

The Possibility of a Non-Anthropocentric Notion of
Environmental Sustainability

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Abstract

This thesis examines contemporary discourse on the natural environment, a discourse that employs terms such as “sustainability” and “sustainable development”. These terms work against efforts to rethink and alter the relationship humankind has with the natural environment. I will illustrate that it is the anthropocentric elements in our notions of sustainability and sustainable development that prevent us from working towards a more harmonious and genuine rapport with nature or “the nonhuman.” This will be accomplished by a methodological inquiry into the way that anthropocentrism penetrates discourses on environmental sustainability, and through an examination of how even more sustainability aware forms of environmental worldviews are caught in the trap of anthropocentrism. I argue that there is a way to introduce the possibility of a non-anthropocentric conception of environmental sustainability by critiquing the anthropocentrism of our contemporary discourse on environmental sustainability.

In order to introduce the possibility of non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability, I use elements of the critical methodologies of Michel Foucault, Bryan Bannon and Martin Heidegger for analysis. I argue that an introduction to the possibility of a non-anthropocentric sustainability cannot be encouraged until humankind is able to bracket our anthropocentrism and make space for the transcendent un-explainability of the nonhuman. To illustrate the difficulty of overcoming and bracketing anthropocentrism, I will critique Bannon’s argument of nature as a friend through an appeal to aspects of Heidegger’s hermeneutical phenomenology. The thesis will include reflections on the development of thought concerning the progression of environmental sustainability and alternative environmental worldviews on sustainability, and critically examine concrete examples of how organizations appeal to environmental sustainability.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the nonhuman: may these beings and materials flourish
with or without the hands of humankind.

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE INSPIRATION

This thesis is inspired by the belief that contemporary discourse on the natural environment, a discourse that employs terms such as “sustainability” and “sustainable development,” works against efforts to rethink and alter the relationship humanity has with the natural environment. In other words, our discourse itself is part of the problem and undermines attempts at achieving a more authentic form of engagement with nonhuman natural world.¹ I will show that it is the anthropocentric elements in our notions of sustainability and sustainable development that prevent us from working towards a more complete rapport with nature or “the nonhuman.”

Without a more complete rapport with the nonhuman, the problems that we currently see in the use of the nonhuman will continue and these problems will culminate in an ecological crisis. The risk of an ecological crisis is evident from the impact that human civilization has on many aspects of the nonhuman and the natural world. For instance, consider the impact of global warming from industrial civilization on just one aspect of the environment, the oceans; there is certainly an influence on sea level rise and a clear threat to huge numbers of humans and species who live in these regions. At the same time, even feeding humanity is becoming more difficult through the impacts of industrial agricultural processes on the soil. The industrialization of our agricultural practices changes the soil and increases the amount of desertification in arable land around the world. Technology may seem like the way forward for such things as desertification,

¹ By the “nonhuman”, I mean to include all “natural” things besides human beings (for example, rocks, trees, animals), as well as “natural” processes, whether physical, chemical or biological (ecosystems, air, waterways, geological formations) again considered as opposed to human beings and the human world of artifacts. Although no doubt human beings are “natural” and part of natural processes, it is the dominant belief in anthropocentrism that posits a sharp distinction between human and nonhuman things and processes, and this influence within anthropocentric beliefs on discourse is the focus for analysis in this thesis.

but technology alone cannot fix the issue. There has to be more of a focus on a combination of technology and natural approaches to agricultural production, a focus that mitigates against the privileging of human desires for overconsumption.

But there are many kinds of negative impacts on the environment resulting from our actions and our understanding of our relationship with the natural environment. Another discernible impact of our human actions is the amount of carbon that some parts of the world experience on a regular basis. Certainly, when people have to “chew” the air and wear filtered masks to survive contemporary city life then an ecological crisis is imminent. The amount of water used for human civilization is also a crucial indicator of an ecological crisis. Water, similar to air, is a vital ingredient for all life on earth. Yet, we seem to be a little naïve as to the impact we are having on the world’s water supply. And while there are many who research and attempt to alleviate this impact and find technological methods to keep water an important resource, overuse, pollution of above ground and below ground water tables (aquifers) continue with little change to the current developmental narrative. The last aspect that illustrates the point that an ecological crisis is certainly possible, if not already upon the planet, is the loss of countless species that share and contribute to the balance of the biosphere. These members of the nonhuman provide humans with food, with pollination, with disease control and purify water (there are many other things that species do but it is beyond the scope of this thesis). However, as will be shown in the following thesis escaping the trap of anthropocentrism and giving a more equal standing to the nonhuman remains a difficult proposition. Nonetheless, these reflections have to take place to avert what may be an ecological crisis beyond human intervention. These are the reasons why we need analyze and rethink our current discourses dealing with our engagement with the nonhuman.

In this thesis, I will provide a methodological inquiry into the way that anthropocentrism penetrates contemporary discourse on environmental sustainability. I will show how even more sustainability aware forms of environmental worldviews are caught in the trap of anthropocentrism. By anthropocentrism in this thesis I literally mean human-centred and seeing the world through a human privileged perspective. The most common account of this human-centredness is privileging the human perspective and promoting humans as the only beings with value or inherent value. ²The human-centred perspective has become a part of our thinking, values and language. Moreover, the pervasiveness of anthropocentrism prevents us from recognizing the “otherness” of the nonhuman by reinforcing the view that the nonhuman should be conceptualized or categorized in human terms; this, in turn prevents the legitimacy of recognizing any independent claims/interests these other beings may have.

I will now provide some preliminary examination of “sustainability” and “sustainable development” as a basis for understanding the ubiquity of anthropocentrism in our discourses concerning the environment. I provide a four part introduction to the main argument of my thesis. In the first section, I will explain why I focus on an analysis of discourse and how the work of Bryan Bannon and Michel Foucault relates to my own methodological approach. In the second section, I will explain some recent developments in contemporary discourse on sustainability by explaining and analyzing the notion of sustainable development as presented in the Brundtland Commission Report “Our Common Future” of 1987. In the third section, I explain how sustainability can be distinguished from sustainable development and how both notions retain anthropocentric elements. In the fourth and final section, I will conclude my

² Humans are at the centre of the world. Human beings and their anthropocentric discourse prevent the perspective or even the imagining of a perspective of the other beings and materials that make up the world. This privileging blinds humanity to alternative ways of engaging with the nature (for this thesis the nonhuman).

introduction with an overview of the chapters and arguments of the overall thesis. By the end of the thesis, I hope to have shown how our contemporary discourse on environmental sustainability has undermined attempts by theorists and practitioners to establish an authentic harmonious non-anthropocentric engagement with nonhuman reality.

1.1 Discourse and our relationship with the nonhuman

“Environmental sustainability”, which I will show is ultimately an anthropocentric notion is a part of our discourse, which influences the way humanity exploits “the nonhuman.” There is no easy way to assess or change this influence. Therefore, we need to reflect on and question the forms of anthropocentric discourse which are involved with in our exploitation of the nonhuman. The difficulty of both recognizing and overcoming anthropocentrism ought to be part of all approaches to environmental sustainability. A critical analysis of anthropocentric elements in discourse is key to recognizing and mitigating against the negative impact it has as it penetrates individual and collective human values. Since these values are central in the formation of discourse and the meanings that are contained in it, an analysis of discourse is critical in understanding how humankind dominates the nonhuman.

This thesis is in part motivated by a personal reflective process on the power of anthropocentric discourse and the dominance over the nonhuman it exerts. Certain thinkers have assuaged some of my concerns and contributed to the articulation of my argument. One of these thinkers is Bryan Bannon author of “Resisting the Domination of Nature: Regarding Time as an

Ethical Concept” (2014). In this article, Bannon argues that if humans see nature as a friend it may lead to a more caring relationship and less dominant or instrumental use of nature. Bannon’s argument is certainly an example of advocating for a more genuine relationship with nature. In a certain sense, it relates to the harmonious view of the human-nonhuman interaction that I mentioned above. However, I think his solution is in the end not sufficiently non-anthropocentric. The reason is that it ultimately remains impossible to forge a conception of friendship without reference to human values and constrictive anthropocentric ethics. Friendship is an incorrigibly anthropocentric concept. If I reject Bannon’s view, this does not mean I am able, at present, to provide a better account of non-anthropocentric engagement with the non-human. The argument I put forth must consistently examine the domination of anthropocentric ideas or conceptualizations that appear even in the more progressive alternative environmental philosophies, such as Bannon’s and others for example, those promoted by EarthFirst! and Deep Ecology.³

It is not possible to escape from the confines of anthropocentrism with moderate forms of anthropocentric ethical valuations. I situate Bannon’s solution of interacting with nature through the lens of human friendships in the category of moderate anthropocentric ethical valuations. However, friendships, even in the human community, are not as easy to navigate, as Bannon wants the reader to believe.⁴ For instance, in the human community, there are countless ways for the formation, diffusion and interaction of friendships. Friendships are formed out of a sense of

³ See Timothy W. Luke *Ecocritique: Contesting the Politics of Nature, Economy, and Culture*, specifically Chapter One “Deep Ecology as Political Philosophy” and Chapter Two “Ecological Politics and Local Struggles: Earth First! as an Environmental Resistance Movement”

⁴ Bannon illustrates how friendship is a back and forth relationship construct and may lead to human society relating to nature on the basis of this anthropocentric ethical virtue. Especially on page 55 of the article “Resisting the Domination of Nature: Regarding Time as an Ethical Concept” (Bannon 2014) Bannon argues that if we use the human ethical construct of nature as a friend it may allow humanity to see nature, and all the things that encompass it, as equal beings in the advancement of a “healthy environment.”

duty, through force, by a mutual self-interested benefit or through a genuine sense of care for another human being. Now, when this ethical value framework extends to the nonhuman, it prevents the nonhuman from revealing itself as it is in itself.⁵ Instead, it contains the nonhuman in ethical categories defined by human values and human constructs (i.e. friendship). This failure to reveal what transcends the human is where the idea of friendship needs more analysis; there is no way to see the nonhuman completely through the lens of human values, theories, rationalities or ethical frameworks without distorting it. The otherness of the nonhuman becomes reinterpreted in human terms even in the less restrictive outlook of human friendship. As a result, the discourse of friendship does not leave human domination aside; it is simply a less rigid form of domination than the domination found in mechanistic or organic theories. Friendship, even the gentler form Bannon argues for, is firmly grounded in the confines of anthropocentric discourse.

In sum, although Bannon's argument for friendship as a paradigm for human relations to nature (which builds upon his earlier criticisms of the rigidity and inflexibility of the temporal domination and control of nature) is admirable, still it fails since friendship is a concept fraught with anthropocentric elements. On the other hand, Bannon does provide some helpful theoretical work when he introduces into environmental discourse (but does not sufficiently develop) some of Heidegger's ideas: the idea of hermeneutics. What we in fact need is an in-depth and critical analysis of the hermeneutical power of anthropocentric knowledge based discourse. This is precisely the reason for my partial endorsement and partial rejection of Bannon's work. I suggest that an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the hermeneutics of anthropocentric discourse

⁵ See Heidegger *Being and Time* particularly the introduction of "things in themselves" on page 24. For Heidegger, things reveal themselves "in speech" or "linguistically".

and how it persuasively transmits the domination of the lesser nonhuman is a critical first step in accessing the possibility of non-anthropocentric alternate views on environmental sustainability.

I do not think that humans can fully dispense with all interpretation and conceptualizations, whether anthropocentric or otherwise. Nonetheless, following the notion of phenomenology that Heidegger articulates in the Introduction to *Being and Time*, I believe that the hermeneutic task involves recognizing those beliefs and conceptualizations that conceal or prevent us from seeing things as they are. Indeed, I will argue that anthropocentric notions of sustainability and sustainable development prevent us from recognizing the nonhuman in its genuine otherness or transcendence. One of the main goals of this thesis is, then, a critical examination of discourses on sustainability and sustainable development with a view to illustrating how the anthropocentric elements in discourse undermine attempts to relate more genuinely to the nonhuman. I do not deny our historicity or the fact that we are interpretive and linguistic beings. But, I suggest, as interpretive and linguistic beings we may still aim for a more transparent and self-reflective form of discourse which will entail a more genuine form of harmonious reciprocity with the nonhuman.

It may at first seem that this harmonious reciprocity with the nonhuman that I advocate is the same as Bannon's friendship with nature. The key difference is that this harmonious reciprocity of existence involves explicitly positing a beyond or that which transcends the confines of the human interpretive mind. It is a concept close to the Husserlian phenomenological declaration of "back to the things themselves" which Heidegger endorses and reworks, and which he alleged was compatible with recognizing the historicity and interpretive/linguistic nature of the human condition (Heidegger 24). I will explain this more thoroughly in Chapter 2. However, for now, let me note that the call "to the things themselves",

as it applies to the nonhuman, seems incompatible with the appeal to and the imposition of purely anthropocentric constructs, such as friendship. At the same time, if we were to see environmental discourse through this harmonious reciprocity of existence it may lead to humans interrelating with the nonhuman in a way that may acknowledge the genuine otherness of the nonhuman.

Further explanation of my caution to fully endorse Bannon's nature as friend argument and why I think it does not qualify as sufficiently non-anthropocentric is to be found in Chapter 2, where I build on Bannon's Foucauldian argument concerning the nature of power and domination. For now, I will return to a preliminary explanation of environmental sustainability and anthropocentrism. Our discourses on environmental sustainability as they currently stand, prevent even the initial consideration of a non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability.

In the next sections of this introductory chapter, I will provide some background regarding the contemporary debate on environmental sustainability. More specifically, in the two sections that follow, I deal with the confusion of the terms 'sustainable development' and 'sustainability' and show how they are distinct. Despite the distinction, both will be shown to be ultimately anthropocentric concepts, which, as I will show later, undermine attempts at a genuine and authentic harmonious reciprocity with the nonhuman.

1.2. Sustainable development and economic rationality

Sustainability is often confused and conflated with some of the economic and scientific accounts of how humanity ought to use the nonhuman, nature, and the natural environment. This is due, in part, to the fact that sustainability is often conflated with sustainable development. The beginnings of the contemporary notion of sustainability are found in the Brundtland Commission report entitled “Our Common Future” of 1987. However, sustainability was never defined in this report. Rather, with this report we see the beginnings of the conflation of sustainability with sustainable development. Indeed, the term sustainability and its definition precede the Brundtland Commission report. The word sustainable came into contemporary use in the early 1970’s and was introduced into the environmental lexicon (Sumner 76).

The dictionary definition of sustainability is “the ability to be sustained, supported, upheld, or confirmed” (Sustainability Dictionary.com). From this definition, even the unaware reader comes to the realization that sustainability was never a concept with ethical space for the nonhuman. The reason is that “the ability to be” cannot directly be attributed to the nonhuman. Since nonhuman beings and things do not have the same abilities, do not act, or think like humans, then there is no possibility of having the nonhuman on the same ethical level based on the confines of anthropocentric rationality. In other words, humans cannot give an accurate ethical valuation of such beings, things and groups of these natural beings (i.e. including ecosystems) and materials precisely since these nonhuman entities are not human and are beyond comprehension in purely anthropocentric terms.⁶ Until humans recognize the limits of their

⁶ As stated at the start of the thesis, the human centred perspective that anthropocentrism promotes does not currently have the space within its language and discourse framework to allow for the otherness of the nonhuman. The issue is that we do give ethical valuation, and yet the valuation we give is too narrow. It, almost always, slips back into why we (humans) are doing this and what benefit will it have to the development of our species. This is

biases and the influences of these biases on interpretations, there is no way to articulate or understand the transcendent otherness of the nonhuman. This does not mean that we have to give up on attempting to understand this otherness of the nonhuman. It does, however, indicate that until we can properly bracket our anthropocentric language, we cannot be open “to the things themselves” (Heidegger 24).

As pointed out above, the notion of sustainability in contemporary discourses on the environment is often thought to have emerged with the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report “Our Common Future”. Nonetheless, The Brundtland Commission never categorically defined Sustainability. In the report of the 1987 meeting of thinkers, scientists, government officials, and corporate representatives, what was in fact defined was “sustainable development.” The Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development as, “development which meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (Sustainable Development - Concept and Action, UNECE.org). The Brundtland Commission definition of Sustainable Development makes the term “sustainable” refer specifically to “development,” and, furthermore, the term “development” refers only to present and future generations of *people* including their economic progress. This view of sustainable development with its inherent economic element is consequentialist and instrumental in scope and thus defective as an approach for genuinely caring for the environment. Furthermore, this consequentialist and instrumental approach only takes into account effects on human beings, excluding consideration of effects on the nonhuman as such (or represents the nonhuman as

where the problems arise, in that our human centred privilege does not allow us to imagine the values of the nonhuman or that there are any other values but those of humankind.

instrumentally valuable only to the service it offers present and future generations of human beings).

For all practical purposes, sustainable development is simply a 'light' version of the developmental narratives that pervade most western economic ideologies. These western economic ideologies view the management, conservation, and preservation of the natural environment for the sake of allowing individual humans to develop and realize their full potential. This form of instrumentalism clearly does not allow humans to bracket anthropocentrism. In its place, whether ideologies foment from socialist, humanist, traditional, religious, capitalist, communist, anarchist, fascist or nationalistic beliefs, there seems to be a consistent anthropocentric similarity in its focus on the open development and enhancement of the human species.

In this belief framework, only the development of humankind is really important. Even if the nonhuman has an ethical value, it only has instrumental ethical value in an anthropocentric context. The nonhuman only has ethical value in relation to people. This is where the Heideggerian argument that one is thrust into an already formed world that is not of one's making is relevant (Heidegger 127). In the plight and existence of humans, to say nothing of the nonhuman, there is rarely time for deep reflection on the dominant belief systems that influence how we interpret and act in the world. In the context of the dominant discourse of the economics of sustainable development, there is no space for promoting a genuine human and nonhuman experience.

The Brundtland Commission did not offer a softer anthropocentric relationship with the nonhuman. On the contrary, the commission focused exclusively and explicitly anthropocentric and mostly economic applications of the principles of sustainability. In addition to this explicitly

anthropocentric and economic focus, the Commission also reemphasized a philosophical outlook of narrow individualism with a basis in instrumentalism and consequentialism. In fact, the Commission simply broadened the scope of anthropocentric notions of development to include future generations of human beings. Reinforcing the human economy and the instrumental use of the nonhuman for human development cannot be a basis for the progress of humanity or the nonhuman.

The narrow instrumental economic perspective which characterizes the Brundtland Commission's work does not have the room for reflection on the actual use of the nonhuman and how this use influences the over-exploitation of the nonhuman. Instead, what tends to happen, as will be shown in Chapter 3, is a narrow promotion of the dominance of humankind. As we will see, this domination continues despite the change in discourse from the language of sustainable development to the language of environmental sustainability, especially in the contemporary era.

Brundtland Commission encouraged and empowered governments, corporations, religions, social institutions and non-profit organizations to cultivate human social (mainly economic) development. But what, I ask, is more, anthropocentric than the development of only humankind? Clearly, the Brundtland Commission and its focus on the Sustainable Development of social institutions and raising the material wealth of humankind cannot be part of the solution or move to a non-anthropocentric conception of environmental sustainability. The commission and the policies it inspired, though more beneficial to some communities and future human generations, are no more than a furtherance of the instrumental anthropocentric dominance of the nonhuman.

This dominance of the nonhuman leads to many questions. I think one of the most important of these questions is how exactly is sustainability, as it is understood in contemporary

discourses on the environment, different from sustainable development? While sustainable development puts an emphasis on economic (as well as other) forms of development for human beings now and in the future, sustainability is thought to be more explicitly an ethical stance towards the environment. Sustainability purports to “care” for the environment in a way that sustainable development, with its unabashedly economic rationality and calculation does not. Thus, sustainability, as it occurs in contemporary discourse, recommends how humans ought to act ethically with the nonhuman or nature. According to this line of reasoning environmental sustainability has to have nonhuman materiality (e.g. plants, air, water, minerals, energy, ecosystems, etc.) as part of its concern. On the other hand, sustainability as a concept still has a “decidedly human emphasis, reflecting not only concern for our future but also an unease with our current situation and an emphasis on human agency” (Sumner 78). This privileging of human agency underpins the anthropocentrism of environmental sustainability policies. The use of this tight anthropocentric agency implies that humans own or in a loose ethical sense are stewards of the natural environment and are thus still in a privileged position to care for the nonhuman. As this human agency flows through discourse and forms environmental narratives on sustainability, it reinforces anthropocentrism. Human agents have to be above and in control of the nonhuman (nature).

1.3 The ethics of sustainability: a kinder, gentler anthropocentrism

The contemporary discourse on the environment is dominated by a kinder and gentler form of anthropocentrism with its appeal to sustainability. As mentioned in the previous section,

sustainability purports to care for the nonhuman in an ethically considerable way. However, in this section, I will show how anthropocentrism is as much a part of this ethically oriented version of (environmental) sustainability as it is the more economically laden notion of sustainable development. I will show that, in spite of its more inclusive and ethical language, there is ample evidence that these discourses on sustainability are in fact more detrimental to the nonhuman. With this in mind, this section explores the impact anthropocentrism has on the concept of environmental sustainability.

To consider humans as stewards of nature is to attempt to give nature a distinct ethical status as an ethical patient. According to notions of environmental sustainability as currently incorporated into the accepted version of the global liberal developmental worldview, humans ought to care for and manage nature and provide our rationally formulated input to aid in its sustainability. This begs many questions, but one of the most significant of these questions is: What exactly does it mean to say that nature (the nonhuman) ought to be sustainable?⁷ For example, when the discourse on sustainability is considered in other terms, such as ‘Forestry’ (itself an invention of the industrialized anthropocentric mindset), it transforms discourse on sustainability into a category of understanding for human, technologies. In other words, sustainability becomes a symbolic term representing a kinder and gentler form of exploitation of the nonhuman with the best and greenest technology and policies available. Heidegger not only

⁷ The purpose here is not to paint a bleak picture of the belief systems and how these systems promote and broadcast environmental sustainability in one acceptable ethical enterprise. I am aware that there are many thinkers (one prescient example is Vandana Shiva and her consistent critiques of the developmental ideology and the narrow Western philosophy it grows out of) from various cultural backgrounds who are more than aware that the way humanity lives on the planet is unquestionably destructive. These voices have been voicing opposition the developmental paradigm present in sustainable discourse for decades. Moreover, if one only wants to look at the thoughts Vandana Shiva has on how the dominant anthropocentric developmental discourse restricts a genuine relationship with the nonhuman or nature an excellent text to start with is *Monocultures of the mind: Perspectives on biodiversity and biotechnology* (1993).

has relevance in the account of phenomenological hermeneutics, his commentary on technology allows one to analyze the trap that contemporary technology places humankind in. Suffice it to say that the command over the nonhuman is similar to the command over technology that Heidegger lamented.⁸ Moreover, one could say that technology, even the green type that sustainability promotes, is a tangible manifestation of the trap of anthropocentric sustainable development, which discounts human creativity and exploits the nonhuman for humankind's exclusive purposes. This does not aid in the formation of a more non-anthropocentric form of environmental sustainability. Instead, it forms a contradictory ethical structure. One cannot be kinder and gentler toward the nonhuman with a use of greener technologies as even these forms of anthropocentrism still over-exploit the nonhuman. The problem is that this mindful use of green technology has not resulted in an ease in human technology. Escape from a technological use of the nonhuman is impossible with a view of sustainability linked only to the use of green technology. Moreover, as this misconception and application of technologies develop, even if it is grounded on gentler forms of environmental sustainability instead of sustainable development discourse, it is not sustainable for the entirety of beings on the planet, merely for the ethical humans that continue to hyper-inhabit and overexploit. As such, environmental sustainability is, in its present understanding and application, intensely anthropocentric and without imagination of a world where the nonhuman may be seen on equal terms.

⁸ *In The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger explains on page 2 that "Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means. We will, as we say, "get" technology "spiritually in hand." We will master it. The will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control." I argue that this approach of the mystery of technology is similar to the hermeneutical discourse and anthropocentric conceptions humans employ to articulate "sustainability" and "sustainable development". The reason is that if we do not categorize the "otherness" of the things beyond the human mind then we cannot begin to use these things, whether it be the nonhuman or the technological artifacts imagined and then produced, with a clear conscious.

Nevertheless, even the simple definition of sustainability contains rationalized and hermeneutically loaded anthropocentric tools. For explanation, let us examine this simple definition of sustainability briefly. Words in the simple definition of sustainability stress bifurcated ideas including “sustained” “supported” and “upheld.” Under this line of reasoning, the things that have to be “sustained” “supported and “upheld” all stimulate the anthropocentric enterprise. For example, consider the case when a hybrid or electric car is introduced on the premise that the natural environment or the nonhuman will be “supported” or “sustained”. Yes, the impact on the nonhuman world seems to be less when, for example, one takes qualitative and quantitative measurements of pollutants. Still, what happens through the implementation of these technologies is consumers are persuaded that their efforts are better for the natural environment (nonhuman) and are encouraged to consume more. As a result, this greenwashing has led to overconsumption of green products. In a sense, humankind is dominating nature with a softer technology that has not eased the authoritative instrumentality and domination by humans in contemporary industrial society. Moreover, as sustainability, in its various forms, becomes an integral part of social and cultural institutions, it becomes more difficult to critically assess the hermeneutical meaning and influence of this concept. Perhaps, the pervasiveness of this term “sustainability” is one of the reasons why there has yet to be a sustained critical reflection on the influence of environmental sustainability in our discourses.

Again, environmental sustainability is characterized as implying an ethical stance towards the nonhuman (nature). How could one conceive of nature with an ethical stance? One could argue along the lines of Spinoza that nature, the nonhuman or the natural environment is/are notion(s) of nature and humankind entwined into one conceptual system of divine

representation.⁹ Thus sustainability would involve seeing at the same time humankind and the nonhuman, nature or the natural environment laced into one. I am not in agreement with some Deep Ecologists that subscribe to the Spinozian notion that all of reality is merely part of or an extension of some ultimate nature or divine ethereal entity. Environmental sustainability does not lend itself well to this monotheistic approach.

The concept of environmental sustainability which portrays us as stewards of the land often ends up being construed in terms of consumption and ownership of land and resources. In this way, the concept of sustainability is once again conflated with the economically understood notion of sustainable development. Consequently, with the cost-benefit analysis of the environmental management of natural resources, the influence of human reason on the nonhuman is undeniable. To put it another way, whether one invokes the contemporary construct of sustainability or sustainable development, both notions dictate that the nonhuman is not there until the human constructs it, produces it, dominates it, controls it and exploits it for our own purposes. Thus, Environmental Sustainability, even if construed in a kinder and gentler way than sustainable development, ends up incorporating anthropocentric elements by the invocation of terms such as ownership and consumption.

As mentioned, many explanations of environmental sustainability start with the assumption of humans caring for the nonhuman and thus imply a kind ownership of nature. This anthropocentric ownership is the sole basis for human progress in caring for the environment. Within this anthropocentric ownership of the nonhuman or nature, there are not alternative discourse descriptions of the nonhuman permitted; there has to be a constant strength given to

⁹ See Spinoza, Benedict De. *The Ethics*. Translated by R.H.M. Elwes. New York: Start Publishing LLC., 2013.

the logic of humankind to the detriment of the nonhuman. The contradiction in this management/ownership view of nature is that “The uniqueness of the object (nature), and the autonomy of the corresponding discourse are thus lost. In an important sense anthropocentrism as social constructionism prevails” (Kaldis 77). Thus, even if we think of human beings as parental, caretakers, managers and stewards of the nonhuman, this view still assumes that the nonhuman depends on and requires our intelligent guidance. Sustainability, since it bases most of its ethical outlook on a kinder relationship with the nonhuman, feeds into this predictable anthropocentric position. At the same time, sustainability in its current anthropocentric form is a conundrum. It promises a more caring account of nonhuman utilization, and yet, it has become an authoritative tool of overexploitation of the nonhuman.

Not only is the understanding of stewardship and ownership implicit in the notion of environmental sustainability enabling humankind’s exploitation of the nonhuman for its sustenance, but humankind also becomes a representative of a divine being acquiring even more authority, including moral authority, and ultimately control over the nonhuman. A reflection or even an initial discussion of alternative non-anthropocentric forms of environmental sustainability are beautiful utopian ideals, which must never come into existence. For instance, the domestication of animals and plant life for the nourishment and development of contemporary humankind exemplify this almost divine privilege and control over the nonhuman realm. Jacques Derrida and Elizabeth Roudinesco on the plight of animals within contemporary environmental anthropocentrism conclude, “This industrial, scientific, technical violence [against animals] will not be tolerated for very much longer.” They write, “The relations between humans and animals must change. They must, both in the sense of an ‘ontological’ necessity and of an ‘ethical’ duty” (63). At the same time, one could argue that the need to understand animal

species could extend from an anthropocentric discourse based on a version of utilitarianism; thus, one could extend human moral rights that permit the moral rights and interests to other nonhuman sentient beings (Singer 74). This version of utilitarianism is undoubtedly better for nonhuman sentient species; however, it is still individualistic and instrumental in its approach and thus promotes an anthropocentric technological worldview. In a definitive way, the perception of the nonhuman (nature) in our discourses is pervasively influenced by anthropocentrism.

Presenting a non-anthropocentric alternative to understanding environmental sustainability, given the pervasiveness of anthropocentrism, is a monumental task. Dominant anthropocentrism keeps humankind from engaging in an integral relationship with the nonhuman. This constant movement of reengagement with the natural environment happens with organizations, institutions, and traditions continually re-defining conceptions of sustainability. Even a cursory examination of this notion shows how anthropocentric elements infiltrate perception, objectification, and exploitation of the nonhuman. The limitations of anthropocentric discourses on environmental sustainability are increasingly evident. This evidence comes from pollution, climate change, species extinction, wildlife control and alteration of the life and material cycles of the biosphere. The negative impact of contemporary anthropocentric notions of sustainability could not be clearer, even though the role that our discourses themselves have on our actions and possibilities is not often acknowledged.

1.4 Critically analyzing discourses on environmental sustainability: the argument of the thesis

To support the possibility of a non-anthropocentric concept of environmental sustainability, I examine some contemporary discourse on environmental sustainability. I also provide brief illustrations on how anthropocentrism penetrates and reinforces the contemporary discourses of environmental sustainability. Though not the central argument of this thesis, I will conclude with a supporting argument for the need for humans to work towards a more harmonious and essential rapport with nature, the nonhuman or the natural environment; in other words, my critical analysis may show a way to mitigate our anthropocentric biases to conceive of a non-anthropocentric notion of environmental sustainability.¹⁰ As the value system of anthropocentrism has detrimental impacts on the nonhuman, a more harmonious relationship is imperative. Harmony is the key. The reason is that even the most anthropocentric human ought to realize that the influence humankind has on the nonhuman is a form of violence against both humans and nonhumans. Moreover, a non-anthropocentric approach to the environment with a built-in reminder of how our dominant interpretations form meanings and reinforce anthropocentric discourse particularly as it applies to environmental sustainability, has to be a first principle. With this in mind, this thesis attempts to provide part of the justification for this claim by examining some of the impact anthropocentric notions of environmental sustainability have on attempts to improve the relationship between humans and nonhumans.

Groups such as technological enthusiasts and climate change deniers cannot continue to dictate discussions with an attitude of anthropocentrism toward the nonhuman. The insignificant

¹⁰ Although there are intellectuals that have proposed a more aware and less impactful relationship with the nonhuman such as deep ecology, small sustainability, and big sustainability, I propose there has not been enough interdisciplinary focus on language and discourse itself. There needs to be more investigation on why the discourses we use have such a profound influence on the nonhuman for humankind's exclusive exploitation.

critiques of a few environmentally aware individuals and groups are insufficient. These eco-critiques have done little to present a genuine alternative philosophical approach to contemporary anthropocentric approaches to environmental sustainability, to say nothing of the continued exploitation of the natural environment. An ongoing and comprehensive examination of the burdens and impact of anthropocentric elements in environmental sustainability discourses and how they encourage the categorization and exploitation of the nonhuman is crucial.

Philosophically, anthropocentric concepts and categories have undermined attempts at a proper reflection on the actual importance of the nonhuman. Indeed, one could argue that the nonhuman sentient beings and materiality are the stuff that allows for the existence of humankind and our concomitant intensifying exploitative culture. In its place, what tends to happen is that our discourse dominates through meaningful etymological turns and gives an incessant prominence to the ‘rational being’: the human.¹¹ In a certain sense, a human life is only as important as its adherence to this form of anthropocentrism. Moreover, when one attempts to clarify the interdependency between human life and nonhuman existence, there is insufficient room for conceiving of an essential linking.

This lack of an essential linking is evident in the way that anthropocentric discourses promote the use of the nonhuman. For instance, consider the case of our use of natural resources

¹¹ By “rational being” I mean the type of economically based human agent who as John McMurtry describes in the text *Unequal Freedoms: The Global Market as an Ethical System* (McMurtry, 1998) on page 128 as governed by “the idea of self-maximization as a universal principle of rationality”. This way of seeing the world does not allow one to see beyond the confines of their own psychology and imagine rights for other humans, to say nothing of the nonhuman or the possibility of a non-anthropocentric form of environmental sustainability. Moreover, McMurtry sums up how the dominant worldview views alternative thought when he says “Behaviour that is not self-seeking is excluded a priori from economic models, and from decision making models in general, even treatises on the nature and meaning of justice”. This reflects back on the problem of overcoming the anthropocentrism in terms such as “sustainability” and “sustainable development”, since most of our thought seems to retreat to the individual and collective benefits of the evolution of the contemporary narrow economic version of the self.

as viewed through the philosophy of environmental conservation of nature; such plans are for the exclusive use by humankind.¹² Philosophically speaking, the human is the only thinking species in this relationship of domination. In other words, human beings must exploit the assets (nature, biosphere, environment, natural world) of the nonhuman to meet the virulent needs of the anthropocentric technology based civilization. Even if there is an environmental conservational ethic, it must be part of the agenda of a developmental project based on the needs or purposes of a rational, enlightened humanity.¹³ At the same time, the non-anthropocentric valuations of the nonhuman transform into more benign forms of anthropocentrism, such as the ethical stance found in environmental conservation. If humanity continues to live solely through an anthropocentric worldview at the expense of the nonhuman, a significant loss will occur.

Despite the somewhat pessimistic outlook of this thesis, I feel there is one reflexive activity that in its purest form may aid in the discussion and in possibly understanding and easing the influence of anthropocentric dominance: Philosophy. I do not champion one school of philosophical inquiry above another, although the influence of figures such as Bannan, Foucault, and Heidegger should be evident in the argument in this thesis. Moreover, despite the navel gazing that much of contemporary philosophy represents, especially in the activity of categorization and separation from the other modes of intellectual inquiry, it may, nevertheless, contribute to environmental sustainability theorizing. At the same time, the branch of philosophy, which occasionally studies the interaction with the natural environment, i.e. environmental ethics, in spite of the efforts of many of its endorsers, has yet to provide an in-

¹² Ulrich Beck explains the formation and broadcast of A Risk Society. In the book *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (Beck 1992) chapter 2 "The politics of Knowledge in the Risk Society" (Beck 1992) and chapter 7 "Science beyond truth and enlightenment" (Beck 1992) illustrate how human beings are constructing knowledge and using science and technology for the over exploitation of nature.

¹³ See footnote 10.

depth unwavering reflection on why anthropocentric discourse undermines attempts to reconceptualise our relationship to the nonhuman.

Since my goal is to speculate on overcoming the initial dominance of anthropocentrism as it relates to discourses on environmental sustainability, my methodology will be critical. Accordingly, I will argue that the critiques of Michel Foucault and Foucauldian environmental, philosophical reflections of Bryan Bannon provide an important basis for the analysis of anthropocentric discourses and, more specifically, contemporary environmental discourses on environmental sustainability. I explain my argument through a methodological analysis, which focuses on hermeneutics or interpretation and how contemporary discourses on sustainability influence our actions in relation to the nonhuman. Thus, I accept Foucault's view that knowledge and power are interdependent in our critical analysis of aspects of society, since our discourses shape and limit our possibilities for actions (and vice versa).

As a result, the balance of the thesis contains two chapters and a conclusion. The first of these chapters, Chapter 2, builds on the article by Bannon and ideas by Heidegger and Foucault. For the Foucault section of this chapter, the idea of panopticism will be briefly explained and used to illustrate how discourses (techniques of disciplinary control) may determine and limit possibilities of action for others. This notion of techniques of disciplinary control provides understanding as to the complex ways in which humankind attempt to control and limit the possibilities of action concerning the nonhuman.

To form a more concrete analysis of anthropocentric discourses of environmental sustainability, the assistance of a proven environmental philosopher, who focuses on how the Foucauldian critique is necessary for an intelligent environmental discourse, is key. As mentioned, the philosopher in question is Bryan E. Bannon and the article "Resisting the

Domination of Nature: Regarding Time as an Ethical Concept” (2014). Bannon’s reflection provides a methodological generalization of aspects of the Foucauldian argument as he also sees Foucault’s analysis as it relates to crime and punishment as analogous to a critique of our current exploitation of the natural environment and a possible move from anthropocentric to non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability. Bannon’s primary objective in this article is a critical analysis of the different ways in which we control and dominate nature through temporal disciplinary means. He also argues for an alternative and more genuine way of conceiving of our relationship to nature on the model of friendship (Bannon, 333).

Although I accept Bannon’s appeal to Foucault’s disciplinary techniques as a good way to understand the complexity of ways we can control and dominate nature, I go beyond Bannon’s argument in two ways. First, by focusing on Bannon’s brief reflections and explanations of the Heideggerian based “hermeneutic domination” (335), I extend his critical analysis of the contemporary treatment of the natural environment. I draw attention to the influence of anthropocentric elements on discourse which undermines attempts to achieve an alternative, more genuine and reciprocal harmonious relationship with the nonhuman. Moreover, as Bannon does not focus enough on the impact of anthropocentric elements in discourse, he fails to address the problems with his alternative model of friendship. Thus, the second way that I go beyond Bannon’s article is by criticizing his appeal to friendship as a way forward; as I mentioned earlier in this introduction, I do not think that regarding nature as a friend is a method for a more non-anthropocentric relationship. Even the best example of human friendship cannot be a methodology for engagement with the vast things that occur and flourish in nature (the nonhuman). Nonetheless, throughout this thesis, I have Bannon’s argument in mind to overcome the initial difficulty of articulating a non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability.

The second chapter, Chapter 3, has one central theme with two distinct sections. The central theme: to show how the hidden and pervasive anthropocentric elements in discourses on environmental sustainability undermine attempts at improving our relationship with the nonhuman. The first section of this chapter focuses on environmental theory. It shows how the environmental theory put forward by groups that are not part of the dominant view expose the hold of anthropocentrism on environmental theories. As an illustration, I give a brief overview of eco-feminism as I see it as one of the possible alternatives in environmental theory. At the same time, I will show that other so-called ‘environmentally aware’ notions of sustainability, whether eco-feminist or otherwise, are in the end still entangled in anthropocentric notions. The chapter then looks at the critical analysis of discourse at the level of environmental policy and practice and the day-to-day use of environmental policy. First, I will examine examples of concrete practices that express the contemporary notion of sustainability (examples such as recycling programs and fines for environmental violators) and show how these practices can be undermined by anthropocentric elements in discourses on sustainability. Second, I will examine two apparently contrasting policy views on sustainability. The first of these discourses on environmental policy comes from a transnational corporation. The second of these discourses comes from an Environmental Non-Governmental Organization (ENGO). I will argue that both policy statements on sustainability, despite the benign forms of anthropocentric language used to articulate their views on climate change and sustainability, are steeped in anthropocentrism. Though there is not enough room in this thesis for the full articulation of alternative non-anthropocentric views of environmental sustainability, I do nevertheless assert that such a critical analysis of anthropocentric discourse is a vital first step for illustrating the way for genuine

alternatives and the fomentation of an initial thought for a non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability.

2. BUILDING ON BANNON AND FOUCAULT TO EXPOSE THE LIMITATIONS OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM

2.1 Bannon's argument for a more complex and nuanced account of domination

The first significant point from Bannon's argument is his examination of the dualistic domination of nature through the viewpoints of William Leiss and Val Plumwood (335). Both of these environmental thinkers have arguments concerning how mechanistic thinking is based on the conceptual tendencies of dualism implicit in our domination of the nonhuman or nature. Bannon believes that the approaches of both thinkers lead to an oversimplification of the ways in which people dominate nature (335). In agreement with Bannon, I have doubts concerning the validity of an approach which simply replaces the mechanistic view of the why and how of nature domination with a more 'organic' approach (Bannon 335). Instead of simply substituting the mechanistic with an organic philosophical viewpoint, we must pay more attention to the different ways in which humankind dominates and controls nature in the first place.

Bannon responds to the approach that replaces mechanistic thinking with an organic approach with an appeal to Foucault. Bannon argues that Foucault in a work such as *Discipline and Punish* understands control and domination of people through temporal and spatial instruments; in a similar way, these instruments may apply to our control and domination of the natural environment (nature).¹⁴ Bannon focuses more specifically on temporality to illustrate his point about the rigidity and inflexibility of temporal forms of control. This critical analysis leads

¹⁴ On page 33 of the thesis I give an illustrative example of what I mean by temporal instruments and how these types of power and control govern human social lives. The examples given are of health, education and even leisure activities and the way in which people seem to blindly follow these subtle and rigid forms of control to add governance and meaning to their lives.

Bannon to propose an alternative, more flexible orientation towards nature. Thus, Bannon believes that his appeal to Foucault leads ultimately to a “novel way of living that displaces and resists the normalizing, disciplinary flows of power within the context of our relationship to nature” (Bannon 336). Nonetheless, for friendship to truly represent a change in our relationship with the natural environment (nature, the nonhuman), I will argue that an analysis of the “hermeneutic domination” of anthropocentric discourse is crucial. Consequently, a full endorsement of Bannon’s account, as argued in his article, is not possible until one provides a thorough analysis of the influence and impact of hermeneutical forms in dominant meaningful discourse(s) on environmental sustainability.

As I have claimed, there needs to be more analysis and critique of how hermeneutics and the anthropocentric meaning implicit in environmental sustainability discourse reinforce anthropocentrism making it so difficult to overcome. Also, while Bannon appeals to Heidegger to give the reader the impression that he has thought about how hermeneutics and the discourses of anthropocentrism are important, I think Bannon’s brief appeal is not sufficient to understand the role that discourse on sustainability has had on our interpretations of and actions towards the natural environment. Further, Bannon’s alternative position of seeing nature as a friend is proposed without properly considering the role that anthropocentric concepts have in undermining attempts at genuine alternatives. Certainly, Bannon does extend a more nuanced analysis of power to understanding our domination of nature, and his focus on temporal instruments in particular is innovative. Additionally, akin to Bannon, I believe that the presence of bifurcation, even in the holistic arguments of a relationship with nature, the nonhuman, does not bring by itself humankind out of its dominant and controlling inclinations.

However, Bannon cannot make a move from his critical analysis of rigid forms of temporal control of nature to seeing nature as a friend by ignoring the role that anthropocentric concepts play in manipulating and undermining attempts at conceiving of genuine alternatives. Without a more focused analysis of the power of hermeneutics and the impact and influence of anthropocentrism in our interpretations, attempts at alternative ways of conceptualizing our relationships with nature become infused with anthropocentric discursive traits. Whether these evaluations are from early Foucault or later Foucauldian accounts of bio-power, such as the ones Bannon uses for his argumentation, without a comprehensive analysis of the influence of anthropocentric forms in our interpretations and discourse, the path is not straightforward.¹⁵ This is why I must give what I think is a supplementary and extended version of the hermeneutical domination of nature that Bannon invokes but does not develop.

Contemporary discourses on Environmental Sustainability is a form of hermeneutical domination in the spirit of Heidegger. What is hermeneutics and how does it relate to the recognition of the nonhuman? Let us respond to this with a brief appeal to Heidegger's account of hermeneutics. If one is to follow Heidegger (1996) from *Being and Time*, then Dasein (which for ease of explanation we can at this point simply understand as the human condition) is characterized both by a temporality and by a historicity (24). In this theoretical perspective, humans are temporal beings in the sense that they are "projections" from the past into a future of possibilities. Humans are historical beings in the sense that we are all thrown into a world that is not our making. To put it in simpler terms, we come into a world that is already permeated by beliefs, traditions, metaphysics and enduring ideologies which we did not make or choose. At the

¹⁵ For a further explanation of how the genealogy articulated in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Foucault 1977) began to overwhelm the discipline of human lives into the administration of socio-biology see *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at College de France 1978-1979* (Foucault 2008).

same time, as it relates to environmental sustainability and the possible articulation of a less anthropocentric form of sustainability, the world we are thrown into already consists of anthropocentric beliefs and institutions/actions based on these beliefs. Moreover, according to Heidegger, some of our beliefs and theories are instruments of concealment which prevent a seeing of things as they are (i.e. the “truth” is hidden) and thus there is a need to analyze and even de-construct some of our beliefs. From this standpoint, anthropocentrism and anthropocentric beliefs prevent us from seeing nature, the nonhuman and natural things as they really are, in the way they reveal themselves.

It is a mistake to think that the pathway to this revealing of the “things as they are” means a dispensing with all conceptualizations, language, and interpretation. In other words, it is a mistake to think that the purpose of a non-anthropocentric notion of environmental sustainability is a type of non-linguistic “intuiting” or “seeing” of nonhuman things. Indeed, for Heidegger, and for the practicalities of proposing a non-anthropocentric view of environmental sustainability, we ought to see phenomenology as interpretive and linguistically based. In simple terms, for Heidegger, phenomenology is not opposed to Hermeneutics. Definitely, from this point of view, it would be accurate to describe Heidegger as providing a type of phenomenological hermeneutics! For instance, when Heidegger famously says that language is the house of being, most scholars take him to mean that the revealing of things, as they are in the way they so reveal themselves in their revealing is interpretive and linguistically constructed.¹⁶

¹⁶ This is a loose account of his definition of phenomenology from the introduction to *Being and Time*, which is based on background beliefs/tradition. Specifically, Heidegger reports on page 24 of *Being and Time* “With the guiding question of the meaning of being the investigation arrives at the fundamental question of philosophy in general. The treatment of this question is phenomenological. With this term, the treatise dictates for itself neither a “standpoint” nor a “direction,” because phenomenology is neither of these and can never be as long as it understands itself. The expression “phenomenology” signifies primarily a concept of method”. Additionally, when Heidegger famously says that “language is the house of being” (Letter on Humanism 83), most scholars think that

Therefore, it seems as if we are caught in a hermeneutical circle but this circle is not vicious. Heidegger and his phenomenological hermeneutics oblige one to be aware of the beliefs and theories that “conceal” or prevent one from being open to the otherness of things. I am opposed to the “hermeneutical dominance” of anthropocentric concepts and conceptualizations, which I argue prevents us from being open to the genuine otherness/alterity/transcendence of the nonhuman. Nevertheless, this does not mean that I am completely opposed to hermeneutics as it is a basis for understanding both the concealment of our beliefs and the transcendent unexplainable aspects of the nonhuman.

While I do have issues with Bannon not giving enough emphasis to hermeneutics and how discourse is interdependent with power and action, I do agree with his critique of dualism. Softer agency based organic teleological dualism is too close to mechanistic, rational thinking to offer a revelatory option to humankind’s cultural treatment of nature (nonhuman). Moreover, I share Bannon’s concerns of attributing to nature and the beings and things within nature a virtue resembling anthropocentric ethical teleological agency. However, as mentioned, and in contrast to Bannon, I do not think an appeal to temporal forms of domination is sufficient to account for the impact of anthropocentric dominance in our interpretations and discourse.

Bannon’s brief appeal to Heidegger’s notion of the hermeneutic rule and the Heideggerian argument for letting things be is, I argue, more important than Bannon’s argument for the temporal domination of nature and his ‘nature as friend’ hypothesis. To explain why, let us consider how some concepts may prevent or conceal things. I tend to agree with Bannon’s brief account of Heidegger’s stance on hermeneutic domination. Specifically, Bannon argues that

he means that the revealing of things, as they are in the way they so reveal themselves in their revealing is interpretive and linguistically constructed.

the proper view of nature, whether nature is viewed mechanically or organically, is not the problem for Heidegger. For Heidegger and Bannon, the problem is not “the kind of properties we think nature possesses, but that we think of nature as a being at all” (Bannon 340). Instead, Heidegger sees Nature as a historical concept developing and changing through time. There has been a shift from thinking about Nature as an internal principle of change to an external system with its individual parts having “functional roles within this system that provides each being with its meaning” (Bannon 340). With this view of nature, Bannon (drawing on Heidegger) can define hermeneutical mastery in the following way:

We can call this form of the mastery of nature hermeneutic mastery or domination since it deals with our interpretive relationship to other beings. To define it simply, hermeneutic mastery pertains to taking up an interpretive position wherein beings are not allowed to reveal themselves in terms other than specifically functionalist ones (e.g., conceiving of the activity of a species in terms of an “ecosystem service” or the commonplace in evolutionary psychology that the purpose of living beings is to reproduce their species) (Bannon 340).

Subsequently by defining/conceiving of nature (the nonhuman) in functionalist terms, we end up concealing the otherness of nature. Anthropocentric concepts conceal in a similar way. In other words, a discourse laden with anthropocentrism cannot begin to give way to any alternative form, since the containment of human reason within this expression of anthropocentrism represents the nonhuman in human terms. The otherness of Nature becomes concealed. Nature

(the nonhuman) is only of importance in how it gives more fuel to anthropocentric descriptions and purposes.

One sees that Heidegger, Bannon and Foucault have difficulties in overcoming what appears to be a vicious interpretive circle. However, as explained earlier, the interpretive task, correctly understood, involves first a critical analysis of our background beliefs to see if there are concepts that prevent us from letting things reveal themselves to us in the way they so reveal. Anthropocentric notions prevent us from recognizing the genuine otherness or transcendence of the beyond human explain-ability of the nonhuman, nature or the natural environment. Thus, this thesis and its critical analysis of anthropocentric discourse on environmental sustainability is a part of the hermeneutical task of revealing and removing concepts that conceal and introducing the possibility of a more genuine and reciprocal relationship to the nonhuman.

A return to Foucault and his views on how discourses influence our actions and social institutions is a crucial methodological step before undertaking the analysis that will occur in Chapter 3. Consequently, in the next section, I attempt to articulate some of the ways knowledge and power are productive and how this is a form of control that prevents alternatives to the status quo. Bannon's account of the rigidity of temporal forms of control is important to the formation of nature as friend thesis. Nevertheless, as emphasized, I think there has to be more focus on the impact of the hermeneutic domination of anthropocentric discourse. For now, let us explain more of the Foucauldian critique of discipline and knowledge and power with a particular focus on the Foucauldian account of Panopticism.

2.2 Foucault's account of disciplinary control and its relation to knowledge/discourse

In works such as *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Foucault 1977), Foucault attempts to show how human lives are governed by interactions of power, control and domination. Foucault wants his readers to see how these socialization forms are necessary tools for disciplinary control. The way in which discourses become part of the individual and collective beliefs often without the members knowing or realizing the power of these discourses is profound. The difficulty is how a person so immersed in such discourses may reveal and critically analyze the influence of these dominant hermeneutical tendencies.

In a sense, one could take the critical methodology of Foucault and argue that anthropocentric discourse is not the surrounding language and social norms of social institutions; it constitutes and shapes institution(s) and possibilities for action. These new institutions, in turn, create offspring discourses. Though seemingly different from the original form, these offspring discourses may not create any new social norms, but reinforce existing ones. They are imitative forms of the smaller production of the knowledge and power of greater social institutions. Understanding the interdependence of knowledge and power, though seemingly more available to more people in society through the spread of the human sciences, such as psychiatry, psychology, sociology, criminology and secularized liberal sermons, is crucial to a critical analysis of the discourse of social institutions. On the other hand, the institutions Foucault critiques that evolve from the domination of a human life are where knowledge and power and the control that comes out of this interaction of knowledge and power produce and limit actual social possibilities for action. For Foucault, these institutions embody instruments of containment and control, while interestingly at the same time they may be the focus for agents acting against these forms of societal domination.

To explain this knowledge and power and the disciplinary practices which make it possible, I briefly reflect on the concept from Jeremy Bentham which Foucault borrowed and expanded, since it serves as a good example of how anthropocentric discourse infuses day-to-day life. The formation and spread of panopticism is typical of how contemporary society controls and dominates people. Panopticism refers to the disciplinary principles and instruments expressed or embodied quite nicely in Bentham's model of a prison, (i.e. his architectural Panopticon). Just as the people within a prison are controlled through the spatial organization of the prison itself and temporally controlled through levels and timetables, so the same disciplinary principles are found in many other parts of society (such as labour, educational and health care institutions). Panopticism makes it easier for groups to become subjects of domination through the authority of the dominant strata of human society.

The authority to live a proper and disciplined human life is not something defined exclusively by an external force; it becomes internalized within an individual and collective consciousness. The amount of discipline, which goes into conditioning this suitable human existence, is awe-inspiring. It conditions the individual and teaches their social behaviours from birth. Through this panoptic conditioning, there is only one way to engage in a fully human life: through the administration and disciplinary methods that a panoptic society employs. Foucault questions "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (228). I find merit in Foucault's account and explanation of the panopticon and the disciplinary principles underlying its forms of control. Nonetheless, there is not enough room in this thesis to describe all of his reflections. Instead, I use a few panopticon reflections to illustrate further the dominance over the undisciplined human subject and, by extension, the dominance over the nonhuman.

I will show that panopticism is merely another tool to promote and strengthen anthropocentric domination over the nonhuman and that it prevents the formation of a non-anthropocentric conception of environmental sustainability. Individuals and collective institutions conditioned in this type of discourse produce value-laden taxonomies. As Foucault explains, within the disciplinary method of the panopticon, “juridical systems defines juridical subjects according to universal norms, the disciplines characterize, classify, specialize; they distribute along a scale, around a norm, hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate” (223). According to this line of reasoning, not only does one have to contain the other human in a prescribed category of understanding, but one also has to present the non-administered and non-disciplined human with satisfactory norms lest they become excluded from acceptable social discourse. Take this beyond the confines of anthropocentric hubris and one sees that such a social discourse cannot adequately explain the nonhuman; it can simply categorize for discipline and for the use of humankind. Moreover, in the categorization of control the separation and divine-like rights and purposes of humankind are of supreme importance.

Through this form of social construction, the changing of the nonhuman into the disciplinary forms of control is evident. As these forms spread, the nonhuman becomes conceived within the confines of contemporary discourse on environmental sustainability and sustainable development. Consequently, since such an anthropocentric framework cannot explain or justify the nonhuman as nonhuman, then it must categorize and reconceive the nonhuman in functionalist terms for ad-infinitum exploitation. This functionalist exploitation of the nonhuman through these disciplinary forms of control shows our hermeneutical inclination to reconstruct and categorize what is “other” to us in human terms. The panopticon also exemplifies a mistaken

view of people, conceiving of people as generalized functional units instead of representing their own “otherness” as distinct individuals. Thus, whether these instruments of control are used to dominate other people or the nonhuman, in both cases there is a failure to recognize what is truly “other” to these categorizations and functional purposes.

The panopticon, or more to the point the disciplinary techniques of control expressed in the panopticon, became a pervasive model for control of people in contemporary society. While the actual architectural form of the panopticon did not last long, panopticism and the disciplinary ideas it established and inspired control a diverse range of social institutions through the professionalization and discourses of the social sciences. What is key to the argument of this thesis is the invisible way panopticism governs, regulates and ultimately conditions these social institutions. If this method is part of the analysis of environmental exploitation, whether through Bannan’s focus on temporal means of control or any other form of disciplinary control, it remains difficult to escape the grip of the discourse of anthropocentric rationalism when it is both hidden and pervasive.

Foucault explains of panopticon that “It programmes, at the level of an elementary and easily transferable mechanism, the basic functioning of a society penetrated through and through with disciplinary mechanisms” (209). Although the analysis of the panopticon was a reflection on why the construction of a particular architectural structure could condition the population of a prison, it rapidly became an instrument of total influence over every aspect of peoples’ lives. In this panoptic society, one has to be contained, counted, conditioned, educated and regulated by this, “marvelous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power” (Foucault 202). In other words, a Panopticon is akin to a machine expressing hermeneutical dominance and social conditioning that accomplishes its task not with overt

displays of authority but with the subtlety of a gentle summer breeze. Therefore, when a worldview forms, it almost certainly assumes an invisible order and instrumentality reinforced by the discourse of social experts. There is no longer an overt spectacle of authority on the individual; the panopticon now intercepts, mediates and penetrates each minute aspect of a person's existence (Foucault 226).

Foucault's analysis and critique of the panopticon are not just theoretical. In real ways, it had, and still has, an intense sway on the socialization and discipline of an acceptable human existence. Under this form of socialization, one must be groomed into, administered into and disciplined through channels of panopticism. These channels do not end in the workshop, the education system, the prison system, the hospitals or government institutions; they are apparent in all aspects of a contemporary human life. Moreover, if somehow one steps out of the track of this disciplinary process, they must be reinserted into the administration of the panoptic apparatus for correction.

These types of authoritative disciplined administration of a decent human existence are through a belief in panopticism. For instance, the way a classroom is set up resembles some of the features of the architectural panopticon. The students and the teacher in the classroom are generally on the outer ring of the architecture of the school. In the centre of the school is the administration office. Inside this administration office is the dean or principal's office where the watching and recording, even if it does not blatantly take place, is taking place symbolically. The control of students is not only through spatial organization, but also through the temporal organization (i.e. organizing progress in terms of levels or grades, each level achieved through testing or exams, and even each day organized in terms of a schedule and timetable). Thus, Bannan's criticism is about the rigidity and inflexibility of these forms of control, whether they

apply to people or nature (the nonhuman). The failure to recognize the genuine individuality and agency of people is implicit in a rigid and inflexible adherence to these forms of disciplinary control.

Foucault illustrates that this rigid disciplinary organization of human social, political, cultural, sexual, traditional and religious events are not the way human proceedings must unfold. These activities are constructs formed through procedures that turn a human into a series of rigid and inflexible institutional disciplinary agential encounters. The activities of controlling encounters make a human life into an efficient unswerving functional existence. These activities have hidden complexities within the descriptions, assumptions, ideologies and philosophies they provoke. These complexities are vital in the domination of the undisciplined human subject. It is arguable that humans should not be conceived entirely as disciplined subjects through the reinforcement of knowledge and power discourse. However, the discourses of the disciplines such as psychiatry, education, criminology and other social sciences reinforce the unspoken control through the functionalist categorization of human beings and characterize all alternative views as irrational or unscientific.

The discourses and instruments of the disciplines are pervasive and dictate how humans are to live in all aspects of life (i.e. there are even timetables and schedules for vacations and leisure activities!). Humans under the auspices of the Foucauldian disciplinary institutions are not to be free; instead, they must be parts of a functional account. This functional account becomes part of both the individual and social subjectivity, as Foucault reports “the ensemble of minute technical inventions that made it possible to increase the useful size of multiplicities by decreasing the inconveniences of the power that, in order to make them useful, must control them” (137 and 220). In other words, the professionalization of the human sciences that Foucault

reflected on as forms of domination over “lesser” humans (whether criminals or the poor or minority groups or through sexual identities) is similar to the methods used by current anthropocentric discourses on environmental sustainability to dominate the nonhuman.

2.3 Going beyond Bannon and Foucault

As humankind attempts to express a more genuine relationship with the nonhuman, it is in the trap of anthropocentric discourse. As Bannon argues if humanity is to see nature as a friend then there may be a way to view the gifts of nature in a more non-anthropocentric manner. While I find considerable merit in the thoughts of Bannon and in the way, he accounts for and expresses a Foucauldian critique of our relationships with the nonhuman, it does not lend itself enough to the possibility of a more non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability. The reason is that when one attempts to see nature or the nonhuman through the prism of friendship, it is still a construct based on the principles of anthropocentrism and presents another difficulty for the possibility of non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability. Indeed, the friendship model is fraught with human values. On the other hand, Bannon’s friendship notion of nature is clearly a better and more flexible method of engaging with the nonhuman than the current anthropocentric model which includes disciplinary measures of control.

The methodological assumptions of the Foucauldian critical method as it relates to the discipline of humans is, I argue, analogous to the possibility of exposing the dogma of anthropocentric conceptions of environmental sustainability and may aid in illustrating the possibility of a non-anthropocentric view of environmental sustainability. Foucault’s

methodological theory informs the individual and group that sustainability is not a distinct and separate social undertaking. It has positive and negative aspects, which may provide the basis for a critical reflection by social institutions aiming normative accounts with more benign forms of environmental sustainability. This normative progress, if frequently amended and reflected upon, may assist in the generation of a non-anthropocentric view of environmental sustainability.

Achieving this task is not straightforward. It remains difficult to hold or even begin to understand the nonhuman without the presuppositions of inherently anthropocentric concepts. Moreover, there is an argument that all philosophical theories, even in environmental ethics, are inherently anthropocentric.¹⁷ On the other hand, the nonhuman and all the beings, things, and materiality that exist in it and through it have ethical potentialities equal to those of humans. Still, for credibility, the environmental individual has to use and debate within the confines of this form of forced logic. If there are some who stray far from this dualistic undertaking and its contemporary anthropocentric discourse, they are considered crazy and outside of reasonable environmental dialogue.

Bannon's reflections have merit and are of paramount importance in overcoming inherent anthropocentrism. However, as mentioned, I believe there is one subsection of Bannon's thesis that relates better to my argument for the pervasiveness of anthropocentric discourse, as a discourse which undermines attempts to provide genuine alternatives and improvements in humankind's relationship with the nonhuman. To repeat when Bannon mentions Heidegger's account of hermeneutics, it comes close to my own proposed critical analysis of the dominant strains of anthropocentrism in environmental discourse. Certainly, the description and use of the

¹⁷ See footnote #2 on page 2 of Shane Ray Epting's MA Philosophy thesis "Incorporating Sustainability into Urban Infrastructures: The tension between Bio-Cultural Aspects and Environmental Considerations" for a succinct explanation of the myopic view of environmental ethics.

natural environment cannot continue in narrow human taxonomies. Imagining ethical value beyond the confines of the human mind in the context of the “hermeneutic domination (i.e., how we conceptualize nature)” (Bannon 335) by anthropocentric conceptions becomes impossible since it reinforces the view that only humans have rights. The rights, agency and intentional distinctiveness beyond the selfishness of humankind are not conceivable within the anthropocentric paradigm; rather these nonhuman things are considered a neutral set of materials there for anthropocentric exploitation and development. What is more astonishing is that the domination of the nonhuman is akin to not only dominating the other lesser thing since the domination occurs *against* the nonhuman or the natural world; it is at once a form of violence against humanity itself. In other words, humankind is inflicting on itself the depressing state that through our anthropocentric discourse and conceptualizations we can never relate to the nonhuman as anything else but a useable and functional “other”. Within this anthropocentric discourse malaise, the nonhuman world has to be without difficulty understood, categorized and compliant for human use. Thus, the seemingly impossible challenge of articulating a non-anthropocentric environmental notion of sustainability may be why many scholars when attempting to explain a way to ameliorate the human influence on the natural environment (the nonhuman) assume it a pointless activity. I, however, do not accept this approach. The disagreement I have with this belief underlies my more general goal of expressing an alternative to this bleak viewpoint.

However, before an alternative view can be expressed a critical analysis of discourses on sustainability is crucial to illustrate the hermeneutic dominance of anthropocentric concepts. Bannon states that, “hermeneutic mastery or domination” (340) is a means of “taking up an interpretive position wherein beings are not allowed to reveal themselves in terms other than

specifically functionalist ones” (340). I think the reason Bannon uses this description of hermeneutic mastery is he is following the Foucauldian reflections on how the discipline that takes place in social institutions, such as for instance the educational system, put the subject into a strict role.

Discourses on sustainability and sustainable development are dominated by anthropocentric elements which are both pervasive and which reinforce the hermeneutic domination and control over the nonhuman. Humankind domesticates, placates, designs and integrates the nonhuman world into its naïve supremacy. This integration of the inert matter that according to anthropocentrism makes up the nonhuman is considered mere energy for the development of humankind. As anthropocentric discourse continuously (re)forms and (re)influences the nonhuman in ways within human comprehension, a need for reflection on the destructive inclination of anthropocentrism become important. At the same time, we cannot simply reject all the discourses with anthropocentric elements. We have to understand or at least reflect on the limitations of human language and conceptualization. After all, humans must interpret things linguistically to understand. Nonetheless, this does not mean that we cannot make space for the acknowledged of what is “other” or what transcends human concepts. Indeed, this is the main problem in the formulation of an alternative form of non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability.

The things that make up the nonhuman are not in themselves human like agents, and within the current discourse of anthropocentrism, they will never attain even a temporary agential status. Instead, these nonhuman things must be construed as having properties and functions from the dictates of anthropocentrism; “rather than the mastery of nature referring to the mere use of nature, then, the hermeneutic mastery of nature takes place at a deeper level, at

the point when we conceive of nature as an identifiable and quantitatively measurable being with properties of its own” (Bannon 340). Undeniably, humankind and our attendant cultural constructs and biases have to expose even this deeper version of anthropocentrism. With this functional and anthropocentric conceptualization of nature (the nonhuman), nature is characterized, as it is not. Instead, it provides an enduring way for anthropocentrism to define nature and give nature a purpose to fulfill. This dominance of functional ideas in our interpretations and discourses reinforces, the metaphysics of human superiority over the natural environment. Thus, an analysis of such discourses is important. There is a need for a critical analysis of a theoretical discourse on environmental sustainability (reflecting a debate between the dominant liberal and capitalist approach versus alternative theoretical approaches by thinkers such as eco-feminist philosophers on the natural environment) to expose the ways our ideas and interpretations can perpetuate human domination over the nonhuman at the level of theory.

Further, if we take seriously Foucault’s views on how knowledge and power can influence each other, a critical analysis of our discourse is not just of academic importance (i.e. to understand theories or philosophical approaches to the nonhuman), but is crucial for understanding our notions and policies towards the natural environment. For Foucault, our knowledge embodies in our discourse (often from experts, but also from influential organizations) can determine or limit the possibilities for action for people (i.e. knowledge can affect power). Thus, the way we interpret or conceive of things such as “sustainability” affects the discourses that refer to those ideas, which, in turn affects how people view what is possible and rational in our treatment of the nonhuman. Nevertheless, for Foucault, power (i.e. limits on our practices and our possibilities for action) in turn affect our knowledge and discourses. Thus, when corporations and NGOs develop policies, these policies are not only informed by experts

and knowledge (and their discourse on environmental sustainability), they also have the power to shape these discourses and determine what counts as possible and rational action towards the natural environment. If this perception is correct, then there is a need for a critical analysis of discourse not just at the level of theory, but also at the level of practice and policy. The next chapter will be an application of the ideas developed here and will provide a critical analysis of discourses in environmental sustainability on both levels.

3. THE PERVASIVENESS OF ANTHROPOCENTRIC SUSTAINABILITY DISCOURSES IN ENVIRONMENTAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

In this chapter of the thesis, I will apply the ideas developed in the first two chapters to provide a critical analysis of discourses on environmental sustainability at both the theoretical level and at the level of practice. I aim to illustrate how debates in environmental philosophy between the dominant political and social view (i.e. the unabashedly anthropocentric liberalism/capitalism view) and alternatives such as ecofeminism philosophy (which attempt to take on the dominant contemporary political and social theoretical approach) end up with both sides caught up in the same anthropocentric elements found in contemporary discourses on environmental sustainability. Thus, the pervasiveness of anthropocentrism in our interpretations and discourses undermines a theoretical alternative, which could maintain a non-anthropocentric view of environmental sustainability. I also want to show, through an examination of discourses on recycling programs, pollutions studies and proposals to punish violators, how debates over concrete practices may also end up reinforcing anthropocentric structures. This reinforcing of anthropocentrism negatively impacts on the natural environment and thus prevents a significant change in our treatment of the natural environment. Finally, through a case study involving an examination of two sustainability policy approaches (by the corporation Suncor and ENGO Friends of the Earth International), I aim to show how anthropocentric elements in their understanding of sustainability and in their policy statements themselves are pervasive and end up impeding attempts at significant changes in our relationship with the nonhuman.

Although the argument of this chapter is meant to show the difficulty of overcoming anthropocentrism in our understanding of sustainability and our discourses on the environment, I indicate in my concluding chapter that there is still room for hope. If we are mindful of the

anthropocentric elements in our ideas and discourse, there is hope that we can bracket our human biases and be open to the “otherness” of the nonhuman. It is this bracketing and openness that can provide for a non-anthropocentric relating to the nonhuman as truly beyond humankind.¹⁸

3.1 Critical Analysis of discourses on sustainability at the level of theory: A brief look at ecofeminism

Contemporary liberal thought has yet to provide an adequate reflection on what may constitute reciprocity with the nonhuman. The domination of the nonhuman has progressed through the narrow theoretical discourse of liberalism. Thus, discourse on environmental sustainability comes from a narrow theoretical paradigm. A discourse on sustainability that assures a liberal framework must uphold the rights of the human to the detriment of the rest of the natural world. Attempting to modify this virulent form of anthropocentrism and its robust control on the nonhuman based on the concepts and categories of liberalism is not easy.

The anthropocentric discourse of the rational human removed from nature is part of the liberal value system influencing contemporary ideas of environmental sustainability.¹⁹ This liberal value system declares nature for humanity’s exclusive use.²⁰ Anthropocentric discourse,

¹⁸ I am not making the claim at any point in the thesis that we have to give up all the biases and positions that anthropocentrism offers. I am, however, attempting throughout the thesis, to have the reader imagine that the anthropocentrism and the privilege that the human centred position stimulates does is at this point incapable of easy the grip of the self-maximizing human. In fact, there are many developmental narratives that develop certain forms of social justice (the subject matter for other writers) at the clear expense at even a rudimentary form of balance with the nonhuman and the natural environment.

¹⁹ See Footnote 10.

²⁰ See John McMurtry and the theory he establishes on the value system and the built in human hubris and false rationalism. McMurtry explains this in *The Cancer Stage of Capitalism: From Crisis to Cure*.

in the liberal sense, is the basic premise in the construction of societal institutions. Consequently, the anthropocentric discourse of liberalism impacts on how to use the nonhuman. Some environmentalists ignore the influence of anthropocentrism on the nonhuman and argue that politics and institutional theories and constructs do not matter. However, this approach allows the anthropocentric elements of environmental sustainability to gain even more momentum. Insofar as there is hope for a non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability, a realization of the influence of our theoretical views of society and nature has to be part of our analysis of current and future discourses in environmental sustainability.²¹

At the level of theory, environmental sustainability has many faces. These theoretical faces are explicitly anthropocentric, bio-centric, eco-feminist, eco-Marxist, green radicalistic, green rationalist, administrative, eco-democratic, theological, conservational, preservation, and utilitarian in description and application. Henceforth, environmental sustainability, if it is to become non-anthropocentric, may be the central societal concept of our age. The reason is that at its core environmental sustainability is a kinder and gentler ethical concept than sustainable development; it includes and purports to care for all manner of existence. At the same time, the contemporary concept of environmental sustainability is too anthropocentric. As it relates to the natural world, nature, the environment or the nonhuman the term sustainability has yet to diminish or bracket the biases of the human ego. Notwithstanding the ecologically more aware technologies, policies, environmental histories, traditions and ethical investigations into the rights of the nonhuman, society is in the trap of reinforcing its anthropocentric view of

²¹ For example, the romantic notion that Henry David Thoreau proposes in *Walden: And, On The Duty of Civil Disobedience* (Thoreau 2008) though arguably not his entire principle of the relationship with nature, centres a human existence on a person going back to nature from the vagaries of modern industrial society. This approach may aid in the establishment of a more non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability.

sustainability. No matter how messy it may seem to our anthropocentric rational hubris, humankind must be open to the realization of non-anthropocentric views of environmental sustainability and transcend this anthropocentric trap. Since human society is becoming more complex, intertwined, (un)sophisticated and influential it must rely more on the nonhuman to meet the opulent needs of the good human life. This view of a good human life began with the onset of the so-called enlightenment and post-enlightenment age (or industrial revolution) and the emphasis on scientific progress, technology, and human supremacy.

The lack of agreement and in-depth, balanced discussion on the effects of status quo environmental theories and policy has given academics, the public, and environmentalists a deep distrust of the attempts to form global sustainable initiatives. Narratives on sustainability use a dualistic methodology to reinforce nature as the definitive other in need of categorization, exploitation, and technological refinement. Anthropocentricism dictates that the nonhuman needs the sane control of the human. These types of policies indicate that we must control nature through sustainable initiatives formed on the best practices of science, technology, policy and stewardship. Nonetheless, as we apply this instrumentality, we only tweak the most negative of our anthropocentric influence on the nonhuman and allow for virulent techniques of human progress.

Many thinkers have stepped into this intellectual struggle. From the Deep Ecology of Arne Naess and Warwick Fox to the more radical green thought of J. Baird Callicott, Freya Mathews, Vandana Shiva and Val Plumwood (to name only a few), the arguments for approaching the nonhuman world in a more symbiotic manner are varied and numerous. Notwithstanding these efforts, the question of the impact of dominant anthropocentric concepts

on our interpretations and discourse at this theoretical level needs more analysis. Indeed, there has been some analysis, from the so-called radical wings of academics (e.g. eco- feminism).

There are significant alternatives to the dominant liberal theory and capitalistic mindset of contemporary Western and now arguably global society. There is merit in many other theoretical directions aiming at exposing problems in of our discourses on the natural environment. As it is not the goal of this thesis to provide a comprehensive list and analysis of all alternative theoretical approaches to environmental sustainability, I will only briefly examine one of these theoretical perspectives: Eco-Feminism. I do not profess to capture all of the diversity that this alternative philosophy contains. However, I do need to illustrate what I think are key points that relate to this thesis. In particular, I will use these two theoretical illustrations namely eco-feminist and Liberalism/Capitalism to show how anthropocentric elements in our discourses on environmental sustainability are pervasive and undermine these theoretical attempts to articulate a non-anthropocentric environmentally sustainable alternative.

There are ways of combining more egalitarian anthropocentric concepts of environmental sustainability with dominant forms. Nonetheless, acceptance and integration of these alternative beliefs are not integral to the function of dominant anthropocentric discourse. For instance, lessons from the spirituality of many eco-feminists are viewed as antiquarian and out of touch with the reality of the contemporary age. Indeed, the conquest of the natural environment must continue unabated and reject alternative interactions with the nonhuman as mere disruptors in the progress of sustainability in the context of rational environmental globalization. However, if one is to disregard the contemporary cast of belief in liberal/capitalist thought and return to some of the original musings of the Western philosophical tradition, one sees that even the Western approach to the nonhuman is not inherently as dualistic as our contemporary liberal/capitalist

version. Therefore, through an inclusion of many alternative philosophies (such as ecofeminist perspectives), there may be a way to help us start an anthropocentrism that takes the nonhuman into account and may eventually lead to a non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability.

This move to an account of sustainability is not a case of isolating alternative philosophies and rejecting the dominant discourse to favour a nostalgic view of the nonhuman. Some thinkers view the nonhuman as vital to the human condition. The names of John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Henry David Thoreau, Warwick Fox and Val Plumwood are a few thinkers steeped in rational Western discourses who simultaneously think humans must view their existence as part of the nonhuman (nature) or at least as not separate from the nonhuman (nature) as an individualistic liberalism assumes. These scholars declare that seeing the land, the gendered, the natural, the romantic natural environment and the homogeneity of life in the highest esteem are methods to mitigate the impact of humans on nature.²² This is important as it may allow for a more variegated and inclusionary multiplicity based philosophical reflection on why the nonhuman is principal to the thought of the dominant anthropocentric discourses on environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, individuals and groups who think through these environmental ethics have yet to break the dogmatism of anthropocentric discourses. Instead, what is left are piecemeal movements that assume to present humanity with guidelines of more benevolent forms of environmentally sustainable interactions.

²² Aldo Leopold's land ethic as outlined in *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (1949/1989) provides an example of how Western, specifically The United States of America, Society may be able to lessen the impact on the natural environment by seeing nature as diverse. It is through this diversity and recognizing that the land or natural environment is ethical in and of itself that human beings may have a more interrelated relationship with the land. The challenge is how to use nature in this more interactive way and have economics, agriculture, technology, and culture flourish while listening and respecting nature in a sustainable manner.

Ecofeminist philosophy shows there are alternate approaches for understanding or viewing our interactions with nature in a manner not completely based on the anthropocentrism dominant in liberalism and capitalism. In contemporary society, many non-dominant worldviews offer insightful illustrations of the friction between an environmental discourse permeated with a combination of anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability. Indeed, these other than dominant environmental perspectives have characteristics, ideologies, philosophies and cultural stances that are both rejected and accepted. At the same time, what takes place when the dominant political discourse subsumes these environmentally benign views within its own liberal and capitalistic framework is hardly a revolutionary modification of the status quo. Instead, the denizens of the prevailing theoretical paradigm persuade other that the alternative voices do not have relevance. However, in a certain sense, their voices *do* have relevance but are discordant with proper rationality according to the dominant political framework. Thus, their views are seen as irrational, illogical and outliers from the dominant acceptable theoretical belief system. This prevents the dominant anthropocentric discourse assured in liberal-capitalistic society from receiving a suitable rational counter-critique.

In the case of ecofeminism, their critique of the rational patriarchy of Western liberal culture is characterized by the dominant theoretical paradigm as too narrow, even when presented in an analytical and dialectic method; thus ecofeminism becomes quickly dismissed as irrational (Plumwood 4). This unreasonableness is profound. As these ecofeminist thinkers, were, for the most part, trained and educated in the narrow confines of this theoretical framework, the fact that they are seen as crazy when they present more environmentally aware

anthropocentric interpretations of the nonhuman is disappointing.²³ By ignoring or dismissing these views the dominant liberal-capitalistic theories reinforce the dominant approach. Moreover, the intellectual contemporary liberal theory on environmental sustainability and acceptable academic enterprise is nothing more than an endorsement of the banality and emptiness of dominant forms of contemporary anthropocentrism in discourse. Indeed, a continuation of classifying the nonhuman through this liberal/western thought does not offer hope for the possibility of a non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability.

Many thinkers, philosophers, social activists, and others that have articulated that a discourse of environmental sustainability cannot come from a position of patriarchal industrial power. It has to originate from a thought process where authority and information are empowering rather than containing, regulating and administering. If others in society are to participate and assist in an actual move to non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability, then the first step is to give all the human actors equal voice irrespective of their personal or group philosophy, culture, religion or tradition. On the other hand, many argue that an embrace of diverse, narratives on sustainability prevents more authentic concepts of environmental sustainability from forming. I do agree that a “grand narrative” for sustainability is ideal (Washington 193). However, since the world of everyday involvement is not near to an ideal, I can only agree with a grand narrative on sustainability in theoretical terms. Henceforth, if a move to a non-anthropocentric environmental discourse on sustainability is to happen, then humankind

²³ In the thesis, I only briefly use a small portion of the thought of the feminist environmental philosopher Val Plumwood to illustrate that even in the dominant Western Academy there are thinkers who are consistently searching for alternatives to the developmental anthropocentrism that currently predominates discourse. I am aware that ecofeminism has as many perspectives as there are grains of sand on a beach, yet it is not the intention of this thesis to give a full or even introductory account of these perspectives.

has to be prepared to discourage all its forms of anthropocentrism, including building grand narratives.

Environmental Sustainability, whether understood as a part of the industrialized ideology, traditional political/liberal beliefs or a blend of ideas, does not point to the rejection of anthropocentric discourse. When one understands that environmental sustainability theoretical narratives have implicit anthropocentrism interlaced throughout the accounts of how and why a more ecocentric or biocentric paradigm is necessary, then there is hope for this more benign, though still anthropocentric, account of environmental sustainability. Once the realization of how anthropocentric discourses are so pervasive in our theories and in human institutions is recognized, then the ongoing critique may bring about change to anthropocentric notions of environmental sustainability.

Sustainability declarations are political tactics saturated with anthropocentric elements. In one instance, the government establishes regulatory codes for corporations to enact and use the nonhuman world to meet the needs of the human population. At the same time, the corporation itself is part of the grander discourse that the current form of global liberalism promotes. An example of this is many governments now have incentives for sustainable development. At their core, these incentives have allowances for resource extraction and production in an environmentally sustainable fashion. However environmentally aware this type of sustainable development seems, it is not close to moving sustainability toward a comprehensive ethical, non-anthropocentric environmental discourse.

3.2 Critical Analysis of discourses on Sustainability at the level of practice: recycling programs, pollution studies and punishment of offenders

Programs such as recycling stimulate a move in a direction where people act with positive environmental sustainability consequences, which may assist in more ecological awareness. There is evidence that these programs, while commendable, are actually increasing consumption of produced green goods and services.²⁴ One way that there is an increase in consumption despite the propagation of the green economy is that most human cultures have the priority of the human at the centre, or at least as the steward of all existence in our dominant discourses, which reinforces the principles of anthropocentrism. Moreover, as we engage in the practice of recycling by following environmental policies of sustainability, there is an associative cognitive reward. The reward is due to the fact that the recycling activity has somehow made us more in touch with our lost relationship with the nonhuman world. These forms of recycling are a good start. Nonetheless, as stated, what tends to occur is an increase in the consumption of green products. This new lifestyle, with green consumption and recycling at its centre, may reinforce new environmentally conscious behaviour but it is still trapped in an anthropocentric drive of a consumer society. As the acceptable environmental discourse becomes a part of the social conditioning of individuals, the hope is that we can also overcome the anthropocentric elements of our disciplinary society.

The promoters of these sustainable fixes desire that the public consumes the scientific-technological ideology and forgo a broader ethical, environmental reflection. The status quo anthropocentric belief continues with slight regard for any of the positive aspects that the

²⁴ Despite some of the best efforts of environmental thinkers, scientists, policy-makers, corporations and consumers, there is clear everyday evidence that “green goods and services” do not alleviate consumption, rather there has been a marked increase in the consumption of these products.

different forms of non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability offer. The issue is that using the most trivial aspects of environmental sustainability as a basis for punishments or rewards to teach or aid in the movement to a better form of sustainability rarely contributes to the recognition of our dependency with the nonhuman. Instead, rewards and punishments for such trivial and insignificant aspects of environmental sustainability fail to express our impact on the nonhuman (nature, natural environment).

However, in some regions, giving rights to animals, waterways, geological formations and even something as hard to fathom as air can be a basis for punishment and reward which can, at the same time, change people's basic view of the natural environment. Punishing people who violate the rights of these nonhuman things aids in the realization of the interdependence of all material. Though punishing a group or an individual who violates the rights of say a river, may seem right from the environmentalists' perspective, there is room to alter or influence a change in the polluters behaviour. This does not mean the violator(s) ought to take classes in ecological sensitivity or spiritual sustainability. It does, however, mean that when such a hypothetical situation occurs the punishment expresses to the violator(s) and to other members of society that all the members of the natural environment, sentient or otherwise, have the same or equal rights as the human being. The harm done to other members of the natural environmental family informs the violator(s) and others of an ethical allowance for deep anthropocentric reflection. It may permit humankind to see how contemporary anthropocentric discourse can negatively impact both on the lives of humans and the health of the nonhuman.

As anthropocentric conceptions of environmental sustainability seem to infect multiple philosophical, ideological, religious, cultural, political, industrial, technological, agricultural, scientific and psychological discourses coming to terms with the full impact of anthropocentrism

becomes problematic. How then is it possible to imagine discourses on environmental sustainability without anthropocentric elements? What is needed in order to permit the formation or introduction of a non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability? The various philosophical, cultural and ideological constructs of anthropocentric environmental sustainability are not necessarily bad in isolation. Nevertheless, when the discourses become essentialist and focus on only a limited view of what sustainability means to humankind and the nonhuman, then the issue becomes more volatile.

3.3 Critical Analysis of policy discourse: A case study of Suncor's corporate sustainability versus the environmental sustainability of ENGOS' Friends of the Earth International

An additional exploration, articulation, and elucidation of the progression of environmental sustainability is required. As my aim is to show how the discourse on anthropocentric elements in this discourse are both pervasive and undermine attempts at achieving genuine alternatives, I will now use two detailed illustrations to strengthen the argument for my conclusion. I will present two differing accounts of how organizations articulate sustainability and environmental sustainability. The first of these is from the perspective of a transnational energy corporation. The second is from the viewpoint of an environmental non-governmental organization. These sustainability views, though seemingly opposite, still use discourse constructs in their interpretations of best practices for the natural environment. These interpretations of best practices have during the modern age, which began in idea around five

hundred years ago and enhanced in the enlightenment and post-enlightenment age, evolved assuming fundamental anthropocentrism.

I now examine two specific examples of organizational sustainability approaches. As mentioned, the first of these sustainability perspectives comes from the environmental and sustainability policies of a transnational energy corporation. Before naming the corporation, some background on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Over the past two decades, corporations have attempted to become more aware of the impacts that industrialized production and consumerism has on the nonhuman through a more focused articulation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined in the following way:

A company's sense of responsibility towards the community and environment (both ecological and social) in which it operates. Companies express this citizenship (1) through their waste and pollution reduction processes, (2) by contributing educational and social programs, and (3) by earning adequate returns on the employed resources (Corporate Social Responsibility, businessdictionary.com)

Before going into why CSR is applicable to the argument of the thesis let us examine the three clauses from the definition in critical detail. First, "Companies express this citizenship (1) through their waste and pollution reduction processes" (Corporate Social Responsibility, businessdictionary.com). This clause is certainly not a bad introduction to the possibility of a non-anthropocentric form of environmental sustainability. The reason is that it gives a sense of duty to the companies as they may act as ethical citizens when attempting to reduce or alter the linear economy that most contemporary forms of liberalism encourage. At the same time, this clause for the most part is merely theoretical conjecture, since despite the best efforts of companies and their environmentally and socially accepted workforce, the focus on growth and

extreme forms of profit generation still grip most organizations. Second, clause two reports on CSR that environmentally and socially focused companies are ethically sound “by contributing educational and social programs” (Corporate Social Responsibility, businessdictionary.com). This clause, similar to the first one, is a beneficial aspect of why corporations are starting to be more aware that they have a large stake in the promotion and sharing of critical information to allow for the public good. This positive attribute of CSR may happen as companies become more intertwined with governmental institutions and the decision-making process of all citizens. Nevertheless, similar to the first clause most of the actual praxis of the education and social programs that Corporations have endorsed have come from the philosophies that the organizations are based upon. The third and last clause of the Corporate Social Responsibility definition builds from the education and social responsibility of the second clause and states “by earning adequate returns on the employed resources” (Corporate Social Responsibility, businessdictionary.com). It is hard to provide anything positive on this clause as it is the most biased of the three clauses and does not even allow for a mere sprinkle of letting go of our biases in the Heideggerian sense. Nonetheless, if one is able to see the word adequate in a more egalitarian manner then maybe there is room for positivity. For instance, if by adequate returns it means that the returns are sustainable and cause less degradation to both the nonhuman and the human then this is an ethical outcome. Still, similar to the other two of the CSR clauses this has yet to happen on a large scale and has consequently reinforced the anthropocentric tendencies of homo-economicus toward the nonhuman.²⁵

If Corporate Social Responsibility as a policy framework were to become part of a regulation and environmental ethos on how corporations and even institutions, such as the United

²⁵ For explanation of homo-economicus see footnote 10.

Nations, operate then the negative influence on the nonhuman would undoubtedly be less. Nevertheless, despite the introduction of CSR discourse, consumption, pollution, social inequality, environmental degradation and increase in the extinction of countless species have only increased. Without realizing it, humanity has more than any time in the past, provoked this frenzied degradation of the natural environment. Corporations invested in the CSR narrative have seized the opportunities supported by these discourses and used green propaganda as a self-promotion tool. However, even the most environmentally aware of the organizations that employ CSR practices are unable to escape the anthropocentric elements of sustainability, elements that undermine efforts at a genuine improvement in our relationship with the nonhuman.

The two organizations in question, while different on the ideological surface, are both prisoners of the anthropocentric status quo of environmental sustainability. Both organizations' policies on sustainability use the language, techniques, and assumptions of anthropocentric discourse. This saturation is one of, if not the reason, why a non-anthropocentric concept of environmental sustainability has not spread. I do not endorse one of these policy approaches of these two organizations over the other. However, a critical analysis of the two organizational discourses on sustainability illustrates that although these descriptions of sustainability are different on the surface, they are merely sophisticated promotions of anthropocentrism that enhances the stewardship mentality over the nonhuman.

First, let us examine corporate discourses on sustainability. On its website, the global energy corporation Suncor mixes the values of CSR with a slogan of sustainability. This slogan captures the eye and seems to embrace an environmentally centred philosophy. The sections of Suncor's sustainability slogan that best describes a possible move to a non-anthropocentric conception of environmental sustainability declares "Suncor's vision is to be trusted stewards of

valuable resources. Guided by our values, we will lead the way to deliver economic prosperity, improved social well-being and a healthy environment for today and tomorrow” (Suncor.com n.d.). Let us examine some of the key phrases and words from this sustainability vision to explore the penetration of anthropocentrism within corporate discourse. First the word “improved” from this passage perpetuates anthropocentric biases in place of promoting a more reflective comprehension of the functional “otherness” of the nonhuman. At the same time while I realize that improved is merely a language representation of the concept improvement, which I point out below with the discussion of elemental philosophy, it is nevertheless a better position to analyze the way the word is employed in everyday use instead of going into intellectual detail about the concept of improvement.

While the management of sustainable development that Suncor promotes is expressed in positive terms insofar as its use of the natural environment is concerned, it fails to use terms expressing confidence for the possibility of a non-anthropocentric view of environmental sustainability. For instance, the phrase “improved social well-being and a healthy environment for today and tomorrow” (Suncor.com n.d.) seem positive on the surface. However, a close examination of the words reveals that related and associated phrases bring in an extreme form of environmental anthropocentrism that reinforces dominant anthropocentrism. The key word from the excerpt is the aforementioned “improved”. Certainly, it is not hard to realize that this word assumes the reference to standards humans posit as being ethical and at the centre of our individual and collective human existence as we engage and participate in the web of life, reality, energy, and materiality. The superiority of human standards in this interpretation of improvement and the associated dualism this creates with the nonhuman does not promote equality or a genuinely reciprocal relationship with the nonhuman. Instead, what is left are attempts to make

small adjustments to the dominant status quo anthropocentric way of relating to the nonhuman. This form of improvement is solely for the interests of humankind; it cannot be for air, it is not for water, it is not for other animals, it is not for the earth (soil), it is not for the fire (volcanoes, earthquakes) and it is not for other non-sentient forms (e.g. minerals, molecules).²⁶ The term “improved” in discourses on the natural environment is at best loosely associated with sustainable development; it is certainly not a term which encourages the belief in something as ethereal as the possibility of non-anthropocentric view of environmental sustainability.

The influence that anthropocentric elements in discourse and interpretations have on our actions and possibility for action should not be minimized. Even if humankind was to attempt to transform society into one that is more environmentally conscious, there is no clear way to minimize the influence that our anthropocentric interpretations have on our treatment of the natural environment. Human words, philosophies and ideas make a difference to our understanding and actions. Thus, even allowing for the possible positive side of the social constructions employed by corporations, the ethical stance of the nonhuman is discounted to allow for human striving and improvement in anthropocentric/human terms.

In the Suncor case, the word “improved” does, in ideal circumstances, permit creative ways to change environmental practices. These changes may, in turn, allow for new discourses to come and possibly challenge the dominant anthropocentric discourse. In other words, changes in our practices towards the natural environment may stimulate a healthier way for humankind to interact with the nonhuman akin to the kinder and gentler ethical views of sustainability. Nevertheless, the current discourse on sustainability, only directly calls for minimization of

²⁶ For further clarification of elemental philosophy see text *Elemental philosophy: earth, air, fire, and water as environmental ideas* (2010) by David MaCauley particularly Part III: Elemental Worlds.

environment impact; thus, corporate discourse on sustainability such as the Suncor Sustainability policy, prevents a shift to ethical stances beyond the human individual and collective psyche.

Next let us return to the above-mentioned statement from the Suncor website and critically examine the phrase “Suncor’s vision is to be trusted stewards of valuable resources” (Suncor.com, n.d.). This first section of Suncor’s sustainability statement clearly displays the privileged position of the human as the caretaker of the nonhuman. Once again, until we are able to bracket the language and the metaphysical world we are thrown into, ala Heidegger, then how is it possible to make such a nonsensical statement? At the same time, as I have mentioned many times I do not want humans to give up their ethics, morality and privileged intellectual positions in favour of some form of chaotic environmental philosophy; but I do wish that the audience will realize that the actual discourse we use contains everything into narrow and rigid categorizations. Moreover, this type of conjecture is not a map to introduce what I see as the legitimate valuation of the nonhuman. Natural resources are not owned or part of a philosophy of stewardship; they are free things and groupings of things that we as humans have been allowed to access.

With a discourse dominated by anthropocentric elements, lawmakers are left with no way to promote significant changes to our treatment of the natural environment. Although anthropocentric terms and discourse may offer a small amount of equality say, for women and the perpetual poverty-stricken people in society, who in the past and present have been excluded from the dominant anthropocentrism, our overall treatment of the natural environment is still deplorable. However, even the most benign examples of anthropocentric discourse do not allow for creating a non-anthropocentric conception of environmental sustainability.

Though global corporations and the form of sustainability and sustainable development, which they offer, are detailed accounts of how human societies flourish, Environmental Non-

Governmental Organizations (ENGOS) seem to allow for a move to the possibility of a non-anthropocentric view of environmental sustainability. ENGOS presumably attempt to engage with non-anthropocentric discourses. Furthermore, various ENGOS base their sustainability claims on some of the principles found in environmental philosophy or, at least, an inclusionary philosophical viewpoint, one that promotes the flourishing of nonhuman life and materiality.²⁷

On the other hand, however, progressive the environmental movement and ENGOS think they have been, they are yet to fully escape the influence of anthropocentrism in its interpretations or at least bracket its biases towards the things in themselves in the spirit of Heidegger. In its place, the environmental movement arguably has been mutated by the same dominant anthropocentric elements of its reputed corporate opponents. As these interactions unfold, the nonhuman is left as the empty vessel waiting for the input of humankind.

Many environmentalists require contemporary society to cease or slowdown in its use of the nonhuman. With this outlook, we must turn away from violating the nonhuman (nature), we must become more attuned to the rhythms of the nonhuman (nature), and we must only use the bounty of the nonhuman (nature) in a compassionate manner that respects all life. The problem with this standpoint is that the nonhuman (nature) are not thing(s) that humankind may alter without a deep concomitant reflection on the influence of our species. The nonhuman (nature) is there and perhaps will always be there irrespective of how humankind uses the gifts nature provided. The problem is that the anthropocentric use of the nonhuman has already inextricably changed what nature offers to humankind; the environmental movement, for the most part, is

²⁷ See James, George Alfred, James McRae, and J. Baird Callicott. *Environmental Philosophy in Asian Traditions of Thought*. SUNY Press, 2014.

complicit in reinforcing this ferocious relationship with the nonhuman, as it fails to sufficiently consider and account for how the nonhuman has already been altered by humankind.

Certain strains of environmental thought suffer more from this distorted anthropocentric view of the nonhuman. For example, many who embrace using the energy of the biosphere in a more encouraging manner, by using solar panels, wind farms, geothermal energies, and biomass to maintain an energy intensive lifestyle are unable to fully realize that the natural environment is providing the vital ingredients for a life of unqualified ease. However, maintaining this life of unqualified ease, whether it is less energy intensive, or whether based on the current paradigm of energy overuse, is not a road to lessen the impact of anthropocentrism. Moreover, this alternative energy lifestyle philosophy has the same tenets of progress of the dominant anthropocentric discourses. For instance, the philosopher Michael Marder on one of the prescient examples of contemporary environmentalism and possibly less anthropocentric worldviews, biocentrism, which is certainly a philosophical standpoint which is closer to having the nonhuman as equal to humans, reports, “biocentrism recreates the very metaphysical totalities that have been responsible for the degradation, devaluation and instrumentalization of the environment” (239). I would argue that what Marder is lamenting is that even more environmentally aware forms of environmental discourse, because of the influence of anthropocentric ideas and interpretations, use similar disciplinary mechanisms on the nonhuman.

Instead of granting a space for the languages and practices of non-anthropocentric views of sustainability, the approaches of many of the alternative environmentally based views end up polarizing the story. Under this version of sustainability, whether it is used by the environmentalist or otherwise, ethics will only form out of separating the human and their attendant intellects more from the environment (Metcalf 102). At the same time, the

environmental movement struggles to move liberalized global society away from the grip of the powerful institutionalized anthropocentric discourses on sustainability. This initial false assumption of environmentalism advances into a realm where the interconnectedness with the nonhuman, though embraced and given worth through belief systems such as ecological ethics, remain invisible. The assumption is built on the dominance of the human and that the human, even if more environmentally aware still has to be a steward of the natural environment. This is the reason that ENGOS have been unable to move the direction of the environmentally sustainable ways of interacting with the nonhuman out of the confines of the dominant caretaker mindset. As mentioned in Chapter one even if one were to adopt a viewpoint of seeing Nature as a Friend in the spirit of Bannon it is still based on an anthropocentric account of how we value the “otherness” of the nonhuman (nature). At the same time, politically the will to facilitate and introduce a non-anthropocentric view of environmental sustainable discourse into environmentalism is met with suspicion from many shallow and deep ecologists since many still see conceptualizations, despite the use of more non-instrumental discourse and language, as inherently anthropocentric.

ENGOS, with minor exceptions, persuade followers that the move from the current corporate view of environmental sustainability to a non-anthropocentric perspective is good. There is a problem with this philosophical outlook. Most of these ENGOS employ discourse that appeals to the rational philosophical mindset. In these rationalized environmental beliefs, people are caretakers, stewards, and managers of the natural environment. Thus, discourse that employs the idea of environmental sustainability affects why and how humanity engages, exploits and lusts for the gifts of the nonhuman. This anthropocentric metaphysical superstructure affects our interpretations by placing the human animal at the centre of the cosmic web. Other forms of life

and materiality are there for humankind to understand, classify, experiment with and develop for anthropocentric needs. Whether we consider ourselves stewards or not, this approach feeds and reinforces the anthropocentrism of human culture. The nonhuman (nature) becomes a mere afterthought or in the best-case scenario an ingredient of how ENGOS organize slogans.

Although I assert that ENGOS are in the same trap as the corporations when it comes to offering non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability, it would not be fair to make this claim without analyzing an account of an ENGO'S discourse. I will attempt to defend these claims by critically examining the discourse of a particular ENGO and analyzing its sustainability slogan. There is one thing to keep in mind as we examine the ENGO sustainability policy. Similar to the CSR and Sustainability slogan of Suncor, the ENGO in question does not have an exact plan for environmental sustainability. Instead, the ENGO makes a statement that combines the theory of climate change with what are sustainability and sustainable development principles to form its environmental policy.

Although I do not agree with how many ENGOS have promoted their vision, I do agree that the intentions and motives of most people working with ENGOS are good and are an important part of a solution to the overexploitation of the nonhuman. In fact, many ENGOS have been at the forefront of environmental change and have brought awareness of the influence that humanity has on the natural environment to the front of public discourse. Nonetheless, this does not mean that there is still not work to be done. And while I am sympathetic to the direction many ENGOS are going, there needs to be a critique of the anthropocentrism that is a part of the discourse used in promoting their agendas. The ENGO for my analysis will be Friends of the Earth International.

Friends of the Earth International as an organization certainly has a philosophy that is much closer to a more aware anthropocentric care for the nonhuman. At the same time, its philosophy is based on discourses that are closer to how humankind ought to interact with the natural environment. The language use of Friends of the Earth International is centred on biodiversity, corporate responsibility, social and environmental justice, food sovereignty and the associated worldviews that are more focused on an inclusive vision of the human and nonhuman interaction. Through these standpoints Friends of The Earth is part of a growing movement of ENGO to educate and share useful information with human civilization about the impacts on the nonhuman. However, despite its intentions, I will show that the discourse used in promoting its vision undermines its goals. The part of its vision statement that relates to a discussion of a possible move from anthropocentric to non-anthropocentric sustainability from the Friends of the Earth International website, under the Mission and Vision heading, declares, “Our vision is of a peaceful and sustainable world based on societies living in harmony with nature” (foei.org, n.d.). On the surface, this vision statement expresses good intentions and was constructed to appeal to a variety of people with different worldviews. However, on closer examination, problems emerge. I will focus on certain key hermeneutical words from this passage as they relate to a possible non-anthropocentric conception of environmental sustainability. The first two words of the statement illustrate that sustainability from this organization’s perspective, a perspective that should put the human species on equal terms with and not above the nonhuman is still inherently anthropocentric. The first two words of the passage under scrutiny are “Our vision” (foei.org n.d.). Despite the intentions of the ENGO in question, this phrase is exclusionary to the views of other human groups beside the people in charge of the ENGO. Second, this phrase further enhances the human centred mindset by reinforcing the human vision of the world. Third, this

phrase, when followed by the remainder of the passage, reveals that people are the chief stewards of the natural environment. As stewards, humans are placed in a superior position to the nonhuman. Within this outlook, humans are needed as the stewards or caretakers and are necessary for the well-being of the nonhuman.

The very name Friends of the Earth International implies that the organization is sympathetic towards non-anthropocentrism or at least seeking a friendship relationship with the nonhuman. This may be true of the beliefs and environmental practices of many people who make up the group. For instance, the phrase “societies in harmony with nature” (foei.org) assumes that what is better for the nonhuman will be better for possibly other humans who may not share the beliefs of the ENGO. I do not think it is wrong to focus on larger society. Undeniably, for humankind to begin changing to a non-anthropocentric conception of environmental sustainability, it must scrutinize status quo anthropocentrism. Furthermore, the society that most of humankind desires is due to its anthropocentrism and cannot be in harmony with the nonhuman. In its place, the nonhuman or the industrial-technological exploitation of the nonhuman must be in harmony with human desires. Thus, the phrase ends up reinforcing anthropocentrism. Perhaps a better way to look at this is to turn the statement on its head. If the declaration were to read nature (nonhuman) in its benevolence allows for the existence and continual unfolding of human civilization, so that one day there might be harmony between humanity and the natural environment, then this might be read in a non-anthropocentric way.

According to the positions of both of the organizations invoked above, sustainability, although it makes room for human beings and nonhuman sentient and non-sentient entities, is ultimately unfolded in the terms of discourse which undermines attempts to achieve a non-anthropocentric view of environmental sustainability. Allowing for nonhuman life and

materiality to have an equal ethical footing to humanity is based on language that employs so many anthropocentric categories. Moreover, the pervasiveness of anthropocentric ideas is precisely the reason claiming winners for environmental sustainability is a difficult intellectual exercise. Much of what is considered sustainable, environmental, bio-centric and ecological, notwithstanding the philosophical or ideological discourse culture it is from, becomes no more than a motivated human reflection on the mysteries of the natural world. On the other hand, one has to remain hopeful that a careful analysis of the influence and problems with anthropocentric terms in our interpretations and discourse may assist in helping us to bracket our human-centred (anthropocentric) biases and change the impact human institutions have against the nonhuman. From the perspectives of Suncor and The Friends of the Earth contemporary industrialization and despite good intentions, these practices, are foundational to the anthropocentric discourse on environmental sustainability. These practices create the fetishistic state of nature ownership. This anthropocentric delusion is based on a belief in human superiority and what now passes for reasonable discourse on the natural environment.

Undeniably, contemporary discourse with its anthropocentric view of sustainability has fragmented characteristics. For instance, under the guise of policies on sustainability environmental organizations first, assume human superiority over the nonhuman (nature) and then define, and contain the nonhuman (nature) in anthropocentric categories or conceptions. This categorization of the natural world leads to views that we are becoming presumably more benign since the constructs seem to come from a rationalistic point of view that cares for the nonhuman. Anthropocentric elements in discourses on environmental sustainability affect how we interpret and thus contain the nonhuman. Thus, our categorizations cover over and conceal the phenomenological particularity of nature in favour of a categorization and demarcation of

nature. Instead of being open to the genuine “otherness” of the nonhuman these discourses remake nature according to rational classifications of the anthropocentric mind. With this re-conception of the nonhuman it makes sense to exploit first and worry about the far-reaching ideological impact later. Even when the realization comes that there must be changes to environmental discourse itself, many of the alternative viewpoints become reinterpreted in the status quo rational categories. The reinterpretation of alternatives into the dominant anthropocentric conception of environmental sustainability is an undermining of a genuine alternative relationship with the nonhuman (nature).

Although my thesis is largely a critical analysis of contemporary discourse on sustainability and sustainable development, I want to acknowledge a thinker that might provide a basis for developing a non-anthropocentric understanding of sustainability. Thus, there is hope for a discourse that can promote a more harmonious rapport with the non-human (although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully argue for this claim). I think that Vandana Shiva, especially in her work and critiques of the developmental narratives that seem to grip liberal/capitalist globalization, is a definite ally in promoting the argument of my thesis. In fact, one may read Shiva as offering hope for the future of both the natural world and human civilization. As Vandana Shiva (1992) claims:

The real meaning [of sustainability] refers to nature’s and people’s sustainability. It involves a recovery of the recognition that nature supports our lives and livelihoods and is the primary source of sustenance. Sustaining nature implies maintaining the integrity of nature’s processes, cycles, and rhythms. (191)

Shiva is just one example of other ways of seeing nature and the ways humanity uses nature in a more sustainable and aware manner. Her reflections on sustainability, especially as they relate to the dominant form of developmental philosophy no doubt reflect back to both Bannon using the nature as friend perspective and my own goals in this thesis to bracket our human hermeneutical discourse in favour of a more genuine interactive relationship with the nonhuman. Moreover, as mentioned I consider Shiva an ally in coming up with a non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability. In fact, it is hard not to be hopeful for a better future when one reads statements such as “Sustaining nature implies maintaining the integrity of nature’s processes, cycles, and rhythms” (Shiva 191) This statement is coming close to a non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability. The reason is that the emphasis is placed on the integrity of nature’s processes; it states that we must be in tune with the process of change in nature, rather than altering nature to fit our needs and purposes. And it is through this emphasis and respect for nature’s integrity that humankind may come to the realization of our proper place and role in the natural world. Only by bracketing our human-centered interests, can we act more ethically and hopefully more harmonious with the nonhuman. And while I do not think that any of the conceptual tools I invoke provide all the answers, they do represent a start in pursuit of possible solutions to the problem of the negative influence of humans on the natural environment

4. CONCLUSION: THE POSSIBILITY OF A NON-ANTHROPOCENTRIC ALTERNATIVE

The hope throughout this thesis is that an examination of the anthropocentrism in the discourse on the environment, through a focus on terms such as “sustainable” and “sustainable development,” may expose the need to move away from anthropocentric environmental discourse. In this way, one could say that a critical analysis of anthropocentric discourses may be the catalyst for a move towards a non-anthropocentric norm of environmental sustainability. As we attempt to implement policies and normative statements on non-anthropocentric conceptions of environmental sustainability, we also need to focus on the nature of dominant anthropocentric discourses. Given the obvious impacts that humankind has on the nonhuman, blind acceptance of status quo anthropocentrism is no longer sufficient. There is no easy fix as to how humans ought to engage with the nonhuman in a non-anthropocentric manner. Reflexive philosophical attempts that place the human as equal to and not the negotiator and fixer of the environmental problem are critical.

This thesis has also shown that philosophically, with small exception, human thought, theories, societies, and institutions are unable at present to propose a conception of environmental sustainability, let alone a non-anthropocentric conception of environmental sustainability. As obvious as this is we must provide an ongoing critical and deeply philosophical analysis as to why anthropocentric concepts are so dominant in the formation, persuasion, rhetoric and broadcast of our worldview.

Forming a non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability from something as abstract as nature, the nonhuman or the natural environment is not an easy task. The reason is that human biases, even in more environmentally aware forms, tend to bifurcate the incomprehensible into comprehensible theoretical constructs. Environmental discourse on sustainability is not immune

to this anthropocentric rationality. For instance, reflecting on non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability may involve what Everden calls “a mode of concealment, a cloak of abstractions which obscures that discomfiting wildness that defies our paranoid urge to delineate the boundaries of Being” (Evernden 1992).

A transformation to non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability cannot occur until all humans become equal in the human project. Presently, this anthropocentric project structure offers zero equality. It consistently discounts thought that does not fit into assumptions on what the dominant discourse considers proper. Appreciation of the other, especially the other that the nonhuman represents as somehow equal to the reasonable human is a tricky proposition. As Shane Epting declares “the elucidated answer to the question of “what is sustainability?” says that environmental considerations are essentially social (anthropocentric) considerations” (6). Within this belief system, environmental sustainability has reinforced the division of humankind from the nonhuman. For the realization of the effect that anthropocentric concepts of environmental sustainability have on the nonhuman world, the reflection must move into a new form of discourse construct. This new discourse would see that creating taxonomies relating to the nonhuman as a reckless approach and a restriction to the expansion of non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability. This universal influence of humankind on the natural environment leads to more and more pervasive commodification of the nonhuman. Nevertheless, discourse is not all detrimental.

As we have seen through this brief argument for a move, or even the mere possibility of a move, to a non-anthropocentric environmental sustainability overcoming anthropocentrism in our ideas and discourses is difficult but critical. Nature, the natural environment, the nonhuman is a part of a categorization of the human construct of things that remains mysterious to these

same categorizations. Moreover, as I have lamented throughout this thesis in current discourse, the mysterious “otherness” of the nonhuman world must always be expressed by categories of our own human understanding. Thus, there may be a need for new terms and a new way of expressing the “otherness” of the nonhuman. Nonetheless, the categories of understanding commonly used is inclined to reinforce the mastery and dominance of ubiquitous anthropocentric discourse.

While the best intentioned amongst humanity formulate or project the possibility of giving the nonhuman equal rights, valuations and ethical stances to the human, it is an anthropocentric view of rights and values that are being given to the nonhuman. Thus, there is not one way to approach or contend for the possibility of a non-anthropocentric conception of environmental sustainability. Even when humans expect to participate with the nonhuman for the benefit of all creation, we may “discover that humans are harming themselves when we intentionally intervene in the non-human world” (Epting 7). Instead, it has to be an exercise of constant scrutiny to the limits of anthropocentric discourse through a bracketing and reflection of the biases of our dominant forms of hermeneutics.

The benefits that the nonhuman provides is not evident until the anthropocentric discourses of all human societies are reduced or at least seen as equal to the struggle of the nonhuman sentient, non-sentient and invisible beings and materiality. Nonetheless, as I have declared, one does not need to give up all the ways of understanding for a better way of engagement with the transcendental aspects of the nonhuman. For a more non-anthropocentric conception of environmental sustainability to take shape we must realize the limits of human discourse and, according to the Heideggerian perspective, be open to new terms or a new language to express this “otherness” to human conceptions. Humankind has to work with our

pre-formed beliefs and adjust them to the nonhuman that is without a doubt calling to us through the impact of our activities. Indeed, being able to experience or participate in the web of life with the nonhuman should not consistently move in a circular human dogmatic routine. Humankind ought to build a philosophical language that realizes its constructionist ecological and ethical limitations when applied to the nonhuman. It must have room for the ethics of the nonhuman and has to accept “the massive and inescapable interdependency among other species and processes in a mutually sustaining web of life and with it a constellation of shared goods” (Brown 12). An advancement of discourses where the nonhuman is outside of and at the same time equal to anthropocentric discipline is vital for the possibility of a non-anthropocentric conception of environmental sustainability. I have no desire for anthropocentrism to be replaced by a complete rejection of the methods humans use to develop civilization. Nonetheless, as I have shown if we are able to deeply analyze the current human centred perspectives that we encourage, then one day we may be able to allow for the beginnings of a non-anthropocentric notion of environmental sustainability. I would state that a move to this form of engagement with the nonhuman and the natural environment is the only moral thing to undertake. The reason is that if humans remain ignorant and continue to develop without awareness of the influence we have on the nonhuman, then even imagining morality will be pointless, since our civilization will take us well beyond any environmental breaking point. Nevertheless, there is hope if the move toward a non-anthropocentric conception of environmental sustainability with arguments such as seeing nature through the prism of friendship, as Bannon argues and as I partially agree with, is conceivable without containing the nature (the nonhuman) in a purely human categorization system. Nonetheless, without a consistent reminder of our place in the cosmos, and the limits of our anthropocentric hermeneutical dominant tendencies, hope for the future of human

civilization is at best a false hope. I, however, remain carefully optimistic that aware accounts of why humanity and a consequent valuation of the nonhuman must be part of the solution to the environmental conundrums of the contemporary age do exist.

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