STUDIA ECOLOGIAE ET BIOETHICAE

STUDIA ECOLOGIAE ᴇᴛ BIOETHICAE

Beyond Binary Opposition Thinking in Environmentalism: Using Chris Okezie Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism to Integrate Anthropocentric and Ecocentric Worldviews

Wyjście poza myślenie w kategoriach opozycji binarnej w ekologii – wykorzystanie harmonijnego monizmu Chrisa Okezie Ijiomaha w celu integracji światopoglądów antropocentrycznego i ekocentrycznego

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Abstract: This paper argues that the perceived divide between anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives on human-nature relations can be bridged by Chris Okezie Ijiomah's philosophical framework of Harmonious Monism. Anthropocentrism, which prioritises human interests, and ecocentrism, which assigns intrinsic value to nature, have long been treated as opposing worldviews. Moving beyond this dichotomy, Harmonious Monism offers an integrative framework that recognises the complementarity of humans and nature. Through its principles of balance, tolerance and interconnectedness, I propose a reconciling perspective in which ecological value and human needs are seen not as mutually exclusive, but as interdependent. This harmonising worldview thus has the potential to transcend the anthropocentric/ecocentric divide and promote a more holistic and ethically grounded human-nature relationship. Rather than treating human and ecological interests as opposites, I employ harmonious monism to present them as interdependent realities within the environment. The emphasis on balance, tolerance and interconnectedness reflects that all beings – human and non-human – coexist and contribute to a greater whole. This avoids privileging one side over the other; instead, it calls for ethical practices that support both human flourishing and ecological integrity as mutually reinforcing goals.

Keywords: anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, harmonious monism, Chris Ijiomah, complementarity, African Philosophy, African environmental ethics, SDG 15: Life on Land, SDG 13: Climate Action

Streszczenie: Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia możliwość przezwyciężenia opozycji między antropocentrycznym, a ekocentrycznym postrzeganiem relacji człowieka z naturą poprzez zastosowanie filozoficznych ram teorii Chrisa Okezie Ijiomaha, znanej jako harmonijny monizm (*Harmonious Monism*). Antropocentryzm, który stawia na pierwszym miejscu interesy człowieka, oraz ekocentryzm, przypisujący naturze wewnętrzną wartość, od dawna traktowane są jako przeciwstawne światopoglądy. Wychodząc poza tę dychotomię, *Harmonious Monism* proponuje koncepcję integrującą, pozwalającą dostrzec komplementarność człowieka i natury. Odwołując się do zasad harmonijnego monizmu – równowagi, tolerancji i wzajemnych powiązań – autor postuluje przyjęcie jednoczącej perspektywy, w której to wartość natury oraz potrzeby człowieka nie są pojmowane jako przeciwstawne, lecz jako współzależne. Taki harmonizujący światopogląd mógłby przyczynić się do przezwyciężenia podziału wywołanego konfliktem między antropocentryzmem a ekocentryzmem, promując zamiast tego bardziej holistyczną i etycznie ugruntowaną relację człowieka z naturą. Zamiast traktować interesy człowieka i ekologii jako sprzeczne, autor, opierając się na zasadach harmonijnego monizmu, ukazuje je jako współzależne elementy środowi-

skowej rzeczywistości. Podkreślenie znaczenia równowagi, tolerancji i wzajemnych powiązań odzwierciedla przekonanie, że wszystkie istoty – ludzkie i pozaludzkie – współistnieją i stanowią część większej całości. W konsekwencji, nie sposób mówić o uprzywilejowaniu którejkolwiek ze stron; przeciwnie – autor wzywa do przestrzegania zasad etycznych wspierających zarówno rozwój człowieka, jak i integralność ekologiczną jako cele wzajemnie się wzmacniające.

Słowa kluczowe: antropocentryzm, ekocentryzm, harmonijny monizm, Chris Ijiomah, komplementarność, filozofia afrykańska, afrykańska etyka środowiskowa SDG 15: Życie na lądzie SDG 13: Działania w dziedzinie klimatu SDG 13

Introduction

How can we overcome the false dichotomy between valuing nature for its intrinsic value and valuing it primarily for human benefit? The persistent division between anthropocentric and ecocentric worldviews has created an artificial philosophical divide that may hinder our ability to develop a more holistic environmental ethic. However, this claim needs further justification, as some environmental philosophers, such as Arne Naess (deep ecology) (1973) and John Passmore (anthropocentric stewardship) (1974), argue that these are fundamentally different worldviews rather than an arbitrary divide. Engaging with their perspectives can help to demonstrate why this division is constructed rather than inherent. This division manifests itself in opposing camps: one that places human interests at the centre of our relationship with nature, and another that recognises the inherent value and moral consideration of all living beings and ecosystems independent of human concerns. Indeed, this stark opposition has become a defining feature of environmental discourse. The resulting fragmentation of environmental philosophy has produced theoretical frameworks that, while internally coherent, often fail to capture the complex, interdependent relationship between humanity and the natural world.

In recent decades, environmental philosophers have struggled to reconcile these seemingly opposing perspectives. Some scholars, such as Bryan Norton (1984), have proposed a "weak anthropocentrism" that acknowledges human-centred values while incorporating broader environmental concerns. Others, such as John Baird Callicott (1999), have attempted to develop a unified environmental ethic that incorporates elements from multiple traditions. While these attempts at integration have been fundamental to environmental ethics, I dismiss them as hierarchical. A deeper engagement with their contributions is needed to show how and why they fall short of true integration. In particular, does weak anthropocentrism really take ecocentric concerns into account? Or does it merely accommodate them within a human-centred framework? Similarly, does Callicott's land ethic achieve a non-hierarchical synthesis, or does it implicitly prioritise one perspective over the other? Answering these questions strengthens the case for a new approach. Despite these well-intentioned efforts at reconciliation, the field remains characterised by an either/or binary that limits our ability to develop comprehensive ethical frameworks for addressing contemporary environmental challenges.

Given these persistent limitations, it is crucial to consider an alternative that does not simply privilege one perspective over the other or establish a hierarchy but rather seeks genuine integration. In the face of these persistent limitations, this paper aims, by illuminating the philosophical ontology and ethical principles underlying anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives, to sharpen understanding of their conflicting conceptions of humanity's place within the natural order. It does not, however, advocate an ontology that sees these worldviews as utterly contradictory and incapable of coexistence. Rather, it sees

these perspectives as capable of complementing one another within a unified framework. To overcome this conceptual impasse, the paper draws on Chris Okezie Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism and its principle of unification. This philosophical system demonstrates the possibility of opposites or contraries coexisting in a complementary relationship within a whole (Ijiomah 2014, 130). At its core, through complementarity, I acknowledge that both anthropocentrism and ecocentrism offer valuable yet partial perspectives, which can be more comprehensive when integrated holistically. Unlike previous integration efforts, which tend to reinforce the dominance of one perspective or subsume the other within a pre-existing hierarchy, Harmonious Monism offers a model in which both can be seen as equal and interdependent. The paper argues that if both perspectives can be embraced as complementary frameworks for understanding human-nature relationships, they can serve each other. In essence, it is only when anthropocentrists and ecocentrists see their core insights as complementary that harmony can emerge.

Ijiomah pursued his postgraduate studies at the University of Kentucky in the early 1980s. This period significantly shaped his philosophical orientation. Engaging with diverse philosophical traditions alongside his grounding in Igbo cultural thought during this time informed his distinctive view of reality as relational and interconnected. This synthesis enabled him to challenge Western dualisms and advocate a more integrated, African-centred understanding of existence. His major work, Harmonious Monism: A Philosophical Logic of Explanation for Ontological Issues in Supernaturalism in African Thought (2014), outlines his central philosophical ideas. In this work, Ijiomah presents a logical system grounded in the African worldview that allows for the coexistence of apparent contradictions. In a related publication, An Excavation of Logic in African Worldview (2006), he further investigates the underlying

principles of African logic and its relevance for philosophical inquiry.

Having established the theoretical framework for this integration in the first section of this paper, the second section will provide an overview of both anthropocentric and ecocentric worldviews, examining their philosophical foundations, ethical implications and practical application. Building on this analysis, the third section will explore the ontological underpinnings of Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism, with particular attention to its African philosophical roots and its complementarity. With these foundations in place, the fourth section will then develop a synthetic framework that demonstrates how these seemingly opposing perspectives can be integrated through the application of Harmonious Monism's principles. Finally, section five concludes with a summary of the main findings.

1. An Overview of Anthropocentric and Ecocentric Perspectives

Within the complex landscape of environmental philosophy, anthropocentrism represents a philosophical paradigm that places humans at the centre of environmental and cosmic understanding. Deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts, this perspective asserts that humans occupy the central position in the environment, while non-human entities are relegated to the periphery. In essence, human beings are ascribed intrinsic value, while other beings and natural systems are given only instrumental value. Significantly, this approach systematically distinguishes humans from nature by elevating human cognitive capacities such as reason, self-consciousness and symbolic communication as markers of superiority (Md Firoz Hossain 1990, 51).

To understand the dominance of anthropocentrism, it is important to trace its intellectual origins. The anthropocentric worldview has its roots in the Enlightenment and the Judeo-Christian tradition, both of which have had a deep impact on modern scientific and social paradigms. The Scientific

Revolution was particularly influential, establishing systematic experimentation and rational analysis as cornerstones of scientific practice. This perspective also permeated politics, economics and ethics, promoting ideals of individual autonomy and human progress. The theological underpinnings are particularly revealing. The Judeo-Christian tradition of human dominion over nature, which was reinforced during the Enlightenment, emphasised human mastery over the natural world. Coupled with the rationalism of the Enlightenment, this religious influence contributed to an increasingly instrumental view of nature, in which scientific and economic progress was framed as humanity's rightful conquest of the environment. Lynn White Jr. (1967) observes that biblical and early church teachings promoted a worldview that separated humans from nature, positioning humans as superior to other creatures. White argues that Christian theology was a driving force in legitimising human dominance over nature. Essentially, this perspective asserts that the environment exists primarily to serve human interests and needs.

In its philosophical essence, anthropocentrism revolves around several key principles. Humans are positioned as primary moral agents with a unique moral status that non-human entities lack. Consequently, environmental decisions must prioritise human interests, even when such decisions may negatively impact ecological systems. As Hossain (1990, 48) articulates, this perspective conceptualises humans as "conquerors," with nature serving merely as an instrumental resource for human needs and material gratification. The implications of this worldview extend beyond theory into environmental practice. Anthropocentric environmentalism encompasses both present and future human generations. Critically, the central thesis is that the preserving and caring for the environment is ultimately justified by human interests. In particular, scholars such as Norton (2005, 87) argue that environmental ethics should take into account the full range of human values, both present and future.

In practical terms, the instrumental valuation of nature under anthropocentrism is particularly strong. In essence, the environment and non-human entities are not valued for their intrinsic value, but solely for their utility to humans. To reinforce this perspective, Passmore (1974, 101) suggests that all things exist for humans and for their benefit. This worldview has profoundly influenced Western industrial practices, leading to the exploitation of natural resources without adequate consideration of ecological consequences. Utilitarian philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and mainstream economic theories have perpetuated the prioritisation of human interests over environmental concerns, often leading to ethical decisions that favour short-term economic gains over long-term ecological health.

However, this anthropocentric perspective has not gone unchallenged. While ostensibly promoting environmental stewardship, it recognises human responsibility towards the environment through a lens that prioritises human utility over ecological integrity (Paul Taylor 1986; Rolston Holmes 1988; Aldo Leopold 2001). Paradoxically, this approach fundamentally challenges a more holistic environmental ethics that recognises the intrinsic value of non-human entities and ecological systems. The limitations of anthropocentrism, particularly its failure to acknowledge the moral significance of non-human nature, have prompted alternative environmental frameworks. One such response is ecocentrism, which seeks to transcend the human-centred paradigm and advocate a broader ethical scope.

Ecocentrism, on the other hand, offers a fundamentally different perspective on environmental ethics. Ecocentric environmentalism emerges as a transformative approach that critiques both anthropocentric and biocentric perspectives. This philosophical framework fundamentally challenges existing paradigms, arguing that previous environmental ethics provide

an incomplete and one-sided view of our relationship with the natural world. Tracing its intellectual genealogy, the ecocentric perspective finds its origins in the environmental thinking of early conservationists such as Henry David Thoreau (1854) and John Muir. As Muir (1916) articulated, every plant is a teacher, every natural object a universe of truth and wisdom, reflecting an emerging understanding of nature's intrinsic value beyond human utility.

Building on these fundamental insights, philosophers such as Aldo Leopold and Arne Naess developed the philosophical foundations of ecocentric thinking. Leopold's Land Ethics (1949) critically challenged purely economic approaches to environmental management. He extended ethical considerations to land, soil, water and non-human organisms, emphasising the interdependence of the biotic community. Ecocentric environmental ethics is a radically inclusive philosophical approach unlike anthropocentric perspectives that assign intrinsic value only to humans, or biocentric views that prioritise living entities, ecocentrism recognises the intrinsic value of all natural entities – both biotic and abiotic. As Geoff Holloway (2019) argues, ecocentrism finds intrinsic value in all of nature – this includes both living and non-living parts of nature. Ecocentrism goes beyond biocentrism, which focuses only on living things and ignores the ecological and geological aspects of nature. Critically, this approach fundamentally challenges the hierarchical thinking that has dominated environmental philosophy. Joe Gray, Ian Whyte, and Patrick Curry (2018) emphasise that ecocentrism sees the entire ecosphere – including ecosystems, atmosphere, water, and land – as inherently valuable and interconnected.

John O'Neill (1993, 119) highlights the philosophical ambiguities surrounding the term, noting that multiple interpretations can lead to potential logical fallacies. Some critics argue that intrinsic value is a subjective human attribution rather than an objective property of nature, raising concerns about its philosophical basis. However, philosophers such as Holmes Rolston III (1988) argue that "natural things can and should count morally for what they are in themselves." Hugh McDonald (2003, 8) further argues that intrinsic value creates a moral obligation to protect, placing environmentalism within the rationalist tradition of justifying ethical mandates through reasoned argument.

While offering a comprehensive approach to environmental thinking, ecocentrism is not without its critics. Some argue that by positioning humans outside natural ecosystem structures, it potentially undermines the very moral responsibility it seeks to establish (Denis Goulet 1990; Norton 2005; Haydn Washington et al. 2017). As Norton (2005) notes, prioritising ecological conservation without considering human needs risks alienating local communities and undermining long-term conservation efforts. Nevertheless, thinkers such as Haydn Washington et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of conserving both biodiversity and geodiversity, highlighting the holistic nature of ecocentric thinking.

Ultimately, ecocentric environmentalism represents a deep philosophical shift, challenging us to recognise the intrinsic value of all natural entities and our fundamental interconnectedness with the broader ecological system. By transcending the traditional boundaries of environmental thought, this approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of humanity's relationship with the natural world and invites us to rethink our place within the complex web of ecological existence.

2. An Insight into Chris Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism as a Philosophy of Integration

Harmonious Monism is a philosophical system developed by Professor Chris Okezie Ijiomah, a prominent Igbo-African philosopher of the 21st century. This system spans various areas of philosophy and life. Central to Harmonious Monism is Ijiomah's

reflection on the connections between the physical and spiritual realms, and between peoples, cultures, groups and phenomena. As Ijiomah (2006, 5) states, "every material thing has a spiritual dimension, and every spiritual thing has a material dimension." This holistic worldview is the hallmark of Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism.

Although Harmonious Monism can also be understood as a system of logic, this discussion focuses primarily on its ontological foundations, which are rooted in African conceptions of reality. While it incorporates logical principles, these function mainly as tools to articulate its ontological commitments rather than as an independent focus. Central to this ontology is the African three-valued logic, which contrasts with Western logic by recognising a middle ground between apparent extremes and opposites. In contrast to the Western law of the excluded middle, harmonious monism affirms the interconnectedness and complementarity of apparent opposites (Ijiomah 1996, 45-46). Within this framework, Ijiomah distinguishes two types of monism: subsumptive monism and harmonious monism.

Subsumptive monism is rooted in Western philosophical traditions such as Hegelian dialectics and Marxian materialism. It reduces all realities to a single aspect – either spirit or matter (Ijiomah, 1996, 48; 2018, 4). By reducing reality to a single aspect, subsumptive monism imposes a hierarchical dominance that Ijiomah criticises. Subsumptive monism imposes a hierarchical dominance in which one reality (e.g. spirit) subsumes its opposite (e.g. matter), leading to a reductionist ontology. Ijiomah criticises this framework for its inability to explain some African conceptions of reality, where spiritual and material aspects coexist interdependently and inseparably (Ijiomah 2014, 133).

Unlike subsumptive monism, which privileges one aspect of reality over the other, harmonious monism argues that opposites (e.g., physical/spiritual) coexist as complementary "missing links" within a unified whole (Ijiomah 2014, 130). Grounded in African ontology, it employs a three-valued logic (true, false, and "both/and") to bring about integration rather than exclusion. For example, African realities such as ancestral spirits are neither purely material nor purely spiritual but a union of both (Ijiomah 2014, 28). This is an articulation of a deeper theory of reality of relational and interdependent existence, particularly in African thought.

Harmonious Monism operates on principles different from the three laws of Western logic. A core principle of combination is that opposites can be unified into an inseparable unity, rather than merely overlapping. As Ijiomah explains, this principle allows seemingly opposing values or entities to be harmoniously combined into one reality. In his words, "the rule of union on complementarity says that all complements can unite without multiplying" (Ijiomah 2014, 126). For example, the principle of complementarity allows us to see how night and day, though opposite, complement each other to form a whole cycle. Ijiomah further articulates that through combination, "we can find a way of stating the fact that for any two ontological entities (classes), there is a third which can be the sum, product, difference or quotient of the two classes" (Ijiomah 2014, 127). This logical formulation is not an abstract exercise, but a reflection of the ontological structure of reality as fundamentally integrated.

The fundamental difference between these monisms lies in their approach to opposites: whereas subsumptive monism negates and subsumes an aspect of reality, harmonious monism integrates and affirms the two aspects of reality. Subsumptive monism relies on dialectical negation (e.g., Marx's class struggle), whereas harmonious monism uses union (∪) operations to unify opposites (Ijiomah 2014, 30-32). Furthermore, subsumptive monism reflects Western linear logic, whereas harmonious monism emerges from African communal values that prioritise reciprocity and balance (Ijiomah

2014, 24). Ijiomah argues that subsumptive monism does not adequately address the complexity of African metaphysics, which requires a logic that accommodates the simultaneous coexistence of opposites (Ijiomah 1996, 47; 2014, 131). Again, the logical framework of harmonious monism serves to articulate an ontological vision in which opposites are not negated but affirmed in their interdependent existence.

In this African ontology, aspects of reality are deeply interconnected so that one cannot be separated from the other. This interconnected view of reality is encapsulated in Ijiomah's assertion that for Africans "every reality has both physical and spiritual elements. What qualifies or makes reality physical or spiritual is the most salient feature of reality through which reality exercises its power. This feature may be sensual or nonsensual" (Ijiomah 2014, 99). The existence of one facet is intrinsically dependent on the existence of its complementary opposite. These two aspects permeate each other and become indistinguishable and inseparable parts of a unified whole. While one aspect may be more pronounced in a given phenomenon, the two remain eternally linked in a holistic entity, with a fluidity between whichever facet is more pronounced.

Harmonious Monism provides further insight into this African view of reality and the unity of apparent opposites. Ijiomah observes that "the extremes of reality can freely complement each other and thus have equal freedom" (2014, 134). In African reality, the material and spiritual realms complement each other within phenomena, as do life and death, order and chaos. There is an existential inseparability between opposites as they continually coexist (Ijiomah 2014, 99). Relationships between entities intertwine realities cyclically, with opposite phenomena/entities tending to harmonise in coexistence (Ijiomah 2014, 119). Through the principles of complementarity and interconnectedness, Harmonious Monism philosophically examines African reality.

Although Harmonious Monism is rooted in African ontology, its conceptual resources have broader relevance. Beyond its African origins, I see its potential to address global socio-political challenges by offering a framework of unity in diversity. This perspective can help to address persistent global problems such as racism, cultural erasure, trade inequalities and the dominance of Western epistemologies by promoting mutual respect, balance and interdependence among cultures and peoples. In the next section, the focus would be on how Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism can be used to overcome the schism that exists between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism.

3. Using Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism to Integrate Anthropocentric and Ecocentric Worldviews

The relationship between humans and the natural environment has long been debated between two opposing perspectives: anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. Anthropocentrism sees humans as the most important entity and nature primarily as a resource for human use. Ecocentrism values nature for its intrinsic value, independent of human use. These worldviews shape environmental ethics raising critical philosophical questions about how to balance ecological conservation with human needs. Despite their apparent opposition, these perspectives need not be dichotomous. Harmonious Monism provides a conceptual framework that integrates these viewpoints by acknowledging the interdependence between humans and nature. Drawing on its underlying principles of balance, tolerance and interconnectedness, it offers a more integrative orientation. Rather than treating human and ecological interests as rivals, Harmonious Monism frames them as interrelated dimensions of a unified reality. In what follows, I will tease out the three principles of balance, tolerance and interconnectedness and show how they can help to integrate anthropocentrism and econocentrism in environmental thinking.

The principle of balance in Ijiomah's harmonious monism reflects the ontological view that all realities – material and spiritual – coexist in a unified and proportionate structure. This balance entails a dynamic reciprocity in which human beings and nature, though distinct, are fundamentally interconnected. Building on this idea, I do not see the distinction between human beings and nature as an obstacle to ethical integration. Rather, I interpret the principle of balance in Harmonious Monism as a way of recognising their complementarity – where differences are maintained but do not imply separation or hierarchy. Accordingly, what is central, then, is the reciprocal relationship that sustains both – anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, not the elimination of their distinctiveness. In environmental ethics, this means that neither human needs nor ecological concerns can be pursued in isolation without destabilising the whole. Humans can use nature, but only within limits that ensure its capacity to regenerate. This reciprocal relationship thus affirms both the instrumental and intrinsic value of humans and nature, and redefines environmental action as a condition for human survival rather than a competing interest.

The principle of tolerance derives from the ontological claim of Harmonious Monism that opposites coexist without negating each other (Ijiomah 1996; 2014). Tolerance in this context does not mean passive acceptance, but active recognition of difference without dominance. Applied to environmental philosophy, it suggests that humans and non-humans, though distinct, share a relational bond that must be maintained through respect and non-intrusion. Thus, human dominance over nature disrupts this coexistence and violates the ontological order of mutual respect between complements.

The principle of interconnectedness is central to Ijiomah's harmonious monism, which holds that all entities are constituted by the inseparable interaction of the material and the spiritual (Ijiomah 2014, 131). This framework posits that reality consists only of entities that possess both dimensions and exist in continuous unity. This suggests that all realities, whether living or non-living, form a unified whole through mutual complementarity (Ijiomah 2014, 99). Environmental degradation in this context is not an external disturbance of "nature" but an internal rupture in the fabric of existence. The ecosystem is not separate from humanity; it is the extended matrix of human life. Ecological damage thus reverberates within the human condition. Ethical decisions must reflect this ontological interdependence, recognising that environmental ethics is not peripheral to human development but essential to it. That is, decisions must be based on an awareness that human flourishing and ecological health are inseparable. To neglect environmental concerns is to compromise the conditions necessary for human flourishing.

Taken together, these principles reframe nature not as a fragmented set of resources or a static backdrop to human activity, but as an interactive system in which relational complementarity prevails. Reality becomes an interacting web of dynamic forces – material and spiritual, human and non-human – operating in interdependence. When applied to anthropocentric and ecocentric contexts, the ontological coordinates derived from Harmonious Monism – balance, tolerance and interconnectedness – translate into ethical orientations that emphasise ecological responsibility based on relational complementarity. Table 1 presents the three principles of Harmonious Monism for clarity.

Balance implies that each entity in nature contributes to the functioning of the whole through complementary rather than oppositional relationships. A river regulates water cycles, a tree stabilises soil and absorbs carbon-dioxide, insects pollinate crops and clouds regulate temperature – each plays a systemic role in maintaining ecological order. These are not isolated services, but interdependent expressions of mutual

Table 1. Three principles of Harmonious Monism

The table summarises the key principles of Ijiomah's harmonious monism, explaining each principle in simple terms and indicating its main ecological and ethical implications.

Principle	Core Idea	Ecological/Ethical Implication
Balance	Each entity plays a systemic, complementary role in sustaining ecological order.	Ethical responsibility means preserving interdependence – not isolated conservation.
Tolerance	Coexistence happens through mutual accommodation and complementarity, not dominance.	Respect for biodiversity and resisting ecological uniformity is essential for stability.
Interconnectedness	No part functions in isolation; all are linked in sustaining life and ecological processes.	Responsibility means acting with foresight to preserve the integrity of all ecological relationships.

support, like the earthworm and the soil, or the forest canopy and the undergrowth. Therefore, when one element is damaged or removed – whether through pollution, deforestation or climate disruption – the whole system suffers, often to the detriment of the creatures responsible. For example, a factory that dumps toxic waste into a river may be poisoning the water supply on which the local community depends. Ethical responsibility is therefore not about conservation in isolation, but about maintaining the functional interdependence of all parts. Mutual affirmation – where each being supports the flourishing of the other – is essential to ecological stability.

Tolerance, as expressed in harmonious monism, affirms that different entities coexist by mutual accommodation, not by assertion of ownership or belonging. The question is not "where does Being belong?" but "how do Beings relate to each other? In Harmonious Monism, Being exists in complementarity – biotic and abiotic elements persist by adapting to each other within a shared structure. Predator and prey, decomposer and producer, do not cancel each other out, but maintain a dynamic equilibrium. This interaction is a sign of resilience, not weakness. Ethically, it requires people to make room for other life forms and ecological processes, and to resist environmental homogenisation. Accordingly, tolerance here means supporting biodiversity and ecological variation as preconditions for stability.

Interconnectedness means that no ecological element exists or functions in isolation. Soil health affects plant growth; plants support herbivores; herbivores in turn shape predator populations. A disturbance in one aspect – such as polluted rivers – disrupts aquatic life, contaminates drinking water and weakens agricultural and terrestrial ecosystems. These ripple effects show that life depends on sustained interdependence. For example, fungi and trees exchange nutrients through their root systems, enabling each other to survive and the forest to remain healthy. Rain nourishes vegetation, which in turn maintains the water cycle. Even in death, living things fertilise the soil for future growth. Interconnectedness thus demands ecological foresight and mutual care, making ethical responsibility inseparable from maintaining systemic cohesion. This means that human beings cannot act ethically without considering the health and balance of ecological systems. Every action – clearing land, using pesticides, dumping waste – affects other parts of the system. To be ecologically responsible, people must act with an awareness of these links. This means conserving habitats, reducing pollutants, supporting regenerative agriculture and protecting biodiversity. Responsibility in this context is not abstract – it is based on maintaining the integrity of the relationships that sustain life.

Together, these coordinates challenge the fragmentation of nature into exploitable parts. Instead, they establish an ethics based

on relational complementarity/interdependence, in which all entities matter, not for their isolated utility, but for their role in sustaining the whole. A key ontological concept here is Ijiomah's notion of existence, which emphasises the inseparable and harmonious integration of spirit and matter. To exist is to exist in and with others. Being is not atomistic or self-contained, but is defined by relational interdependence (Ijiomah 1996; 2014). The identity and continuity of each entity is constituted by its entanglement with other entities. This concept reinforces the need for relational complementarity – no being can sustain itself independently of its ecological companions. The affirmation of this ontology has profound moral implications. If beings are co-constitutive, then value is not projected onto them from outside (e.g. from human interests), but is immanent in the web of relationality. Thus, no being is merely a means – each is a co-constituent of the condition of being. This shifts the moral standpoint from instrumental use to relational responsibility. Thus, flourishing is not individual but collective, not exploitative but reciprocal.

Ijiomah's communal ontology, which emphasises human relationality, naturally extends to eco-communalism – an environmental ethics of mutual relevance among all beings. In this framework, solidarity is not limited to human communities, but includes rivers, trees, animals, winds and soils. Mutual participation and collective flourishing become central ethical norms. Just as community members must live in harmony for peace, ecological entities must interact constructively for sustainability. This perspective rejects both anthropocentric and ecocentric hierarchies. Rather than prioritising humans or elevating nature, it advocates horizontal complementarity – all forces are equally necessary because of their functional roles in the whole. It also responds to the view that the ecosystem is a passive container of life. From the standpoint of Harmonious Monism, one could infer that the ecosystem is not merely a background for existence, but an active relational field. It does not simply house entities; it helps to constitute them. Each ecological entity can be seen as both a condition for and a participant in the dynamic unfolding of existence.

Humans have a moral responsibility to protect the ecosystem because failure to do so threatens the very basis of existence. Maintaining the integrity of the ecosystem requires practices such as conserving natural habitats, reducing emissions and waste, switching to renewable energy, supporting sustainable agriculture and protecting endangered species. These are not just technical or political choices – they are ethical imperatives, based on the recognition that to harm the ecosystem is to undermine the conditions of life itself. Ethical responsibility here means aligning human activities with the long-term health of the interconnected web that sustains life.

According to Johnathan Chimakonam and Lucky Ogbonnaya (2025, 12), the ecosystem has intrinsic value, which can be demonstrated by two simple arguments. First, if we accept that only certain realities have intrinsic value, and these realities are inseparable components of the ecosystem, then by association the ecosystem itself as a unified whole has intrinsic value. This suggests that the moral significance of the ecosystem depends largely on the relationships that bind its constituent parts together. Secondly, if we consider that each reality – whether living (biotic) or non-living (abiotic) – serves as a crucial link in the web of existence (the ecosystem), meaning that the ecosystem cannot exist without the interconnectedness of these realities, then the intrinsic value of the ecosystem arises from the inseparability of its parts. The concept of inseparability here does not mean that these realities cannot be physically separated, but rather that such separation risks the destruction of parts or potentially the whole of existence. Therefore, the only way to prevent such destruction is to maintain the integrity

of these connections and preserve the ecosystem as an interconnected network.

Consequently, humans, as sentient beings, have an ethical obligation to consistently maintain the integrity of the ecosystem. This means that human beings, by virtue of their awareness, rationality and moral capacity, are in a unique position to understand and act on the consequences of ecological degradation. This awareness places an obligation on them to act responsibly, not just out of self-interest, but out of recognition that the ecosystem supports all life, including their own. The kind of moral responsibility humans have is both preventive and restorative: they must avoid actions that harm ecological systems and actively promote conditions that support biodiversity, balance and renewal.

It can be argued that Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism is a theory of being that contains fundamental insights for respecting the ecosystem and non-human entities. This provides a basis for the development of an ecocentric philosophy that values community relationships. In line with Ogbonnaya's (2022) idea of "ezi n'ulo" as a model of eco-conservation, the form of communalism proposed here can be called eco-communalism, where all beings – biotic and abiotic – are bound by obligations of care, cooperation and complementarity within a shared ecological household. Similarly, the solidarity between these beings is eco-solidarity, since sustaining existence requires mutually supportive and non-exploitative relationships. Environmental degradation is thus a sign of broken relationships – where the interdependence between beings no longer allows them to thrive. This breakdown also hinders self-fulfilment, understood here as the realisation of a being's purpose through its contribution to the flourishing of others. In an eco-community order, each reality achieves fulfilment not in isolation, but through meaningful participation in the balance and continuity of the whole.

This holistic view places humans within a broader ecological system, emphasising interdependence rather than separation. The environmental crisis highlights the need to move beyond an anthropocentric framework that prioritises human interests at the expense of ecological integrity. However, this does not require an outright rejection of anthropocentrism, but rather a perspective that recognises human agency while maintaining ecological balance. Rather than treating the environment as a mere external resource, I employ harmonious monism to conceptualise it as integral to human well-being, thereby avoiding the dualism that often frames the relationship between humans and nature as one of opposition. Since humans are dependent on the environment, responsible interaction requires a reciprocal relationship: taking from nature and giving back to it. In this sense, anthropocentrism serves ecocentrism and vice versa, creating what I call an "anthropo-ecocentric balance", which refers to an ethical perspective that neither focuses only on humans (anthropocentrism) nor only on nature (ecocentrism), but sees both as interdependent and mutually valuable. It avoids framing human and environmental concerns as competing. Instead, it argues that human flourishing depends on ecological integrity, and that the value of nature includes, but is not limited to, its role in sustaining human life. In this ethics, humans are part of the ecological web, not separate from it, and ethical decisions must take account of this relational complementarity. It is a middle position that integrates human needs and ecological responsibility without subordinating one to the other. This balance is evident in many indigenous African environmental management practices, where human activities are guided by a belief in the interconnectedness of all forms of life.

An example of the anthropo-ecocentric balance in indigenous African environmental ethics is the practice of protecting sacred groves. These are specific forest areas that are considered spiritually

significant and are therefore protected from agriculture, logging or hunting. In addition to their cultural value, sacred groves perform ecological functions by conserving biodiversity, regulating microclimates and protecting water sources. This illustrates a form of human-environment interaction where cultural practices contribute directly to ecological stability. A second example is the method of selective harvesting used by many African farming communities. Instead of exploiting all available resources, people harvest only mature trees or crops and replant what they have removed. This practice maintains a regenerative cycle, ensuring the future availability of resources while meeting current needs. It reflects reciprocity: nature provides sustenance, and people support nature's ability to regenerate. Finally, totem systems offer another model of ecological stewardship. In communities where clans are associated with particular animals, members are forbidden to hunt or eat their totem species. This taboo serves to protect certain species from extinction, indirectly supporting the balance of the ecosystem. At the same time, it reinforces a moral relationship between humans and other life forms, making conservation an expression of identity and ethical duty. These practices show that indigenous systems often avoid the rigid dichotomy between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. Instead, they embody a balanced ethics in which human well-being and ecological integrity are mutually reinforcing.

One criticism that scholars may raise is that my argument risks collapsing anthropocentrism into ecocentrism by overemphasising interdependence, potentially erasing meaningful ethical distinctions between human needs and ecological preservation. If everything is seen purely through the lens of interdependence, it becomes difficult to prioritise urgent human needs without appearing to betray ecological commitments, or vice versa. This risks losing the clarity needed to address real-world ethical dilemmas where human and environmental interests sometimes conflict. However, while interconnectedness highlights interdependence, it does not abolish distinct responsibilities. The framework respects human needs, but embeds them within the wider network of relationships, ensuring that neither humans nor ecosystems are subordinated. It recognises that while humans are part of the ecological web, their moral agency entails specific duties that can be articulated without dissolving ethical distinctions. Interconnectedness does not eliminate hierarchy or priority; it places them within a framework that requires attention to both sides.

In addition to this concern, another concern that scholars may have is that by grounding environmental ethics primarily in the ontological assumptions of harmonious monism, my argument may struggle to persuade audiences who demand more empirical or pragmatic justifications for ecological action. Those sceptical of ontological claims may find the argument too abstract or detached from practical needs, reducing its persuasiveness in broader environmental debates. My response to this is that the ontological grounding complements, rather than replaces, empirical arguments. Recognising relational interdependence philosophically strengthens, rather than undermines, political and empirical appeals for sustainable practices. It provides a deeper rationale for why empirical evidence of ecological interdependence matters ethically and offers a coherent moral vision alongside scientific and practical arguments.

Conclusion

This paper navigates the complex philosophical landscape surrounding the dichotomy between anthropocentric and ecocentric worldviews. It demonstrates the practical and theoretical necessity of integrating these perspectives by presenting Ijiomah's Harmonious Monism. Through a detailed exploration of how human and non-human entities are fundamentally interconnected, the paper advocates a complementary framework that promotes harmony over conflict. This synthesis challenges the entrenched

divide within environmental ethics, inviting an appreciation of the mutual benefits resulting from an inclusive approach. Integrating these perspectives strengthens our ability to address pressing environmental issues and fosters a deeper ethical understanding that respects both ecological integrity and human well-being.

Furthermore, the application of harmonious monism serves as a basis for developing approaches to sustainability and ecological management that prioritise sustainability, equity and ecological management. It affirms the values of balance, tolerance and interconnectedness as being essential to guiding responsible human interaction with the environment. By promoting cooperative strategies that recognise both human needs and the intrinsic value of non-human entities, the paper outlines a framework for more integrated and respectful environmental engagement. Moving beyond the binary of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, it calls for a renewed understanding of humans as participants in, rather than masters of, the ecological system.

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