Anthropocentric Ecocentrism: Aligning Sustainability with Human Nature

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***Abstract*—Inspired by Thaler and Sunstein's libertarian paternalism, where two polar ideas can work together to form a cohesive argument, this paper proposes a new framework in philosophical anthropology—Anthropocentric Ecocentrism—to enhance international climate efforts and cooperation. This new worldview blends human-centered ethics with nature-centered values to address the environmental crisis in the Anthropocene, a proposed but not yet fully accepted geological epoch marked by significant human impact on the Earth's climate, ecosystems, and geology. By blending philosophy with anthropology, this paper argues that the climate crisis is an unintended consequence since, some 300,000 years ago, culture became the primary means by which we adapt rather than physical evolution. As a result, although most of humankind realizes that curing the environmental crisis is just as important as human well-being, current climate initiatives have repeatedly shown failure because they often ask societies to act against their immediate self-interests. Hence, technology alone cannot save a civilization that refuses to adapt societal values. Anthropocentric Ecocentrism aligns environmental health with our rational desires that come as a byproduct of societal development. Though anthropocentrism and ecocentrism are polar viewpoints, I assert they can work together to address issues of climate change.**

***Keywords*—anthropocentric ecocentrism, environmental philosophy, climate change, choice architecture, human nature**

I. Introduction: Reframing the Environmental Catastrophe

We know what to do—we just do not do it. In the Anthropocene, climate change is no longer simply an environmental problem, but a human problem rooted in how we live, what we value, and how our societies are built. Despite unprecedented technological advancements and global awareness, humans continue to fail to act at the scale climate change demands. We recycle, install solar panels, write climate agreements, and invent clean technologies. Yet, environmental issues continue to rise (e.g., global carbon emissions and waste, air, and water pollution) without solutions, echoing several prehistoric societies (e.g., the Maya, the Rapa Nui) that faced ecological concerns while lacking solutions at the height of their societies. This disconnect suggests that the core issue is not just what we do, but how we do it.

We sometimes treat climate change as a matter of innovation or morality. For example, urging wealthy nations to cut emissions out of fairness to poorer countries and future generations. However, technological approaches overlook the truth that human nature can be self-interested, short-sighted, and wired for convenience. Our systems reflect this: plastic is cheap, fossil fuels are efficient, and artificial intelligence is fast. Simply calling for action and expecting people to change habits engraved into their lives is unrealistic. Forcing stakeholders to act in goodwill that results in profit lost out of abstract concern for future generations may be ethically admirable, but it is also behaviorally infeasible. We need a new approach, rooted not only in technology but also in our values.

Thaler and Sunstein's [1] idea of libertarian paternalism, where seemingly conflicting ideas are fused to steer behavior without coercion, poses the question: Can two polar ideas—anthropocentrism and ecocentrism—work together to form a more effective framework for climate action by aligning sustainability with human nature? Rather than denying or attempting to alter our desires in the state of society, Anthropocentric Ecocentrism accepts it by reframing sustainability as self-preservation and repositioning ecological care as essential infrastructure for human well-being. By aligning environmental health with our rational, unescapable self-interest, Anthropocentric Ecocentrism offers a pragmatic pathway to long-term environmental resilience that can both satisfy humanity and sustain the planet we depend on.

II. Literature Review: Philosophical Foundations of Anthropological Behavior

A. Anthropocentrism vs. Ecocentrism

The divide between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism is foundational in environmental philosophy, shaping how scholars and policymakers conceive of humanity's moral relationship to the natural world. Anthropocentrism, the dominant framework in Western thought, views humans as the central agents of value, with nature serving human ends—only valuable because humans need it. Its roots lie in classical and religious traditions: Aristotle's natural hierarchy placed humans at the apex due to reason, while Genesis's concept of "dominion" has often been interpreted to justify control over nature [2, 3, Gen. 1:28]. Enlightenment thinkers like Rousseau and John Locke further reinforced this mindset by describing non-human nature as mechanical and inert [4, 5]. Modern environmental policies continue to reflect this legacy. As Kalita and Barsha [6] explain, sustainability programs often adopt an anthropocentric logic that measures ecosystems by their utility rather than their inherent worth.

Ecocentrism sprang up in the 20th-21st centuries to challenge this by asserting that nature possesses intrinsic value regardless of human interests. Drawing on deep ecology and systems theory, Arne Næss and others argue for an "ecological self," a reimagining of human identity as embedded in the larger web of life [7]. Aldo Leopold's land ethic and Holmes Rolston's moral philosophy extend this

principle, claiming that rivers, mountains, and animals deserve moral consideration for their own sake [8, 9].

In the 2000s, this philosophy started to enter legal systems in many countries. In 2008, Ecuador, enshrined in its constitution that "Nature, or Pachamama, where life is reproduced and exists, has the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles" [10]. This legal innovation marks one of the first attempts to merge ecocentrism with anthropocentrism by affirming that human well-being depends on healthy, functioning ecosystems. By giving legal standing to nature itself, Ecuador reframed environmental protection from a matter of human benefit to a moral and legal obligation for life-sustaining living systems. Other countries, like India and New Zealand, followed and now also have laws protecting their rivers.

Psychological research by Kortenkamp and Moore [11] challenges the strict divide between anthropocentric and ecocentric reasoning since people often use both when faced with environmental dilemmas. Their study found that while non-environmental reasoning was most common, participants were more likely to adopt ecocentric justifications when ecological harm was made clear. Individuals with strong environmental values often combine both frameworks, suggesting that moral reasoning about nature is flexible and context dependent. Better communication can help people think more about nature—even if they care about humans first.

The implications of these frameworks are stark. Anthropocentrism, while enabling technological progress and economic growth, has also led to ecological degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate destabilization. It influenced the Industrial Revolution, which left irreversible benefits and harms on our environment. Though many ecomodernists believe we can apply developed technology to save our environment, this theory reduces nature to instrumentality, grants moral standing only when humans benefit, and entrenches short-termism that assumes substitutability of nature capital with human-made capital [12]. This leads to the externalization of ecological costs until they visibly harm humans and enable prolonged exploitation to privilege our interests. By contrast, ecocentrism offers a radically different paradigm, one in which human interests are balanced within a broader system of mutual interdependence. Despite this, ecocentrism faces cultural and political resistance because it demands a fundamental shift in worldview that includes rethinking development, law, and even prosperity within society. Thus, there are struggles with motivation and uptake, since intrinsic and altruistic value claims can feel abstract, especially when sacrificing practical buy-in. Ecocentrism is also often read as anti-human or anti-development, as its high moral demandingness (radical lifestyle/consumption shifts) can be seen as punitive.

B. Anthropological Foundations

Charles Darwin's [13] theory of natural selection helps explain the process of biological evolution, in which traits that enhance an organism's ability to survive and reproduce—such as speed, strength, intelligence, or resourcefulness—are more likely to be passed down to future generations. Darwin himself said little about human culture or behavior. Later thinkers like Spencer [14] introduced the concept of Social Darwinism with concepts like "survival of the fittest," which began to apply evolutionary theory to social life in all contexts beyond the environment. In the state of nature, this was a good thing, for it meant learning to act quickly and compete while preserving our limited resources. However, as humans evolved to the state of society, social adaptations began to replace purely biological ones. In a world of abundance and industrial growth, this became the fuel for the overexploitation of our natural resources as an aspect of both human nature and natural selection.

This evolutionary grounding leads to the Malthusian-Darwinian Dynamic (MDD), which connects biological evolution to large-scale societal patterns. As outlined by Nekola *et al.* [15], this model explains how population growth and environmental stress intercorrelate with each other over time. Malthus argued that populations grow faster than their resources, while Darwin showed that competitive traits are selected under these pressures. This cyclical model, although containing two opposing views, explains how humans evolve to exploit, hit limits, and then invent to delay collapse. On the other hand, Ester Boserup [16] criticized the Malthusian view, suggesting that necessity and human innovation—not fixed natural limits—drive agrarian change. However, she argued that agricultural development was driven primarily by population pressure, not the other way around because as populations grow, societies must innovate and intensify farming methods to produce more food.

When resource consumption and technological expansion decouple populations from ecological constraints, environmental collapse occurs amongst civilizations. Diamond [17] reinforces this notion by showing how many civilizations declined from environmental stress and the failure of cultural and political adaptation. Similarly, Tainter [18] reframes collapse as a rational systemic outcome when a society's complexity becomes too costly to maintain. Rather than sudden disasters, collapse emerges from diminishing returns on energy, infrastructure, and administration. Meanwhile, DeGroot *et al.* [19] offer a critical perspective, arguing that successful societies have historically adapted through institutional change and societal alignment with ecological awareness integrated within our systems.

In summary, the arc from natural selection to societal collapse often reveals that human evolution favors short-term survival traits scaled through culture and technology that now threaten the very ecosystems we depend on. This makes environmental sustainability not just a technical challenge but a behavioral and cultural reckoning.

C. Philosophical Foundations

Libertarian Paternalism reframes how institutions can shape behavior by working with, rather than against, human psychological tendencies [1]. It begins with the recognition that individuals' actions are predictably influenced by cognitive biases we have as humans: inertia, status quo bias, present bias, and loss aversion. As a result, people often fail to act in their long-term interests and side with the default option presented to them because of how choices are structured. This insight leads to the central principle that institutions can improve individual welfare by shaping choices that are predictable and benign while still preserving

freedom of choice—a middle ground between libertarianism and paternalism. Rather than banning options or mandating behavior, planners can implement nudges to guide people toward a better outcome without restricting their autonomy.

A key limitation of the original theory, though, is that it does not extend its framework to the domains of environmental sustainability, nor does it consider human nature but rather only psychology. At the heart of this paper is bridging that gap by applying this behavioral logic to anthropogenic challenges and building upon it to propose a new model that reframes environmental care to cohere with the human psyche and human nature.

The tragedy of the commons offers a clear illustration of behavioral and structural challenges that Anthropocentric Ecocentrism attempts to address [20]. In this formulation, individuals acting rationally in pursuit of their own gain can collectively deplete a shared resource, leaving everyone worse off. This tragedy emerges when there is no effective mechanism to restrain individuals from undermining the common good—a problem in the state of nature but also in the state of society (as evident in our world today). Even with a government, we still cannot control the overexploitation of resources for profit. In fact, governments often promote this anthropocentric behavior to accumulate profit for themselves.

While libertarian paternalism offers a practical framework for steering behavior through choice architecture, its success depends on deeper analyses about human nature and society in the structures we create to govern ourselves. To explore those foundations, we must consider the social contract theory, where Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau offer sharply different portraits of human cognition, motivation, competition, and political order.

Thomas Hobbes, in *Leviathan*, paints a picture of the state of nature, a hypothetical pre-social condition where there is no government or overarching authority. A life in this state is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" [21, Ch. 13]. For Hobbes, humans are equal in vulnerability and driven by fear of death, desire for comfort, and a restless appetite for power. Scarcity, mistrust, and the pursuit of glory push individuals into a cycle of preemptive competition. Reason suggests that peace is preferable, but without a sovereign to enforce agreements, cooperation collapses. Therefore, the state of society is preferred over the state of nature because a government prevents humans from harming each other in a state of war. This also means disobeying the original rules of nature by hiding behind the fences of society.

John Locke, writing in the *Second Treatise of Government*, offers a more optimistic vision [4, p. 19]. The state of nature is lawful and governed by reason, and people are generally capable of respecting each another's rights. Locke grounds these rights in natural law—how we ought not to harm others in their life, health, liberty, or possessions. His theory of property holds that mixing one's labor with nature justifies ownership, so long as enough and as good is left for others and nothing is spoiled beyond what one can use. Locke's frameworks deeply influenced anthropocentric European thought, ignoring the intrinsic values and rights that nature possesses.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in the *Discourse on Inequality* and *The Social Contract*, begins from a different premise: humans in their natural state are peaceful, self-preserving, and guided by compassion [5, p. 109, 22, p. 60]. It is society, he argues, that corrupts this mindset, breeding vanity and competition through constant comparison, especially with the introduction of luxury goods beyond the realm of absolute necessities of survival. Beyond food, water, and shelter, we begin to care about money, fame, and power, which fuels our desire for ease and urge for competition, leading to the overexploitation of resources.

Taken together, the understanding of human nature provides the ground rules for building any workable system to adopt feasible and implementable ecological principles that fit how humans think, feel, and compete. Our actions, policies, and institutions must be designed with these motives in mind so caring for the environment is the natural, rational, and shared choice.

III. Methodology: Mixed-Methods Research

This literature-based research paper uses interdisciplinary research methods grounded in environmental philosophy. What makes this work distinctive is where it looks for evidence. Rather than treating environmental philosophy as a purely abstract exercise, it grounds its reasoning in two concrete bodies of material. The first is philosophical anthropology, the study of what human beings are and how we tend to act. Clarifying our actual nature comes before prescribing how we ought to relate to the natural world, since an ethic that ignores how humans behave cannot practically guide them. The second is anthropology itself, particularly the record of past civilizational collapses, which offer historically documented cases of what happens when human value systems fall out of alignment with their environments. Together, they reveal whether Anthropocentric Ecocentrism is both internally coherent and practical.

This paper proceeds in three main parts. First, it begins with a literature review that refutes anthropocentrism and ecocentrism on their own terms. Second, the paper makes two central arguments. One frames the Anthropocene as not merely a technological or industrial failure but a structural consequence of societal evolution away from ecological balance; the next proposes that rather than resisting human nature, we must reengineer systems to align ecological preservation with self-interest through a new ideological framework: Anthropocentric Ecocentrism. Finally, this paper concludes with reflections on its limitations and directions for further research.

IV. From Scarcity to Inequality: Setting the Stage for the Climate Crisis

A. Three Key Transitions in Human History

Throughout our cultural evolutionary development, we have continuously expanded our abilities to manipulate the environment while loosening the constraints of natural evolution and survival. Around 3.3 million years ago, the invention of the first stone tools to be used for butchering and cutting marked the symbolic start of human technology. Humans began to use crafted apparatuses to extend human capability beyond our biological limits [23]. This also marked the very beginnings of the basic decoupling of survival, meaning that humans were no longer entirely bound

by the physical limits of their bodies or the immediate availability of natural resources. Instead of relying solely on their raw strength, speed, or teeth like other animals, stone tools allowed us to secure food, defend ourselves, and adapt to new environments in ways that biology alone could not.

For most of human history, over 99% of our time on Earth, we survived as hunter-gatherers. Although the first stone tools began to loosen many constraints, this way of life kept human survival tightly bound to relying on what nature provided in the moment. It was approximately 11,000 years ago that agriculture began to shift us from hunter-gatherer mobility to increasingly more sedentary farming, which provided the expansion of the population beyond what wild ecosystems could naturally support (though in some cases, population growth came first). Agriculture, however, did not emerge because it was inherently easier or healthier. Evidence shows that farmers suffered from poorer nutrition, disease, and social inequality compared to foragers [24]. Archaeologists once assumed it arose simply because farming seemed to provide a more stable food source, but in fact it emerged largely as an adaptation to rising population pressures and ecological limits. By clearing land, domesticating plants and animals, and producing food surpluses, humans began to shape environments to meet our needs rather than vice versa. This shift laid the groundwork for social hierarchies, material accumulation, and technological acceleration far beyond anything seen in the preceding millions of years.

Fast-forwarding to the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, we see another key milestone of human technological, socioeconomic, and cultural shift at a rate never seen before. The transition from agrarian and handicraft economies to those dominated by industry and machine manufacturing accelerated production, transportation, and urbanization as we began to harness fossil fuels to provide ease. From here, human advancement started exponentially growing, but so did environmental consequences from massive carbon emissions, pollution, and global-scale resource extraction through mechanization. At this point, technological acceleration has officially outpaced natural regeneration, and survival has become a function of human-designed systems rather than ecological balance. Overall, these three transitions progressively altered and enhanced our quality of life yet severed us from nature's limits. These shifts also created the behavioral and structural conditions that now drive the climate crisis, which I believe stems from the moment humans opted out of the state of nature.

B. Merging Anthropology with Philosophy: Has Culture Freed Us from Natural Selection, or Doomed Us to Fail?

The social contract[1] was designed to free humans from the chaos of the "state of nature" (think of prehistoric society) by guaranteeing safety, stability, and basic rights. In doing so, it also severed us from the ecological checks that once kept our consumption in balance. For most of human history, scarcity worked as a feedback loop—when resources ran short, populations adapted or moved. But agriculture, industrialization, and today's global supply chains insulate us from those cycles. Modern infrastructure allows consumption and population growth to continue even when ecosystems are under severe stress.

Our social standards and survival systems, equipped with modern technology, also have the potential to protect those who would not have survived in the state of nature (e.g. those born weak, blind, deaf, or with chronic illnesses). Although still not everyone is receiving access to adequate health and social care, many can, for instance, receive surgery to cure these illnesses, get glasses to fix eyesight problems (which, as small as it seems today, used to cause survival issues), and at least live in a society without having to worry about being the prey of other animals. Modern ethics, advanced technologies, and social systems protect individuals from the survival pressures of natural selection, a moral achievement that also enables the human population and resource use to expand beyond the ecological limits that once constrained them.

Removing natural limits, though, has a hidden cost. By doing so, our social and economic systems reward the very behaviors that degrade the environment—extracting more to meet growing demand and population, producing more to maintain economic growth and employment, and consuming more to keep markets active and businesses profitable. Since humans are not satisfied even after achieving the basic necessities of survival, we shift our competition to raising our position in the social hierarchy that formed with the development of agriculture. Control comes from whoever has the capabilities to sustain and feed more people and feed those people well, so overexploitation starts to occur for resources beyond what we absolutely need in the acquisition of power. This is the fundamental principle of how power comes to be: you are in power, and you remain in control of a state, corporation, or institution when you can provide the most for those beneath you—whether it is money, food, or shelter. Anthropologists like Earle [25] argue that this principle of control-through-provision is exactly how chiefdoms emerged; over time, those who redistributed resources most effectively consolidated enduring hierarchies of dominance. The more people you can provide for, the more people you have under your control, and the more powerful you become.

That is when we start emphasizing efficiency over sustainability in the state of society, because our primary competition is no longer for survival in conditions of scarcity but for status, influence, and control within an abundant system. In this new form of competition for power, success is measured by how much we can produce, how quickly we can deliver, and how easily we can provide comfort and convenience to ourselves and others. As a result, the state of society rewards behaviors that, although unsustainable in the long term, yield short-term gains in efficiency and ease. The fastest supply chains, the cheapest manufacturing, the easiest form of transportation, and the most streamlined technologies often depend on practices like mass extraction of resources, single-use production models, and energy-intensive processes that harm the environment. Yet these are

[1] In political philosophy, the social contract is a hypothetical agreement among individuals to establish a government and society by surrendering some of their freedoms in exchange for protection of their other rights and the promotion of the common good.

precisely the practices that help individuals, corporations, and states climb higher in the modern hierarchy, because they allow more people to be served, more goods to be produced, and more demands to be met with less effort.

Think of phones, artificial intelligence, single-use plastics, and fast fashion. Around 57 million tons of plastic waste are produced globally every year (enough to fill Central Park to the height of the Empire State Building), and 150 million metric tons of plastic are currently in our oceans (killing over 400,000 marine mammals annually) [26]. Programming a single AI model can use up to 700,000 liters of freshwater; by 2027, global AI water usage is projected to hit 6.6 billion cubic meters, exceeding Denmark's annual water withdrawal [27].

Although these pollutants all harm the environment, they make our lives easier and do jobs better. The human tendency is that if we have an option that is more appealing or provides more ease, it is extremely hard for us to stop using it, even if we know it is harmful, simply to preserve the environment. Before we used AI, we still functioned and did our own work, but now that we have started using it, most people cannot stop because it is easier and, in many ways, better than ourselves. Prior to industrialization, human societies survived without reliance on machines; yet today, the loss of electricity or internet access exposes a profound dependence on technology, leaving many individuals functionally incapacitated and disconnected from basic survival skills.

Additionally, so much of our world now exists on an artificial and digital platform, so we have developed a trait of overreliance and indolence. Once our phone shuts down, we shut down in some way as well. We suddenly feel disconnected and detached from the world; many of us panic. We instantly lose our ability to navigate to unknown places, contact others, socialize with friends, make payments, and live. When you are bored, you do not know what to do, and when you do not know something, you cannot instantly Google it. We do not *need* to know it immediately, or we can, in theory, look it up in a physical encyclopedia, but in today's fast-paced world, we have largely lost both the ability and the patience to do so. These tools that we now find essential to our living are not truly essential; cultural and social adaptations have simply made them feel that way, even though they were never necessary for our survival to begin with.

However, there is still one thing that some fear in society that prevents them from taking certain actions that might boost their profits: punishment and consequences, such as paying large fines or going to jail. But, in the status quo, being unsustainable does not carry that kind of disadvantage; if anything, it allows us to gain more influence and power. If acting unsustainably in the state of society has no consequences, and consequences are ultimately what we care about, then people will act for their personal gain. In this way, the state of society ultimately fuels unsustainability, incentivizing more production, ease, pleasure, and wealth, another rationale behind Rousseau's argument that the state of society creates luxury goods that corrupt our values and distance us from our original, more balanced relationship with nature.

C. *Technology Vs. Time: Why Innovation Cannot Save Us Without Culture Change*

To combat these inherent qualities of the social human that perpetuates our ecological degradation, we must first draw on past environmental collapses to understand the rationale behind failure to not repeat the same mistake. A theme connecting the so-called collapses of the Maya, the Easter Islanders, and the Ancestral Puebloans is that they all faced environmental pressures that built up slowly, but their political systems could not respond quickly enough to fix them [28]. These examples reveal that modern humans have a deep flaw: societies often exhibit shortcomings in anticipating and preparing for long-term outcomes. We see warning signs, but we tend to delay action, assuming someone in the future will invent a solution or that technology will rescue us at the last minute. Even today, we are repeating the same pattern with climate change; in its early stages, we refused to acknowledge and recognize its existence, and now that the globe has finally realized it, it has already caused several irreversible effects. Humans continue to prioritize immediate political or economic benefits and put off the hard work for later.

Today, technological optimism often functions as a release valve for the conscience. We point to cleaner gadgets and smarter grids like renewable energy sources, so we do not have to confront the harder work of changing what we value and how we live. If technology alone were enough, global emissions and temperature would not still be setting records even as clean power gets cheaper and green tech gets better; energy-related CO_2 hit a new high in 2024 and keeps rising, despite the rapid rollout of renewables [29]. Humans consistently over-rely on technology, believing that it can solve all our problems. Nevertheless, with new inventions, convenience often prevails over sustainability and aligns itself with the self-interest of humans, who continue to seek ways to maximize their advantages. The result is a loop: new "green tech" promises relief, we use it to justify more consumption and speed, the total footprint grows (classic rebound), and we call for even more technology. Until we shift the goalposts—what we subsidize, what counts as "success," and what we celebrate—sustainability technology turns into a permission slip and excuse for convenience, and the environment pays for it.

Consequently, innovation must be more than simply developing new technology—it must also include rethinking values, leadership, and priorities. That is a powerful insight for humans: even the best tools fail if a society cannot adapt its mindset to recognize slow-moving threats before it is too late, and that is the core of Anthropocentric Ecocentrism.

V. Anthropocentric Ecocentrism: Fusion of Polar Opposites to Solve the Climate Problem

Anthropocentric Ecocentrism starts from a simple observation about how people behave: we do what feels near, easy, rewarded, and seen. If we want widespread impact, we should not fight that psychology, but wire it into the design of our laws, defaults, interfaces, prices, and social norms. The core claim is practical: align human motivations in the state of society with positive environmental impacts, and behavior will move naturally without constant moral effort.

A. Biases in Human Nature and Inherent Flaws in Society

Humans, by nature, are biased toward the default, which is what is close in space and time. Seeing smoke in my neighborhood motivates me more than a carbon emissions graph for 2100. This is not a character flaw; it is due to our desire for simplicity. People often keep an irritating phone setting for years because fixing it means digging through menus, so it feels easier to live with the annoyance than to change it. Present costs feel heavier than future costs, and local threats feel more urgent than distant ones. Since we tend to care more about things that directly impact us, Anthropocentric Ecocentrism utilizes these biases for systemic sustainability.

Additionally, we are social—the fear of missing out (FOMO)—turns social comparison into a fast, reliable motivator. When returns, rebates, or eco-streaks are public, people feel they are losing status, money, or belonging if they do not join in. That shortens the link chain, since payoff is immediate (cash back, points, perks) and local (your class, your street), so the decision routes through present bias and social proof instead of abstract future duty. In practice, FOMO converts sustainability from a private moral chore into a convenient public norm.

B. Conceptual Architecture of Anthropocentric Ecocentrism

By blending anthropocentric incentives with ecocentric outcomes, Anthropocentric Ecocentrism accepts that humans and states are self-interested as well as short-sighted. The theory re-engineers systems by making sustainability coincide with human self-interest as it is expressed in the state of society: the desire for ease, money, time, comfort, and status. It reframes ecological protection not as self-sacrifice, but as the most intelligent and self-preserving act humans can take. The point is not to make people saints, but to make the green path the path of least resistance.

Through identifying and utilizing these inherent inclinations in human nature, Anthropocentric Ecocentrism lays out three principles. First, the Choice Architecture principle reframes human nature's inertia and tendency for indolence as a channel toward sustainability through the institutional design of decision-making environments. Since we desire ease, most choices are passive, and people stick with the status quo. If the status quo is polluting, passivity quietly compounds harm. Flip the default, and the same passivity quietly compounds the benefit, so even not doing anything is an act of sustainability.

Layer One (1) of this principle then becomes making the default option the sustainable option. This includes turning the power-saving mode on by default, green energy opt-out (not opt-in), reusable containers standard at events, and repair/refill shown first in apps. People stick with what feels easiest, even tolerating minor annoyances to avoid effort. By leveraging the innate inertia, inaction favors the planet rather than harms it. Layer Two (2) of this framework is making the sustainable option better than the non-sustainable option in terms of usage, efficiency, and cost. We cannot be passive in all decisions, for there are always certain items that we must use in society. For those, if we can make the sustainable alternative tangibly smoother and cheaper, people will then pick it for convenience and not just moral heroism. This creates an incentive for everyone, but especially those who already care about our environment, to be sustainable while knowing that they are not being put at a disadvantage but an advantage. The final layer (3) of this framework is eventually making the sustainable option the only option. Once defaults and performance win hearts, phase out harmful alternatives completely with standard sustainable options. Therefore, even if prices rise, people are locked in with procurement rules, building codes, product standards, and platform policies, so adoption is universal. This would mark the conclusion of a systemic and value shift of rudimentary barriers that prohibit environmental sustainability within society.

One might argue, would this not hinder humans' ability to survive and compete in the modern era? The truth is that we do not unconditionally need add-ons like plastic—it is simply that, with the easier option in hand, modern humans lack the self-discipline to resist using it. The process described is a way to fix this problem by eliminating these pollutants in the first place. Without these aids, life initially might be somewhat difficult, but survival would still be entirely possible. After all, we once lived without plastics, relying instead on wood, metal, and other materials. The reason individuals do not make this shift now is that they do not want to be the only ones facing inconvenience. Yet "inconvenience" is subjective: if sustainability becomes universal, it would no longer be seen as difficult but simply the norm. Inconvenience only exists when there is a seemingly "better" option presented. The same act of walking to work was not an inconvenience before the invention of automobiles, but it is now. Going to the store and refilling used goods was the normal practice in the 19th and 20th centuries, yet it feels inconvenient today compared to the speed of plastic packaging.

Modern humans live in a fast-paced and efficiency-centered society, but despite this, if we all must devote time to sustainable practices as part of our daily lives, just like brushing our teeth or eating food, people will no longer perceive it as wasted time. Take milk as an example. Some grocery stores offer milk in glass bottles, and even if the price is higher in a glass bottle, the total cost ends up being less than buying milk in plastic once you return the bottle for a deposit. Recycling is another example. Many regions in Asia offer automatic vending machines in neighborhoods that take plastic, weigh it, and give money to the provider. The company makes money by recycling it, the individual saves money through conserving, and the environment is preserved. In both cases, the only added factor is time, but if this becomes simply how society functions with no alternative route, people will still do it without feeling that they are doing something unnecessary.

Second, the Present Anchoring Principle utilizes environmental communication to make climate change feel like a current, local threat tied to your own street, school, and wallet—not a distant problem in Antarctica or 2100. This principle translates abstract risks into immediate, place-based signals and payoffs, such as today's air quality index on your block, this week's heat risk for your campus, or near-term flood alerts for your neighborhood due to environmental damage. Because humans are social animals, belonging and comparison are powerful motivators. We harness the FOMO

aspect of humans by making sustainable action the most visible and rewarded "in-group" behavior, so people feel they are losing status, money, or belonging if they do not join in. We stack short-term incentives so present bias works for us through instant rebates at point of sale, next-bill credits, line-skipping or priority access, delivery-fee waivers, and cafeteria discounts for reusables—benefits you feel now. We keep comparisons close to home and time-bounded, such as weekly neighborhood dashboards, class-vs-class tallies, and block heat and energy maps, with progress bars that reset to keep urgency fresh. We frame messages in the near and the here, like "protect your lungs this week," "keep our block 5°F cooler next month," and "beat the street next door," not "save the planet someday." Ultimately, decisions will be routed towards the sustainable option by design.

Finally, one of the biggest structural limitations in society may be luck. Luck is not only where we are born, to whom, of what socioeconomic status, or with which traits (hardworking or smart). In the climate context, the most decisive factor is *when* we are born. One generation enjoyed cheap fossil-fueled growth; another inherited the bill in the form of heat, fires, floods, and instability. Timing creates asymmetry, because those who benefit most are not the same people who will pay most. The principle of temporal justice acknowledges this temporal luck and shifts incentives accordingly so that the easiest, cheapest, and most socially rewarded behaviors are those that repair, not erode, shared life support. Anthropocentric Ecocentrism treats intergenerational luck as a design constraint: today's actors must see immediate values and benefits in choices that protect tomorrow's generation.

C. Why Anthropocentric Ecocentrism Is Greater than Anthropocentrism Plus Ecocentrism

Anthropocentric Ecocentrism is not a compromise but a synthesis that outperforms the two separate ideologies. Pure anthropocentrism motivates action but licenses exploitation whenever human payoffs appear higher elsewhere. Pure ecocentrism supplies ethical depth but struggles to secure uptake and durability because its rewards are abstract, long-term, and politically fragile. Simply adding the two does not fix either weakness, because you get moral aspiration without reliable mechanisms, or you get structures that unravel when values drift. The merged framework closes this gap by engineering everyday structures so that the actions that feel easiest, cheapest, and most rewarding today reliably produce ecocentric outcomes tomorrow.

Nevertheless, a serious objection arises here. Kopnina *et al.* [30] argue that anthropocentrism and ecocentrism cannot be reconciled, contending that anthropocentrism is not benign "human compassion" but a hierarchical ideology that enables ecological harm. On their account, any framework that grounds environmental protection in human self-interest will betray nature the moment human payoffs point elsewhere. Although this critique is correct about unreconstructed anthropocentrism, it misreads what Anthropocentric Ecocentrism claims. I do not argue that the two worldviews *naturally* converge; left to themselves, they diverge exactly as Kopnina warns and as stated above. However, that convergence can be deliberately engineered via choice architecture, present anchoring, and temporal justice so the self-interested option and the ecocentric outcome become structurally identical rather than merely aligned in good faith. The scholars' framework asks humans to adopt intrinsic value directly, which, as they themselves note, faces severe problems of motivation and uptake. Anthropocentric ecocentrism recognizes that and instead routes intrinsic-value outcomes through the very self-interest they distrust because relying on moral conversion alone has repeatedly failed to produce action at scale.

Afterall, Anthropocentric Ecocentrism is a dual-anchored motivation where self-interest and intrinsic value backstop each other, so the mobilization of either one promotes the advancement of both, since anthropocentric levers are engineered to deliver ecocentric outcomes. The shared standards also reduce the need for constant persuasion, monitoring, and enforcement in the tension between the two (where one day we are anthropocentric, and another we are ecocentric), especially in the ever-changing and complex geopolitical framework. If our social and cultural systems reflect both values, we no longer have to choose between one or the other; we can sustain both simultaneously, advancing human and ecological flourishing—the definition of true sustainability.

D. Sustainability by Design: Technological and Social Solutions for Systemic Change

Anthropocentric Ecocentrism treats solutions as a joint venture between technology and governance. Although this paper emphasizes that sole technological advancement will not work for concrete change in the Anthropocene, it can certainly aid the process of value shift. The priority here, though, would be *focusing* on decarbonizing and dematerializing the everyday essentials that we cannot live without (i.e., power, heat/cooling, mobility, and data) rather than *inventing* simply flashy, "new" innovations with unknown rebound effects and applications. Take electric vehicles, for example. Although made with the purpose of being a healthier alternative to traditional gasoline-powered cars, which depend on petroleum, they presented new, unforeseen environmental hazards. Not only does most of the electricity that powers EVs come from power plants, which still run on greenhouse gases, but there is also immense pollution caused by the lack of an adequate disposal solution. The invention of plastics, surprisingly, was also motivated to address problems of environmental harm and resource scarcity, though in practice, it created even worse forms of waste. Hence, extravagant tools can only work after existing non-sustainable products are transformed into eco-friendly substitutes first.

Furthermore, governance turns those technical choices into the operating rules of daily life. From the societal angle, governments need to build infrastructure and center urban development that encourages sustainable defaults in public services. This includes increasing renewable-energy-powered charging stations, more sidewalks and bike lanes on the streets, and enhanced public transportation networks. The ultimate goal should be technological and social transformation driving structural change so that human

incentives and ecocentric outcomes align by default, by experience, and by standard.

VI. Conclusion: Centering Humans by Securing Nature

In this paper, I have argued that durable climate action will not come from technology or moral exhortation alone, but from redesigning systems so that human self-interest reliably produces ecocentric outcomes. Anthropocentric Ecocentrism offers that redesign, validating the hypothesis that two distinct philosophies can be merged for a more comprehensive framework. We can advocate using big, hopeful words like "save our planet," but pragmatically, the past decade has shown minimal impact from such baseline approaches. A good, achievable solution is not one that merely forces people to change their behaviors against their desires; rather, it is to change the system, so sustainability matches those desires. Nonetheless, since this research was grounded in qualitative theories, future research can conduct quantitative quasi-experimental tests of green defaults at the municipal scale to assess the implementation of this framework.

After all, Anthropocentric Ecocentrism can be summed up in one point: making sustainability align with and in favor of human nature. If we cannot change the people, then we must change the system. Rather than forcing people to transcend human nature, this theory routes those tendencies through defaults, incentives, and norms that make "good for the planet" the shortest path to "good for me now." In doing so, it converts the perceived trade-off between human welfare and ecological integrity into a false dichotomy: center humans properly, and you inevitably center nature as well.

In the end, only by harnessing human nature—our appetite for ease, status, and security—can we realistically save nature.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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