in relation with the other. When the self is in the I-It attitude, it is not wholly in relation with the other since, as I shall show, when the self is in the I-It relationship with the other, it is properly understood as relating to its image of the other rather than the other itself.

What is the fundamental difference between the I-It and the I-Thou attitudes? The answer lies with how the self interprets the other. In the I-It attitude, the self does not interpret the other as having any possibilities beyond those which the self has

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[4] Martin Buber, *I and Thou: A New Translation, with a Prologue and Notes*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Touchstone, 1996), p. 53.
[5] Donald L. Berry, *Mutuality: The Vision of Martin Buber* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), p. 36.
[6] Buber, *I and Thou*, op cit..
[7] ibid., p. 54.

determined for it. In hermeneutic terms, the self can be understood as constructing an image of the other in which the self imposes possibilities on the other and does not recognise it as having any other possibilities of its own. Hence in the I-It attitude, the self relates to its image of the other instead of the other. On the other hand, in the I-Thou attitude the self recognises that the other has possibilities of its own beyond those which the self expects or imposes, hence respecting the otherness of the other.

Some critics interpret Buber's distinction between the I-It and the I-Thou attitudes in terms of objectification, interpreting the I-It attitude as the objectifying attitude, with the I-It relationship as the relationship in which the self objectifies the other, and the I-Thou attitude as the non-objectifying attitude, with the I-Thou relationship as that which does not involve any objectification of the other by the self. A good example of such a critic is Steven Katz, who claims that Buber's account of the self's being in the I-Thou relationship with the other requires the self to completely avoid objectifying the other:

> The first question must be whether in knowing other persons as *Thou's* we are ever, or could ever be, completely free from objectivity concepts as Buber argues, or whether in contra-distinction to Buber, these delimiting and identifying concepts are necessary and integral to the knowing of others as *Thou* such as the absence of these concepts would preclude *all* knowledge of the other, including knowledge of the other as *Thou*.[8]

[8] Steven Katz, 'A Critical Review of Martin Buber's Epistemology of I-Thou', in *Martin Buber: A Centenary Volume*, edited by Haim Gordon and Jochanan Bloch (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1984), p. 102.

Such an interpretation of Buber's philosophy of dialogue is erroneous and a red herring, for Buber's account clearly allows for the I-Thou attitude to involve an objectification of the other. In Buber's example of contemplating a tree in *I and Thou*, he notes that relating to the tree in the I-Thou mode

> ... does not require me to forego any of the modes of contemplation. There is nothing that I must not see in order to see, and there is no knowledge that I must forget ... Whatever belongs to the tree is included: its form and its mechanics, its colours and its chemistry, its conversation with the elements and its conversation with the stars --- all this in its entirety.[9]

In this passage it is clear that relating to the tree in the I-Thou mode can involve the self's objectification of it. For the I-Thou attitude to involve an objectification of the other and still remain the I-Thou attitude, the self simply has to acknowledge that the other has possibilities of its own beyond those imposed by the objectification. In 'Elements of the Interhuman' Buber again states that relating to the other in the I-Thou mode can involve the self's objectification of the other:

> It is well known that some existentialists assert that the basic factor between men is that one is an object for the other. But so far as this is actually the case, the special reality of the interhuman, the fact of the contact, has been largely eliminated. It cannot indeed be entirely eliminated. As a crude example, take two men who are observing one another. The essential thing is not that the one makes the other his object, but the fact that he is not fully able to do

> so and the reason for his failure. We have in common with all existing beings that we can be made objects of observation. But it is my privilege as man that by the hidden activity of my being I can establish an impassable barrier to objectification. Only in partnership can my being be perceived as an existing whole.[10]

Here Buber states that the self's objectification of the other cannot wholly capture the other, and hence such objectification fails. Hence, should the self wish to objectify the other while relating to it in the I-Thou mode, the self has to acknowledge the failure of such objectification in that the other has its own possibilities which cannot be captured in the objectification.

It should be noted that this passage contains a strong theological element which I wish to exclude from the account of Buber's philosophy of dialogue which I shall use as a foundation for environmental ethics. This theological element occurs in what Buber refers to as his 'privilege as man'. Buber explicates this 'privilege' as being 'the gift of the spirit which belongs to man alone among all things'.[11] Hence in his example of the two men observing each other, the failure of objectification arises from the inability of the one to perceive the spirit of the other in anything other than in the I-Thou relationship.[12] I exclude this theological element from my account of Buber's philosophy of dialogue as it is irrelevant to Buber's philosophy of dialogue.

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[9] Buber, *I and Thou*, op cit., p. 58.
[10] Martin Buber, 'Elements of the Interhuman', in *The Knowledge of Man*, translated by Maurice Friedman and Ronald Gregor Smith (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), pp. 74-75.
[11] ibid., p. 80.
[12] ibid..

In Buber's philosophy of dialogue, the conditions for the self's relationship with the other in both the I-It and I-Thou relationships can be formulated without any reference to theological assumptions, for even if the human agent's possession of spirit provides an 'impassable barrier to objectification', it does not follow that nonhuman natural entities do not possess their own 'impassable barrier to objectification' which comes from some non-spiritual attribute, such as their possession of possibilities beyond those imposed by the self. As Buber himself points out, the self can be in the I-Thou relationship with natural nonhuman entities such as trees[13] and horses,[14] which according to his theological assumption don't possess any spirit.

The interpretation that the self can objectify the other and yet remain in the I-Thou relationship with it seems to run into difficulty with passages in Buber's texts which claim that the I-Thou relationship between the self and the other is immediate and is not one of experiential, conceptual or means-end mediation.[15] *I and Thou* famously states:

> --- What, then, does one experience of the You?
>
> --- Nothing at all. For one does not experience it.
>
> --- What, then, does one know of the You?

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[13] Buber, *I and Thou*, op cit..
[14] Martin Buber, 'Dialogue', in *Between Man and Man*, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1947), pp. 22-23.
[15] Buber, *I and Thou*, op cit., pp. 61 & 62-63

> --- Only everything. For one no longer knows particulars.[16]

Similarly, another passage in *I and Thou* states:

> The human being to whom I say You I do not experience. But I stand in relation to him, in the sacred basic word. Only when I step out of this do I experience him again. Experience is remoteness from you.[17]

These passages do not present any textual difficulty for the interpretation that the self can objectify the other and yet remain in the I-Thou relationship with it, since objectification does not necessarily involve mediation. Mediation involves the self's image of the other functioning as a *proxy* for the other in the self's relationship with it. Marsh notes that certain forms of objectification, such as perceptual or thematic objectification, do not involve mediation.[18] Perceptual and thematic objectification are closely related but can be differenciated with regard to their function. Perceptual objectification involves the self's perception of the entity before it as an object, with the self as subject: this entity is perceived as being distinct from and independent of the self, being perceived from a particular point-of-view, and being perceived as an organised unity. Thematic objectification involves the self's focusing on the entity being perceived, with other entities falling into the background of the self's

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[16] ibid., p. 61.
[17] ibid., pp. 59-60.
[18] James L. Marsh, 'Objectivity, Alienation, and Reflection', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XXII, No. 3, September 1982, pp. 132-134.

perception.[19] Neither form of objectification involves mediation. Consider the self's objectification of a cup. The self perceives the cup, and through perceptual objectification the self perceives the cup as an object, with the self as subject. Through thematic objectification the self focuses on the cup, bringing into the foreground of his attention and allowing other entities to fall into the background. In neither process does the self construct an image of the cup and engage with this image instead of the cup itself. (In constract, consider a form of objectification which involves mediation, such as the self's objectification of the cup as nothing more than an instrument, in which the self's image of the cup-as-instrument functions as a proxy for the cup in the self's relationship with it.) Hence the interpretation under investigation is consistent with these seemingly inconsistent passages.

**Self and Nature.** I shall now examine how the relationship between self and Nature can be accounted for by Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue. This is important since Buber's philosophy of dialogue needs to account for the relationship between self and Nature if it is to be a foundation for environmental ethics. I defined Nature in chapter one as that which is not constructed by humankind. Hence Nature consists of both living and nonliving natural entities. In this discussion I shall focus on Buber's discussion of mutuality or reciprocity. A relationship of mutuality refers to a relationship in which the self and the other can respond to each other. Buber also

[19] ibid..

refers to thresholds of mutuality. Each threshold of mutuality refers to the ability of the entity the self is related with to respond to the self.[20]

Martin Buber discusses how the self can be in relation with Nature in his accounts of the spheres of relation and the thresholds of mutuality. In these accounts, Buber claims that the self can be in relation with any entity it comes into encounter with. In his account of the spheres of relation, Buber states that the 'spheres' of being the self can be in relation with are Nature, humans, and spiritual beings.[21] (Donald Berry translates 'spiritual beings' as 'aesthetic forms'.[22]) Buber's account of the thresholds of mutuality provides a more elaborate classification of the types of beings the self can be in relation with.

The realm of plants and nonliving natural entities, which Buber describes as the 'huge sphere that reaches from the stones to the stars',[23] is classified as the pre-threshold of mutuality, since entities in this realm cannot respond to the self.[24] Animals are classified as the threshold of mutuality since they have the ability to respond to the self's presence.[25] Buber does not classify animals as being beyond the threshold of mutuality because they lack the capacity for language necessary for them

[20] Berry, op cit., p. 22.
[21] Buber, *I and Thou*, op cit., pp. 56-57.
[22] Berry, op cit., p. 1 & 104.
[23] Buber, *I and Thou*, op cit., p. 173.
[24] ibid..
[25] ibid., pp. 172-173.

to respond to the human self's address to them as *Thou* by addressing the human self as *Thou*. Of the sphere of Nature, Buber states that:

> Here the relation vibrates in the dark and remains below language. The creatures stir across from us, but they are unable to come to us, and the You we say to them sticks to the threshold of language.[26]

Since animals are below the 'threshold of language', although they can provide 'an often astonishing active response' to the self and 'can both turn toward another being and contemplate objects', they 'are not twofold, like man: the twofoldness of the basic words I-You and I-It is alien to them'.[27] Hence the ability of animals to respond to the self's address as *Thou* and their inability to correspondingly address the self as *Thou* is the reason why Buber classifies animals as being on the threshold of mutuality and not above it. Hence the sphere of Nature, consisting of nonliving natural entities, plants, and animals, extends from the pre-threshold to the threshold of mutuality. Beyond the sphere of Nature, the spheres of humans and spiritual beings or aesthetic forms are classified as the over-threshold of mutuality.[28] A discussion of the over-threshold lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

Despite the inability of entities in the pre-threshold to respond to the self, Buber claims that mutuality between the self and these entities is possible, though

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[26] ibid., pp. 56-57.
[27] ibid., pp. 172-173.

mutuality at this level is different from that which occurs on and above the threshold. Since entities in the pre-threshold possess their own being, Buber claims that there can be mutuality between the self and entities in the pre-threshold:

> It is part of our concept of the plant that it cannot react to our actions upon it, that it cannot 'reply'. Yet this does not mean that we meet with no reciprocity at all in this sphere. We find here not the deed of posture of an individual being but a reciprocity of being itself - a reciprocity that has nothing except being. The living wholeness and unity of a tree that denies itself to the eye, no matter how keen, of anyone who merely investigates, while it is manifest to those who say You, is present when *they* are present: they grant the tree the opportunity to manifest it, and now the tree that has being manifests it. Our habits of thought make it difficult for us to see that in such cases something is awakened by our attitude and flashes towards us from that which has being. What matters in this sphere is that we should do justice with an open mind to the actuality that opens up before us.[29]

The following is what I interpret Buber's claim to mean. Since Nature is not a creation of humankind, much less the self, plants and nonliving natural entities are not dependent on the self for their being. As such they possess possibilities of their own beyond those which can be imposed by the self, for example, the possibility of their continued existence in the future free from interference by the self. Since these entities at the pre-threshold of mutuality possess possibilities of their own, the self can be in the I-Thou relationship with them. (For the same reason, the self can be in

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[28] ibid., pp. 173-176.
[29] ibid., p. 173.

the I-Thou relationship with animals.) While mutuality of the type found in the threshold and over-threshold cannot be found in the pre-threshold, since entities at this level lack the ability to respond to the self, these entities do however have the ability to prompt the self to relate to them in the I-Thou mode rather than in the I-It mode by virtue of their being, specifically their possession of possibilities beyond those which can be imposed by the self, hence *in this sense* there exists mutuality in the pre-threshold.

The self can also relate to Nature in the I-It attitude. As shown, when the self relates to Nature in the I-Thou attitude, the self recognises that natural entities possess possibilities of their own beyond those which can imposed by the self. In contrast, when the self relates to Nature in the I-It attitude, it fails to recognise that natural entities possess their own possibilities beyond those which can imposed by the self, and recognises only those possibilities which are imposed by the self.

A good example of the self relating to Nature in the I-It attitude is given by Martin Heidegger. His example is that of the establishment of a hydroelectric plant on the River Rhine. This is an example of an I-It relationship between self and Nature since the human community which constructs the plant interprets the River Rhine as a mere standing reserve of power to be used by the community. The community fails to recognise that the River Rhine has possibilities of its own beyond that of being a

standing reserve of power for humankind.[30] In the following chapter I shall first elaborate on the self's I-It relationship with Nature and then provide a genealogical account of how the expansion of the I-It relationship between humankind and Nature has led to the environmental crisis.

[30] Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 16-17.

## CHAPTER THREE

## THE I-IT RELATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

**Introduction.** In this chapter I shall provide a genealogical account of how humankind's being in the I-It relationship with Nature has led to the environmental crisis. In explicating this relationship, I shall utilise Martin Heidegger's account of Enframing, which he identifies as being the essence of modern technology.

**The Rise of the I-It and Modern Technology.** Martin Buber has argued that the industrial revolution has contributed to a dual crisis of modern humankind. First, the expansion of bourgeois society, a result of the industrial revolution, has led to the collapse of traditional small communities in which individuals had close relationships with one another. New communities such as clubs and trade unions could only approximate but not replace the sense of security, that is, the sense of 'being at home in the world', which life in these traditional small communities provided. Individuals hence suffer alienation in the modern industrial world.[1] Second, the rise of new machine technology in the industrial revolution has led to what Buber describes as the modern crisis of 'man's lagging behind his works'.[2] While in the past, humankind was fully in control of its artifacts and technologies, the era ushered in by the industrial revolution saw a situation in which:

[1] Martin Buber, 'What is Man?', in *Between Man and Man*, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1947), pp. 157-158.
[2] ibid., p. 158.

> Man is no longer able to master the world which he himself brought about: it is becoming stronger than he is, it is winning free of him, it confronts him in an almost elemental independence, and he no longer knows the word which could subdue and render harmless the golem he has created ... Man faced the terrible fact that he was the father of demons whose master he could not become.[3]

In this passage humankind's modern artifacts and technologies are described in diabolical terms, as seen in his use of the metaphors of the golem and the demon. The metaphor of the golem is especially apt, since the golem, in Jewish mythology, is a monster which, like modern technology, is created by human hands.

Buber's dislike of modern technology, as reflected in his use of these diabolical metaphors, arises from his conviction that its rise, ushered in by the industrial revolution, has contributed to the expansion of the I-It and the diminishing of the I-Thou, in that the modern self is more likely to relate to the other in the I-It than in the I-Thou mode. This is precisely the phenomenon described by Buber as humankind's descent into alienation in the modern industrial world, since the increasing rarity of modern individual's being in I-Thou relationships with the other leaves him in a state of alienation from the other.

Since the rise of I-It and the corresponding diminishment of the I-Thou in the modern industrial world seems to have been the result of the rise of modern

[3] ibid..

technology, I shall proceed to investigate the nature of what modern technology is. For this I shall utilise Heidegger's investigation into the nature of technology. I shall then show how the rise of the I-It, brought about by the rise of modern technology, has led to the environmental crisis.

**Revealing as the Essence of Technology.** Heidegger notes that 'all that is merely technological never arrives at the essence of technology'.[4] The essence of technology, or *techne*, has to be determined from what technology itself is.[5] Heidegger argues that revealing is the essence of technology:

> What has the essence of technology to do with revealing? The answer: everything. For every bringing-forth is grounded in revealing. Bringing-forth, indeed, gathers within itself the four modes of occasioning - causality - and rules them throughout. Within its domain belong end and means, belongs instrumentality. Instrumentality is considered to be the fundamental characteristic of technology. If we inquire, step by step, into what technology, represented as means, actually is, then we shall arrive at revealing ... Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth, happens.[6]

Bringing-forth or *poiesis* is revealing, for 'bringing-forth comes to pass only insofar as something concealed comes into unconcealment'.[7] Since revealing is the essence

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[4] Martin Heidegger, 'The Turning', *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 48.
[5] Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', op cit., p. 4.
[6] ibid., pp. 12-13.
[7] ibid., p. 11.

of technology, technology 'belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiesis*; it is something poietic'.[8] Technology's essence as *poiesis* can be seen in that:

> It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another. Whoever builds a house or a ship or forges a sacrificial chalice reveals what is to be brought forth ... This revealing gathers together in advance the aspect and the matter of ship or house, with a view to the finished thing envisioned as completed, and from this gathering determines the manner of its construction. Thus what is decisive in *techne* does not lie at all in making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather in the aforementioned revealing. It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that *techne* is a bringing-forth.[9]

**Enframing as the Essence of Modern Technology.** Heidegger next focuses on modern technology and discovers that its essence differs from that of technology, for while 'it too is a revealing',

> ... the revealing that holds sway throughout modern technology does not unfold into a bringing-forth in the sense of *poiesis*. The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging, which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such.[10]

The *standing-reserve* is Heidegger's name for that which is so challenged by modern technology, for it is 'ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand

[8] ibid., p. 13.
[9] ibid..

there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering'.[11] *Enframing* is Heidegger's name for the essence of modern technology, the challenging revealing of entities as standing-reserve:

> Enframing means the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve.[12]

The metaphor of the frame can illuminate what Enframing is, for when the hermeneutic agent interprets an entity through the mode or way of Enframing, this agent 'frames' the entity as nothing more than a standing-reserve, and this 'frame' excludes all other possibilities the entity might have. Consider Heidegger's example of the challenging revealing of coal as a standing-reserve:

> The coal that has been hauled out in some mining district has not been supplied in order that it may simply be present somewhere or other. It is stockpiled; that is, it is on call, ready to deliver the sun's warmth that is stored in it. The sun's warmth is challenged forth for heat, which in turn is ordered to deliver steam whose pressure turns the wheels that keep a factory running.[13]

Light describes Enframing as the 'process of turning nature into an object of scrutiny through technology', and that this process involves the adoption of 'a one-

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[10] ibid., p. 14.
[11] ibid., p. 17.
[12] ibid., p. 20.
[13] ibid., p. 15.

dimensional view of the world ... which constrains our ability to see nature as anything other than an object that exists for technological processing'.[14] This 'object that exists for technological processing' is the standing-reserve, which Light describes as an object whose existence 'becomes totally dependent on the user and use to which it is put', and hence the standing-reserve 'ceases to exist autonomously'.[15]

A clarification should be made at this point. While Light does not distinguish between an object and a standing-reserve, Heidegger felt that 'whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object'.[16] Consider his example of the airliner:

> Yet the airliner that stands on the runway is surely an object. Certainly. We can represent the machine so. But then it conceals itself as to what and how it is. Revealed, it stands on the taxi strip only as standing-reserve, inasmuch as it is ordered to ensure the possibility of transportation. For this it must be in its whole structure and in every one of its constituent parts, on call for duty, i.e., ready for takeoff.[17]

Enframing is just one of the modes of interpretation which can be used by the hermeneutic agent to interpret the other. Heidegger argues that when Enframing is

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[14] Andrew R. F. Light, 'The Role of Technology in Environmental Questions: Martin Buber and Deep Ecology as Answers to Technological Consciousness', *Research in Philosophy and Technology*, Vol. 12, 1992, p. 88.
[15] ibid..
[16] Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', op cit., p. 17.
[17] ibid..

humankind's dominant mode of interpretation, it is the 'supreme danger'.[18] Even though machine technology, such as nuclear weaponry, is the 'most visible outgrowth of the essence of modern technology',[19] 'the threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology'.[20] If it does not arise from the threat of global destruction posed by the artifacts of modern technology, where does this 'supreme danger' of Enframing arise from?

Heidegger argues that Enframing poses a dual threat to humankind.[21] First, he claims that 'the rule of Enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth'.[22] What he means is that Enframing as the dominant mode of interpretation threatens the ability of the hermeneutic agent to engage in other modes of interpretation:

> As a destining, it banishes man into that kind of revealing which is an ordering. Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing. Above all, Enframing conceals that revealing which, in the sense of *poiesis*, lets what presences come forth into appearance.[23]

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[18] ibid., p. 26.
[19] Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 116.
[20] Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', op cit., p. 28.
[21] ibid., p. 26.
[22] ibid., p. 28.
[23] ibid., p. 27.

What is it about Enframing that makes it ‘drive out every other possibility of revealing’? I suggest that the answer lies in that when the hermeneutic agent interprets in the mode of Enframing an entity as a such-and-such, the entity so interpreted is not the entity itself. And because what is known to the agent is only the entity so interpreted, and since the agent in the mode of Enframing does not expect the entity to be anything other than a such-and-such, the agent is not compelled to attempt to re-interpret the entity through any other mode of interpretation, such as poietic revealing.

This can be seen in the case of modern science, which is a paradigm instance of Enframing:

> Modern science’s way of representing pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces. Modern physics is not experimental physics because it applies apparatus to the questioning of nature. Rather the reverse is true. Because physics, indeed already as pure theory, sets nature up to exhibit itself as a coherence of forces calculable in advance, it therefore orders its experiments precisely for the purpose of asking whether and how nature reports itself when set up in this way.[24]

> Science sets upon the real. It orders it into place to the end that at any given time the real will exhibit itself as an interacting network, i.e., in surveyable series of related causes. The real

[24] ibid., p. 21.

> thus becomes surveyable and capable of being followed out in its sequences. The real becomes secured in its objectness.[25]

Modern science as Enframing hence is 'theory that entraps the real and secures it in objectness'.[26] The danger in this, as noted earlier, is that the objectified entity may not capture what the entity itself is:

> Scientific representation is never able to encompass the coming to presence of nature; for the objectness of nature is, antecedently, only *one* way in which nature exhibits itself. Nature thus remains for the science of physics that which cannot be gotten around.[27]

Hence if Enframing is the dominant mode of interpretation, the danger for the agent who perceives an entity as an objectified such-and-such is that he might fail to perceive what the entity itself is.

The second threat which Heidegger identified Enframing to pose to humankind is that if it is the dominant mode of interpretation, then humankind itself might be interpreted as a standing-reserve:

> Enframing is the gathering together that belongs to that setting-upon which sets upon man and puts him in position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve. As

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[25] Martin Heidegger, 'Science and Reflection', *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 167-168.
[26] ibid., p. 168.
[27] ibid., p. 174.

> the one who is challenged forth in this way, man stands within the essential realm of Enframing.[28]

> As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve.[29]

It is clear that Heidegger's warning about humankind itself being interpreted as standing-reserve did come to pass. This is most clearly seen in the field of economics, where the human individual is commonly reduced to the rational economic man, characterised by utility maximising behaviour.[30] (Policy decisions built on such a conception of humankind risk misidentifying what will benefit the community, since they misjudge what the community is in the very first place.[31])

**The Genesis of the Environmental Crisis.** A genealogical account of the rise of the environmental crisis can now be provided. With the industrial revolution came the rise of modern technology. The essence of modern technology is Enframing. Enframing is a mode of interpretation which fails to fully reveal what the entity being

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[28] Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', op cit., p. 24.
[29] ibid., pp. 26-27.
[30] Mark A. Lutz,. 'The Relevance of Martin Buber's Philosophical Anthropology for Economic Thought', in *Martin Buber and the Human Sciences*, edited by Maurice Friedman and Pat Boni (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 269-270.
[31] Robert C. Hoover, 'Buber's Way Toward Sustainable Communitarian Socialism: Essential Relationship Between the Political and Bio-Economy', in *Martin Buber and the Human Sciences*, edited by Maurice Friedman and Pat Boni (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 261-262.

interpreted is, and which excludes all other modes of interpretation. It is clear that Enframing manifests the I-It attitude. The self who relates to the other in the I-It attitude can be described as interpreting the other in the mode of Enframing. The self who relates to the other in the I-It attitude fails to capture what the other is precisely because he interprets the other in the mode of Enframing.

The rise of modern technology, with the concurrent rise of Enframing, has brought about a change in humankind, a change which Buber noted when he described its descent into alienation in the modern industrial world. Not only are individuals alienated from one another by their being in the I-It mode, humanity itself is alienated from Nature. The dominance of Enframing, a result of the expansion of modern technology into modern life, largely prevents humanity from viewing Nature as anything other than as an 'object of technology' or as a standing-reserve.[32] The dominance of this view of Nature as being nothing more than a standing-reserve has led to the environmental crisis, for humankind's inability to see Nature as having its own possibilities apart from those possibilities ascribed to it by humankind, that is, humankind's inability to see Nature as a Thou, has prevented humankind from respecting Nature as being more than a standing reserve. And the absence of such respect has prevented humankind from refraining from engaging in the over-exploitation and wanton despoliation of Nature. And it is precisely this over-

[32] Martin Heidegger, 'The Word of Nietzsche: "God is Dead"', *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 100.

exploitation and wanton despoliation of Nature that has brought about the environmental crisis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## THE I-THOU RELATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

**Introduction.** In this chapter I shall provide an account of how humankind's being in the I-Thou relationship with Nature can lead to a relationship between humankind and Nature which is characterised by respect. This is important since it satisfies the second criterion for Buber's philosophy of dialogue to be a foundation for environmental ethics. I shall then compare the Buberian approach (that is, the family of environmental ethical philosophies founded on Buber's philosophy of dialogue) to other environmental ethical philosophies in order to show that an environmental ethic founded on Buber's philosophy of dialogue is as good as and has advantages over other environmental ethical accounts.

**The Relationship of Respect between Self and Nature.** In chapter two I explained how the self and Nature can be in the I-Thou relationship. There I argued that since both the I-It and I-Thou attitudes belong to the self and are different, the self undergoes a transformation when its I-It attitude is replaced by the I-Thou attitude. And since the self possesses the I-It attitude when it is in the I-It relationship with Nature, and the I-Thou attitude when it is in the I-Thou relationship with Nature, the self undergoes this self-transformation when it moves from the I-It relationship with Nature to the I-Thou relationship. I shall now proceed to elaborate on this self-transformation and argue first, that the self has reason to move from the I-It

relationship with Nature to the I-Thou relationship, and second, that this I-Thou relationship leads to a relationship of respect for Nature.

When the self ceases to relate to Nature in the I-It mode and instead relates to Nature in the I-Thou mode, the self undergoes a transformation. This self-transformation consists in the self's ceasing to relate to its image of the other and its subsequent entry into a genuine relationship with the other. As explained in chapter three, when the self relates to Nature in the I-It mode, the self interprets Nature in the mode of Enframing, and hence interprets Nature solely as a standing-reserve with no possibilities of its own beyond those imposed by the self. The consequence is that the self is relating to its own interpretation of Nature rather than to Nature itself. In contrast, when the self relates to Nature in the I-Thou mode, the self recognises Nature as the other since it recognises Nature as possessing possibilities of its own beyond those imposed by the self. This means that when the self and Nature are in the I-Thou relationship, the self is in a *genuine* relationship with Nature, for the self is relating to Nature rather than to the self's image of it, as in the I-It relationship.

Buber's principal insight is that the human individual is a relational being in that human life is only fully realised when the self establishes itself in a genuine relationship with the other. Hence Buber describes the I-Thou relationship as 'the cradle of actual life'.[1] For Buber, the self that only has I-It relationships with others is

[1] Buber, *I and Thou*, op cit., p. 60.

'not human'.[2] As argued, when the self moves from being in the I-It to the I-Thou relationship with Nature, the self is transformed as its I-It attitude has been replaced by the I-Thou attitude. But, more importantly, this self-transformation is a transformation of the status of the self as a relational being, for when the self is in the I-It relationship with Nature, the self is only in relation to itself, and hence its potential as a relational being is less realised than it would have been had it been in the I-Thou relationship with Nature.

This consequence provides a reason for the self to be in the I-Thou rather than the I-It relationship with Nature. As explained in chapter three, a life that is dominated by I-It relationships and a rarity of I-Thou relationships is a life of alienation, for the self lacks genuine relationships with others. A life dominated by I-It relationships is a life that leaves the relational being of the self unrealised. Hence the self whose life is dominated by I-It relationships is impoverished and suffers alienation. As such the reason for the self to be in the I-Thou relationship with Nature is precisely that the self can in the process realise its nature as a relational being, and hence realise its nature as a human being.

If it can be shown that the self has reason to engage in the I-Thou relationship with Nature, and if it can be shown that this relationship can lead to one of respect, that is, a relationship where the self treats Nature with respect, then Buber's

[2] ibid., p. 85.

philosophy of dialogue would have met the second criterion for being a foundation for environmental ethics, that is, the criterion that a philosophy which is to serve as a foundation for environmental ethics has to be able to show how humankind can be in a relationship of respect with Nature. (In chapter three it was demonstrated that Buber's philosophy of dialogue satisfies the first criterion for being a foundation for environmental ethics since it is able to explain how the environmental crisis arose.) It has just been shown that the self does have a reason to engage with Nature in the I-Thou relationship. I shall now proceed to show that the I-Thou relationship between the self and Nature can lead to a relationship of respect.

When the self relates to Nature in the I-Thou mode, the self interprets Nature as having possibilities of its own beyond those imposed by the self. This means that when the self relates to Nature in the I-Thou mode it cannot treat Nature solely as a means, since treating Nature solely as a means requires an interpretation of Nature as not having any possibilities of its own beyond those imposed by the self. Hence when the self relates to Nature in the I-Thou mode, the self recognises Nature as an end-in-itself, for it cannot treat Nature solely as a means.

What does the self's recognition of Nature as an end-in-itself involve? Kant states that treating a being as an end-in-itself means that the self has to treat this being

'always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means'.[3] Hence when the self recognises Nature as an end-in-itself, the self is permitted to treat Nature as a means but it also has to respect Nature as having possibilities of its own. Adapting Kant to Buber, Berry suggests that:

> Our standing in relation to the natural does not preclude our using the natural as a means for the satisfaction of our needs; that using, however, must be consistent with allowing the natural now and again to be what it is apart from our purposes for it. In the grace of this attitude we are thus able to grant the natural appropriate freedom to be and to enter into relation with us, without the confusion of quantitative language.[4]

It is precisely this attitude of respect, described by Berry as the 'attitude of grace and gratitude',[5] which can prevent the self from interpreting Nature as a standing-reserve or a mere means. This attitude of respect hence brings the self to treat Nature with respect.

Here a difficult problem arises: an agent's mental states and its physical actions arguably do not share any conceptually necessary relationship, so why should the self's *interpretation* of Nature as a Thou, which is a mental state, entail that the self *treat* Nature as a Thou, which is a physical action? I suggest that the connection between the self's interpretation and treatment of Nature as a Thou can be found in

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[3] Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 429.
[4] Berry, op cit., p. 37.

the self's nature as a hermeneutic agent, for the self's choice of actions in a situation is limited by its interpretation of this situation. For example, if the self interprets Nature as a Thou then its choice of actions is limited to those which are consistent with this interpretation, hence those actions which are consistent with the interpretation of Nature as a standing-reserve will be excluded from the self's choice of actions. But consider the deviant but arguably possible case of the self whose choice of actions in a situation is not limited by its interpretation of it. While I am unable to show that this is an impossible case, my first reply will be that this problem affects most, if not all, philosophies which serve as foundations for environmental ethics, and hence Buber's philosophy of dialogue does not face this challenge alone. For example, the axiological approach faces Hume's is-ought problem: why should Nature's possession of intrinsic value entail humankind's duties towards it?[6] Similarly, the Self-realisation approach of deep ecology faces the deviant case of the *Self-hating* Self-realised Self who identifies with but hates Nature, and hence actively harms or destroys it. (While I will not be discussing these specific problems, I shall be discussing the axiological approach as well as the Self-realisation approach later in this chapter) My second reply is that this deviant self has a *reason* to treat Nature with respect when it interprets Nature as a Thou. Although it has the choice to treat Nature as a mere means or a standing-reserve, it is only when it treats Nature with respect that its physically manifested relationship with Nature is the I-Thou or the genuine relationship. (For when this deviant self interprets Nature as a Thou but treats

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[5] ibid..

it as an It, the relationship which is physically manifested is the I-It rather than the I-Thou relationship.) And it is only when this deviant self engages with Nature in a genuine relationship that its relational being, and hence its nature as a human being, is realised. The realisation of this deviant self's nature as a human being provides it with a reason to match its interpretation of Nature as a Thou with its treatment of Nature as a Thou, that is, its treatment of Nature with respect.

**Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue as a Foundation for Environmental Ethics.** Since I have shown in the previous chapter that Buber's philosophy of dialogue can explain how the environmental crisis arose, and since I have shown so far in this chapter that Buber's philosophy of dialogue can explain how humankind can be in a relationship of respect with Nature, I have shown that Buber's philosophy of dialogue satisfies both criteria for it to be a foundation for environmental ethics. I shall now compare the Buberian approach to some important environmental ethical philosophies to show that it is at least as good as and has advantages over these.

**The Buberian Approach and the Instrumental Approach.** As mentioned in chapter one, the instrumental approach is anthropocentric in the sense that it views Nature and its protection as only having instrumental value for humankind. This view has the consequence that if humankind has no instrumental use for Nature then it has

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[6] John O'Neill, 'The Varieties of Intrinsic Value', *The Monist*, Vol. 75, No. 2, 1992, pp. 131-133.

no ground for protection. Hence on the instrumental approach the protection of Nature is contingent on its continued utility for humankind.

Since it is highly likely that Nature will always be useful for humankind, this contingency is not necessarily a serious problem. Also, in prudential terms, it is possible that the instrumental approach can achieve protection for Nature as well as or even better than either the axiological or anthropological approaches.

The main problem with the instrumental approach hence does not seem to lie simply with either its anthropocentricity or the contingency of Nature's utility for humankind. Rather, the main problem with the instrumental approach rests in that the instrumental approach's view of Nature is precisely the view of Nature as an It. The self who views Nature under the instrumental approach hence cannot relate to Nature with respect since on the instrumental approach the self interprets Nature as only having possibilities which it imposes, and it does not interpret Nature as having any possibilities of its own beyond those imposed by the self. The self who views Nature under the instrumental approach hence cannot view Nature as an end-in-itself. Since the relationship between self and Nature on the instrumental approach is the I-It relationship, the self on the instrumental approach suffers from the problem of alienation identified by Buber, for since the self on the instrumental approach is relating to its own interpretation of Nature rather than Nature itself, the self has no genuine relationship with Nature.

Hence even if the instrumental approach does achieve environmental protection, it does not offer any way for humankind to engage with Nature in a relationship of respect. Furthermore, the self of the instrumental approach is impoverished, since its relational being remains unrealised by the absence of a genuine relationship between itself and Nature. The Buberian approach, in contrast, shows how humankind can engage in a relationship of respect with Nature, and the self of the Buberian approach is not impoverished, precisely since the approach advocates the self to engage with the other, including Nature, in the I-Thou relationship.

**The Buberian Approach and the Axiological Approach.** As mentioned in chapter one, the axiological approach (which consists of environmental ethical philosophies such as Paul Taylor's ethics of respect for nature and Tom Regan's ethics of animal rights) argues that we should protect Nature *because* of its intrinsic value. Hence this approach has to establish what this intrinsic value is, as well as explain how this intrinsic value grounds our moral obligation to protect Nature, or at least ground Nature's moral considerability. These requirements present serious problems for this approach. The Buberian approach does not encounter these problems since on this approach the self relates to Nature with respect because of its *perception* of the intrinsic value of Nature, *whether such intrinsic value exists or not*. Even if the self of the Buberian approach does not *know* whether Nature has possibilities of its own

beyond those imposed by the self, it would *still* interpret Nature as having these possibilities, and hence it would *still* continue to engage with Nature in a relationship of respect and continue to treat it as an end-in-itself.

The axiological approach hence has problems with the concept of intrinsic value. The problem I shall discuss deals with the issue of where such intrinsic value inheres in. This issue is important as it determines which constituents of Nature are to receive moral considerability from humankind. Holistic environmental ethical philosophies, such as Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic, view intrinsic value as inhering in collectives such as ecosystems, the biosphere, or the entire cosmos. Atomistic environmental ethical philosophies, such as Peter Singer's ethics of animal liberation and Paul Taylor's ethics of respect for nature, view intrinsic value as inhering in individual entities. The scope of moral considerability granted by each philosophy depends on which property is determined to be the source of intrinsic value. For example, in Kantian ethics, intrinsic value inheres in rational agency,[7] with the consequence that only rational agents are recognised as being morally considerable. Atomistic environmental ethical philosophies select properties, such as the properties of sentiency (as in Singer's ethics of animal liberation) and life (as in Taylor's ethics of respect for nature), which accord moral considerability to a greater scope of natural entities than that which the property of rational agency provides.

[7] Kant, op cit., 446-448.

The problem of determining where intrinsic value inheres in should now be clear. In the Buberian approach, the self can relate to Nature in the I-Thou mode regardless of whether the natural entity being related to is an individual (like a tree) or a collective (like an ecosystem). However, in the axiological approach, in cases of conflict between the good of the collective and the good of the individual, atomistic environmental ethical philosophies cannot grant moral considerability to collectives, while holistic environmental ethical philosophies cannot grant moral considerability to individuals.

That holistic environmental ethical philosophies cannot grant moral considerability to individuals in cases of conflict between the good of the collective and the good of the individual is shown by what Eric Katz calls the 'substitution problem'. While Katz acknowledges that a holistic environmental ethical philosophy might acknowledge individuals as possessing intrinsic value, he notes that:

> The existence of intrinsic values in individuals can be ignored in the evaluation of the overall good for the natural system. The instrumental functional value of entities contributing to systemic well-being is given ethical priority. What is evil for individuals might be, and often is, a systemic functional good, and thus acceptable.[8]

The substitution problem hence arises for holistic environmental ethical philosophies:

[8] Eric Katz, 'Organism, Community and the "Substitution Problem"', in *Ethics and the Environment*, edited by Richard E. Hart (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1992), p. 62.

> If an entity in a system is valued for its instrumental function and not its intrinsic value, then it can be substituted for or replaced as long as the function it performs remains undisturbed. In other words, if an entity is considered valuable because of its functional role in the system, then what is really important is the role, and if an adequate substitute can be found, then the entity itself can be destroyed or replaced without loss of value. Nothing is lost for the overall good of the system. As long as the system is maintained, the precise character or intrinsic worth of the particular individual performing its functions is irrelevant.[9]

An example of the substitution problem can be found in Holmes Rolston III's example of Yellowstone ethicists allowing half of the Yellowstone herd of bighorn sheep to die from pinkeye, despite the easy availability of medical treatment, since medical intervention would have contributed to the weakening of the bighorn sheep species.[10] In this example, in the conflict between themselves and the good of their species, the individual sheep were considered to be irrelevant for moral consideration.

Another example of the substitution problem is that of the position of rare or endangered species in holistic environmental ethical philosophies. Katz notes that:

> A species becoming extinct was once a functional member of the natural system; it had instrumental value for it occupied an ecological niche in the system. Its' present endangered

[9] ibid., p. 63.
[10] Holmes Rolston III, 'Challenges in Environmental Ethics', in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, edited by Michael E. Zimmerman (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993), pp. 139-140.

> state is a result of some kind of substitution - either it lost an evolutionary-biological battle with a more competitive species that is replacing it, or it has been displaced by artificial human modifications of the environment.[11]

> Such individuals are no longer really part of an ecological system. They have no instrumental value, since the ecological system seems to function quite well without them. Thus, if they are to be preserved or protected, as environmental policies universally dictate, it must be because of their intrinsic value.[12]

But as Katz has noted earlier, even if holistic environmental ethical philosophies recognise individual entities as possessing intrinsic value, in cases of conflict between the good of the collective and the good of the individual they are regarded as irrelevant and unworthy of moral consideration. On the holistic view, the plight of the endangered tiger is unimportant since the ecosystem functions well even with its diminished numbers. But such a view is counter-intuitive and wrong. That it is counter-intuitive is simply seen in that environmentalists regard the impending extinction of the tiger and other endangered species as ‘a wrong to be prevented’.[13] That it is wrong is seen in that the holistic view of rare or endangered species as being unimportant because they no longer have any functional systemic role to play, is precisely the false view of them as being mere means for the good of the ecosystem, ignoring that they have further possibilities of their own.

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[11] Eric Katz, op cit., p. 66.
[12] ibid..
[13] ibid..

The substitution problem does not arise for the Buberian approach precisely since both individuals and collectives can be interpreted by the self as possessing possibilities of their own, and hence are open to genuine relation with the self. This means that when the self relates to Nature in the I-Thou mode as individual entity or as a collective, it is brought to relate with Nature in a relationship of respect, and relating to Nature in a relationship of respect precisely involves viewing Nature - both as individual entity and as collective - as being morally considerable.

Atomistic environmental ethical philosophies face an analogous problem. By selecting particular properties of individuals (such as the possession of consciousness or goal-directedness) to inhere intrinsic value in, they exclude natural entities which lack these properties from moral considerability. Consider Paul Taylor's ethics of respect for nature. Taylor's environmental ethical philosophy claims that each living individual in the biospheric community has a good of its own, and this, along with its place in the biospheric community, grants it moral considerability.[14] Taylor's account of moral considerability hence excludes nonliving natural entities such as ecosystems from being morally considerable. This is problematic since entities such as ecosystems[15] are recognised by environmentalists as being precisely the sort of

[14] Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986). pp. 60-71.

[15] Some might argue that the stability inherent in an ecosystem shows it to be goal-directed and hence worthy of moral consideration. But such stability is properly understood as being a by-product rather than a goal. See Harley Cahen, 'Against the Moral Considerability of Ecosystems', *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 10, Fall 1988.

entities which possess moral consideration. This is not a problem for the Buberian approach since the self can relate to Nature in the I-Thou mode regardless of how Nature manifests itself.

Hence the Buberian approach has a significant advantage over the axiological approach in that it is not affected by the problem of locating where intrinsic value inheres in.

**The Buberian Approach and the Anthropological Approach.** The anthropological approach consists of environmental ethical philosophies, such as deep ecology, which are primarily concerned with what being human is or what being human ought to be, and this approach links this understanding of the nature of humanity to what the relationship between the human self and Nature ought to be. The Buberian approach belongs to this approach as it argues that the human being is a relational being, and that the self who relates to Nature with respect has realised its relational and hence its human potential. Philosophies within the anthropological approach argue that humankind will fall into a relationship of respect with Nature if it perceives Nature to possess possibilities of its own. The Buberian approach fulfills this task by means of the I-Thou relationship: the self's being in the I-Thou relationship with Nature will bring it into a relationship of respect with Nature. I shall proceed to compare the Buberian approach to the Self-realisation approach, which is the dominant version of deep ecology, and show that it is at least as good as it.

The Self-realisation approach, which has been formulated by deep ecologists such as Arne Naess, Warwick Fox, Bill Devall and George Sessions, understands the environmental crisis as having arisen from the separation of humankind from Nature, and it advocates the self's expansion of its sense of self to include Nature.[16] Fox describes Self-realisation as 'a state of being that sustains the widest possible identification'.[17] Light describes this identification as a transformation of the sense of self 'such that the self is no longer limited by the ego',[18] while Naess elaborates that identification is 'a spontaneous, non-rational, but not irrational, process through which the interests or interests of another being are reacted to as our own interest or interests'.[19] Devall and Sessions describe Self-realisation as 'an identification which goes beyond humanity to include the nonhuman world'.[20]

The appeal of the Self-realisation approach for environmental ethics is clear. If the self expands its sense of self to include Nature, then the self would be disinclined to despoil Nature and would be inclined to protect and respect it, for the self would not want to harm but would rather want to protect or benefit itself. The

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[16] Peter Reed, 'Man Apart: An Alternative to the Self-Realisation Approach', *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 11, Spring 1989, pp. 54-55.
[17] Warwick Fox, *Approaching Deep Ecology: A Response to Richard Sylvan's Critique of Deep Ecology*, Environmental Studies Occasional Paper No. 20 (Hobart: Board of Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania, 1990), pp. 67-68.
[18] Light, op cit., p. 98.
[19] Arne Naess, 'Identification as a Source of Deep Ecological Attitudes', in *Radical Environmentalism: Philosophy and Tactics*, edited by Peter C. List (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1993), p. 29.
[20] Bill Devall and George Sessions, 'Deep Ecology', in *Radical Environmentalism: Philosophy and Tactics*, edited by Peter C. List (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1993), p. 40.

Self-realisation approach hence functions on the basis of self-interest, with the sense of self being transformed from that of the 'small' self of our individual physical being to that of the 'big' Self of Nature:[21] 'we ought to care about all entities / beings / "things in the world" because they are part of our Self; their diminishment is Our diminishment'.[22] Fox provides a striking illustration of this self-interest:

> It is quite easy to see how the problem of caring about the mountain or the river would be approached from this perspective: diminishing the relative autonomy of the mountain or the river violates the ultimate norm of Self-realisation / cultivating ecological consciousness / living in a state of being that sustains the widest possible identification. More simply and directly: the diminishment of the mountain or the river is My diminishment. Shall I take a knife and tear My own breast? Shall I still the blood that flows through My own veins?[23]

Peter Reed argues that Self-realisation poses a significant problem for the self who attempts to practice it:

> As a practical matter, it seems to me that when we try to operationalise Self-realisation we are put in an uncertain position. We are supposed to retain a sense of our individuality as we work to save the big Self from destruction - but at the same time we are supposed to *lose* interest in our individuality as we cultivate our identification with the big Self. True, Self-realisation is not absolute holism, in which the individual is identical with the big Self. Nor is it absolute separatism, in which the individual is completely apart from the Self. However,

[21] Reed, op cit., pp. 55-56.
[22] Fox, op cit., p. 76.
[23] ibid., p. 80.

> those practicing Self-realisation seem to want it both ways: we are, somehow, both the big and small self. How do we set to work with this ambiguous notion of self?[24]

Naess' reply to Reed only underscores the depth of the problem which he has identified. Naess simply reiterates his definition of identification as 'a process through which the supposed interests of another being are *spontaneously* reacted to as our own interests' and hence argues that identification does not endanger the self's sense of individuality.[25] But this does not answer Reed's question, for Reed has acknowledged that Self-realisation requires the preservation of the self's sense of individuality. What Reed wishes to know is how this requirement can be fulfilled along with the other requirement of Self-realisation that the self *lose* its sense of individuality in the process of identification with the Self as Nature.

It is this latter requirement which Naess ignores, but this requirement is important since 'living in a state of being that sustains the widest possible identification' involves more than an identification of interests. For the Self-realised Self would not be able to feel that 'the diminishment of the mountain or the river is My diminishment' if Self-realisation merely refers to identification of *interests*; what is needed is ontological identification,[26] that is, an identification of *being*, for only this will provide the sense of identification that the Self-realised self has with Nature

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[24] Reed, op cit., p. 67.
[25] Arne Naess, '"Man Apart" and Deep Ecology: A Reply to Reed', *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 12, Summer 1990, p. 187-188.
[26] Light, op cit., pp. 94-96.

which will guarantee that the self will feel Nature's sufferings and joys as its own. As Fox quotes J. Baird Callicott:

> 'The injury *to me* of environmental destruction transcends the secondary, indirect injury to the conventional, constricted ego encapsulated in this bag of skin and all the functioning organs it contains. Rather, the injury *to me* of environmental destruction is primarily and directly to my extended self, to the larger body and soul with which "I" (in the conventional narrow and constricted sense) am continuous. Aldo Leopold captured this ecological idea, as so many others, in his inimitable epigrammatic style: "One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds."' (One must not forget, however, that, from the same perspective, one also lives together in a world of joys: the two owls that have spent the daylight hours of the last few days sleeping side by side in the tree not far from my window!)[27]

The self cannot live either 'alone in a world of wounds' or 'together in a world of joys' if it merely identified with the *interests* of Nature instead of *Nature* itself. But if identification is not merely identification of interests but rather the deeper ontological identification of *being*, then Reed's question as to how the self can keep its sense of individuality in such a permanent expanded sense of self remains unanswered.

The self-interested protection of Nature achieved by Self-realisation seems insecure since such protection is contingent on the self's continued identification with Nature. This contingency is more severe if Naess' definition of identification holds,

since on Naess' account this identification is spontaneous, which means that there is the strong possibility that the Self-realised self might spontaneously identify with the interests of Nature at one moment but fail to do so the next. While it is difficult for the self to permanently maintain the I-Thou attitude, as acknowledged by Buber ('Every You in the world is doomed by its nature to become a thing or at least to enter into thinghood again and again.'[28]), this is clearly a problem which it shares with the Self-realisation approach.

However, the Buberian approach has a significant advantage over the Self-realisation approach in that the Buberian approach does not involve a problematic concept of self-transformation such as Self-realisation. It is easier for the self to achieve the Buberian approach's self-transformation as this simply involves the self's switching from its I-It attitude to the I-Thou attitude.

[27] Fox, op cit., p. 62.
[28] Buber, op cit., p. 69.

# CHAPTER FIVE
## CONCLUSION

A philosophy which can serve as a foundation for environmental ethics is a philosophy upon which a complete environmental ethic can be constructed. Such a philosophy has to fulfill two tasks. First, it has to explain how humankind's relationship with Nature has degraded to the level of the environmental crisis we face today. Second, it has to explain how humankind's relationship with Nature can improve to one of respect.

I demonstrated that Buber's philosophy of dialogue meets the first requirement by using it to construct a genealogical account of the environmental crisis. With the industrial revolution came the rise of modern technology. The essence of modern technology is Enframing, which is a manifestation of the I-It attitude. The rise of modern technology, with the concurrent rise of Enframing, has brought about a change in humankind. Not only are individuals alienated from one another by their being in the I-It mode, humanity itself is alienated from Nature. The dominance of Enframing, a result of the expansion of modern technology into modern life, largely prevents humanity from viewing Nature as anything other than as a standing-reserve. The dominance of this view of Nature as being nothing more than a standing-reserve has led to the environmental crisis, for humankind's inability to see Nature as having its own possibilities has prevented humankind from respecting Nature as being more than a standing reserve for humankind. And the absence of such respect has

prevented humankind from refraining from engaging in the over-exploitation and wanton despoliation of Nature which has brought about the environmental crisis.

I demonstrated that Buber's philosophy of dialogue meets the second requirement by showing that first, the self does have a reason to engage with Nature in the I-Thou relationship, for this brings the self to realise its nature as a relational being, and hence to realise its nature as a human being, and second, that the I-Thou relationship between the self and Nature leads to a relationship of respect, for when the self relates to Nature in the I-Thou mode, the self recognises Nature as an end-in-itself, and this prevents the self from interpreting Nature as a standing-reserve or a mere means, and in the standard non-deviant case, the self's interpretation of Nature as a Thou excludes the self from being able to choose to treat Nature as a standing-reserve or a mere means, hence the self is brought to treat Nature with respect.

Since Buber's philosophy of dialogue can explain how the environmental crisis arose, and can also explain how humankind can be in a relationship of respect with Nature, Buber's philosophy of dialogue can be a foundation for environmental ethics. I concluded by showing that the Buberian approach is at least as good as and has advantages over other environmental ethical philosophies in the instrumental, axiological and anthropological approaches.

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