

EVALUATING RUTH IRWIN'S CONCEPT OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

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Abstract

Ruth Irwin's environmentalism places people in a close relationship with the natural world. From an indigenous standpoint, Irwin's worldview places a strong focus on bioegalitarianism and ecological integration as means of preserving a healthy ecosystem. Her theories demonstrate the connectivity, interdependence, and sense of reciprocity between humans and nature. Her environmental philosophy situates humanity within nature as part and parcel of the ecosystem rather than above it, in a position of superiority and alienation. According to Irwin, this could prevent the world's environmental problems, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, flooding, desertification, extreme heat, and pollution of the air, water, and land. Many researchers have tried to find a practical solution to this issue, by putting humans above nature, thereby creating a problem of human dominance and exploitation of nature. Does her bioegalitarianism's extension of personhood and moral respect to non-human entities actually solve the current environmental problems facing the world? This paper argued for more stringent environmental restrictions globally because there is no concrete evidence that extending moral consideration to non-human entities can ensure a healthy ecosystem. Using an analytical approach, the paper assessed Irwin's environmental philosophy and valued her significant contributions, particularly her notion of connectivity and interdependence in the interaction between humans and nature. This paper believed that more binding environmental regulations can strengthen her environmentalism to better address the current environmental issues today.

Keywords: Environmentalism, Bioegalitarianism, Ecosystem, Holism, Pollution.

Introduction

Environmentalism, environmental challenges/crisis, and climate change are concepts repeatedly used in this paper. A wide range of topics are covered by environmentalism, such as sustainability, pollution, biodiversity, and conservation. The goal of environmentalism is to save and conserve the natural world, which includes species, ecosystems, and natural resources. On the other hand, environmental challenges and crises include a broad range of problems that endanger the environment, such as biodiversity loss, air, water, and soil pollution, climate change, deforestation, and land degradation as well as ocean damage, overfishing, and water scarcity. Human activities like consumption, population expansion, and economic development, as well as natural phenomena like earthquakes, droughts, volcanoes, and tsunamis, can all have an impact on environmental problems. The changes in the earth's climatic system, however, are referred to as climate change. It is primarily concerned with climate change

brought on by human actions like burning fossil fuels and deforestation, which release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and an increase in the average temperature of the atmosphere. Explosive volcanic activity or variations in solar output could potentially be considered natural factors.⁵⁶

In the last 200 years, humanity has witnessed extreme weather phenomena characterised by frequent periods of unusual heat, drought, flood, as well as the pollution of water, land and air at large scales. Despite all attempts to deny, conceal, gloss over or relativise the issue, environmental challenges/crisis and the signs of climate change are here and increasingly evident. For several decades now, efforts have been made at different levels including the national governments, international organisations with representatives of more than 190 countries who meet periodically to address the issues of environmental crisis focusing on climate change. The 1992 Rio de Janeiro conference led to the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These states meet annually in the Conference of the Parties (COP), the highest decision-making body. Some of these conferences were failures, like that of Copenhagen (2009). Other international organisations include: the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the World Bank, Corporations and the Civil Society Groups, and all of these play crucial roles in shaping climate change policies, including setting emission reduction targets, carbon pricing, renewable energy policies, energy efficiency standards, implementing climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, and negotiating international agreements. It is good to commend the efforts of these key players that shape the global response to climate change for their significant efforts so far, although, despite the many negotiations and agreements they had, environmental challenges and global emissions in particular continue to increase. Certainly, it could be said that, without those agreements, they would have increased even more.

From the preceding argument, it is clear that we are facing an existential threat that calls on all well-meaning individuals to find ways of replacing the failures of enlightenment modernity and capitalism engendered by solipsism. For Ruth Irwin, the call to replace enlightenment fundamentals is to further deepen our understanding and acceptance of *whakapapa* and its epistemology, which is the *Maori* 'scientific' taxonomy of genera.⁵⁷ Indigenous philosophy tends to emphasise ecological integration and bioegalitarianism, in contrast to the alienation inherent

⁵⁶ Henry Agbeba Ushiobaifo, "Environmental Challenges and Climate: Nigeria Experience," in *Journal of Research in Environmental and Earth Science*, Vol. 2, 2022, 5.

⁵⁷ Ruth Irwin, "Rewilding Policy Futures: Maori Whakapapa and Ecology of the Subject," *Policy Future in Education*, no, 19(3) 2021, 307-323.

in enlightened thought. This paper relaying on primary works of Irwin's books and articles as well as secondary works comprising books, articles, and journals written by different authors evaluates Ruth Irwin's concept of environmentalism, which holds that human-nature interaction is the solution to the environmental problems the world is currently facing. It pays special attention to her demand that non-human entities be granted the right to personhood, and it adds more nuance to her philosophy. In order to make Irwin's environmentalism more practical in addressing environmental issues, this paper instead argues for more stringent environmental laws at all levels. Since there are no evidence anywhere that the extension of moral consideration to non-huma entities which Irwin's bioegalitarianism is demanding for could truly be a solution to the environmental challenges we face today. It is believed the issue of our shared ecology becoming contaminated and corrupted will be reduced if this idea receives a wide acceptance.

Human-Nature relations in Human Context

Human-nature interaction and mutual reciprocity under environmentalism over the years have received attention by multiple authors. A few of them are discussed here. To begin with, Anaximander, who had a profound impact on the development of Western philosophy in the area of human-nature interaction, has wonderful ideas that are still relevant in the field of environmental philosophy today. Although most of his works are lost, there are fragments of his work titled "On Nature" that present his thoughts on environmentalism. His concept of "*apeiron*," which refers to the infinite, boundless, and eternal substance that underlies all existence and building on it, he argues that the *apeiron* is the fundamental reality that gives rise to all things, including humans and the natural world. He therefore describes the *apeiron* as a unified, indivisible, and eternal substance that is beyond human comprehension. He emphasises that the *apeiron* is a metaphysical concept that underlies all of existence.⁵⁸

In Saint Augustine's *The City of God*, his views on human-nature interaction are scattered throughout the book. However, there are relevant books and chapters that bring out his discussions on human-nature interaction in a way suitable for our study of environmentalism today. In *The City of God*, Augustine discusses the relationship between humanity and the natural world, emphasising the idea that humanity is part of the natural order. He emphasises humanity's role as stewards of the natural world, entrusted by God to care for and manage the earth's

⁵⁸ Anaximander, "On Nature," Fragments and Commentary, *The First Philosophers of Greece*. Arthur Fairbanks, Editor and Translator, (London: K. Paul, Trench Trubner, 1898), 1 and 2.

resources.⁵⁹ For him, humanity has a place in the natural world, where human beings are not only part of the natural world, but also as having a unique role and responsibility within it. This responsibility for Augustine as he argues is that humans are to use the natural world wisely and to avoid exploiting or abusing it.⁶⁰

In human-nature interaction, Hegel employs the concept of *aufhebung* (sublation) which refers to the process of preserving and transcending the natural world, where a higher level of understanding or being emerges from the contradictions and limitations of a lower level. He argues that humans must preserve the natural world and make sure the old orders of human-nature existence are not destroyed, neither are they continued in their prior form, but are being transcended through their consciousness and culture. He calls for the preservation of the natural world in its existing state or understanding, but in a transformed and elevated way. This means that the valuable aspects of the previous state are retained, but they are reinterpreted and recontextualised and contradictions are resolved for a new higher level of understanding or reality to emerge.⁶¹

According to Awoyemi *et al.*'s research on human-nature interactions, "Human-Nature Interactions in the Afrotropics: Experiential and Cognitive Connections Among Urban Residents in Southern Nigeria," a growing number of people are losing direct contact with nature in recent decades. They refer to this as the "extinction of experience." They believe that this process of people becoming more and more isolated from nature is a problem for public health and for halting environmental degradation. On the one hand, the numerous advantages that people's connections with nature offer to their bodily and mental well-being are undermined by the loss of experience. On the other hand, it also has a negative indirect effect on the environment through changes in people's behaviours and attitudes, as contact with nature can facilitate the appreciation of the natural world, and encourage pro- environmental behaviours and practices.⁶² They think that the loss of positive attitude toward nature and the lack of opportunity to encounter it are the main causes of experience extinction. The economic growth and development of societies can worsen both orientation and loss of opportunity. In particular, environmental deterioration, the growing urbanization of the population, overscheduling, and technical improvements that have made

⁵⁹ Augustine, *The City of God*, Philip Shaff (Editor), Trans Marus Dods, (Buffalo: The Christian Literature, 1888), Book XII: Chapters 1-4.

⁶⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIX, Chapter 15, Paragraph 1.

⁶¹ Hegel G W F, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Translated by A.V. Miller with Analysis of the Text and Foreword by J. N. Findlay, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 60-65.

⁶² Adewale G. Awoyemi, *et al.*, "Human-Nature Interactions in the Afrotropics: Experiential and Cognitive Connections Among Urban Residents in Southern Nigeria," *Ecological Economics*, 2024, 1. DOI: 10.1016/j.ecolecon.2024.108105.

television, video games, and the internet the primary leisure activities are frequently linked to the loss in possibilities.

There has been a wide range discourse on environmental issues and human-nature interactions in the past. However, neither of these discussions has presented a satisfying framework that will convince humans and situate humanity within nature as part and parcel of creation. Many authors present human beings in the position over and above nature; leading to the human domination of nature and the reason to conserve the natural environment is not clearly shown apart from the ravages anthropogenic activities are causing today. From an indigenous perspective, Ruth Irwin uses the *Maori* concept of *whakapapa*, a genealogical taxonomy which shows that humanity is linked by blood, by birth, by the nurturing placenta of the land and the flow of water.

Irwin's Environmentalism

Ruth Irwin's concept of human-nature interaction and reciprocity is the crux of her environmentalism. Her environmentalism focuses on relationships, understandings, and emphasises the depth of humans being deeply connected to the environment.⁶³ Irwin developed her theory of human-nature relationship and reciprocity in New Zealand at Waikato University. Over two articles, she worked through different aspects of the theory. The first article, "Ecological Ethics in the Context of Climate Change: Feminist and Indigenous Critique of Modernity." This article highlights the causes of climate change and uses the *Maori* term *Whenua* to show how humans and nature are related in a reciprocal way where both nourishes each other. The second article, "Rewilding Policy Futures: *Maori Whakapapa* and the Ecology of the Subject", focuses on relationships and is an ecological view that the environment is an integrated part of these relationships.

Irwin's environmentalism is influenced by *Maori* epistemology, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Felix Guattari, and Gilles Deleuze. *Māori* epistemology refers to the *Māori* people's unique perspective on knowledge, understanding, and reality. It encompasses their cultural, spiritual, and philosophical beliefs about the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired, validated, and shared. It is a view that everything in existence is connected, related, all things are living, and that unseen worlds can be mediated by the human. All those are called 'unseen' in English, they are 'seen' worlds in *Maori*.⁶⁴

⁶³ Irwin, "Rewilding Policy Futures," 317

⁶⁴ Cherryl Waerea-I-Te-Rangi Smith, "Straying Beyond the Boundaries of Belief," 45.

One aspect of Martin Heidegger's philosophy that significantly influenced Ruth Irwin's environmentalism is his critique of modernity and technology. Irwin uses Heidegger's ideas to analyse the environmental crisis, arguing that it comes from a metaphysical framework that reduces nature to a resource. She explains how Heidegger's concept of "enframing" (*Gestell*), where technology shapes our understanding of the world, contributes to the environmental crisis. Irwin utilises Heidegger's critique of modernity, especially his concept of technology as a way of revealing the world, to understand how modern technological society has led to environmental degradation. Heidegger's idea of technology as "enframing" (*Gestell*) suggests that technology isn't just a tool but a way of ordering and understanding the world, shaping our perception of nature as a resource to be exploited.⁶⁵

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's philosophy, especially through concepts like the rhizome, a non-hierarchical, decentralised network, challenges traditional, linear ways of thinking about nature and environmental problems. Its relations are lateral and egalitarian, rather than hierarchical.⁶⁶ Deterritorialization, refers to the process of breaking free from fixed structures, identities, and affiliations, leading to new configurations and meanings.⁶⁷ The concept of the nomad as someone who moves freely and creates new connections, is used here metaphorically to describe a way of thinking and being that is fluid, open, and resistant to rigid structures.⁶⁸ Irwin uses these Deleuzian concepts to critique anthropocentric views of nature and to advocate for a more fluid, interconnected, and dynamic approach to environmental thinking and action. Irwin's work highlights the potential of Deleuzian philosophy to offer new perspectives and strategies for environmental activism and thinking, moving beyond traditional anthropocentric views towards a more holistic and dynamic understanding of the environment.

Irwin's environmentalism is significantly shaped by Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction and its critique of logocentrism. The deconstruction, which Derrida started, was motivated by what Heidegger refers to as the "destruction" of the philosophical tradition. Heidegger's destruction, which referred "to a process of exploring the categories and concepts that tradition has imposed on a word, and

⁶⁵ Irwin, *Rewilding Policy Futures*, 313

⁶⁶ Gary Genosko, "Rhizome," in *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, (2020), DOI: 10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosr086.pub2.

⁶⁷ Piotr Rutkowski, "Decoding and Deterritorialization. Capitalism and State in the Thought of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari," in *Studia I Analizy Politolologiczne*, Vol. 60, (2021), 60-1, DOI: 10.33896/SPolit.2021.60.3.

⁶⁸ Met'eb A. Alnwairan, "Bearing Witness to Becoming: Deleuzian Nomadism and the Palestinian Experience in Tasting the Sky," *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, Vol. Forthcoming, (2025), 2-3, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes.v2512.750>.

the history behind them," was replaced by Derrida's attempt to apply deconstruction to textual reading.⁶⁹

Human-Nature Interaction and Interconnectedness (*Whakapapa*)

Ruth Irwin used the concept of *whakapapa* which is fundamental to the *Maori* worldview to explain human-nature relationship. *Whakapapa* is a complex idea with multiple layers. At its simplistic it means something like genealogy, the delineation of kin relationships over many generations. *Māori* knowledge holders can recite genealogy back some thirty generations. But the kin relationships referred to by *whakapapa* are not limited to human great, great, grandparents. It is a taxonomy of kin relationships between and within species and genera, similar to the clones of modern biology.⁷⁰ It involves classifying all species and geological occurrences into a well-defined set of well-known relationships. *Maori whakapapa*'s larger conceptual framework functions as a genealogical taxonomy that meticulously clarifies the species and genera and places humans in close relation to the ocean, forest, birds, all varieties of trees, lizards, bats, insects, rock formations, stars, and galaxies.⁷¹

Irwin sees humanity as being linked by blood, by birth, by the nurturing placenta of the land and the flow of water. She uses the *Maori* concept of *whakapapa* to explain this relationship which binds humanity to the natural environment. Something similar is probably being expressed in the Anchorage Declaration of 2009, when the Summit declared: "We reaffirm the unbreakable and sacred connection between land, air, water, oceans forests, sea ice, plants, animals and our human communities as the material and spiritual basis for our existence."⁷² The *Maori* idea of *whakapapa* connects all of creation – plants, trees, animals, rivers, oceans, mountains, and so on – into a web of well-known connections with people. In a rigorous taxonomy of interactions, "equality" is not actually the map here; rather, the interdependence and connectivity of kin bonds spans all facets of ecology, binding humans together with all the other elements of the wild.⁷³ Even as the *Maori* philosophy draws humankind into connection with nature, what is

⁶⁹ Mawazo Kavula Sikirivwa, "Deconstruction Theory and its Background," in *American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (AJHSSR)*, Volume-4, (2020), 45.

⁷⁰ Ruth Irwin, "Climate Change, Techne, Indigeneity and Education," in R. Irwin (ed.) "Climate Change Curriculum in the Anthropocene" M. Peters, (chief ed.) *The Encyclopaedia of Educational Innovation*, (2022).

⁷¹ Irwin, "Rewilding Policy Futures," 317.

⁷² "Anchorage Declaration," 2009. 1. Available from: <http://www.indigenous.summit.com/servlet/content/declaration.html>.

⁷³ Irwin, "Rewilding Policy Futures," 310.

seen in reality is not the same, we see superiority, exploitation of nature, individualism, and alienation in human-nature relation in different spheres of life.

According to Irwin, we will have a healthy ecosystem and a favorable environment if people genuinely regard themselves as a part of nature and get along with other living things. The idea of the "human-nature connection" (HNC) was developed as a result of extensive research into the nature and degree of a person's affinity with the natural world.⁷⁴ This link is frequently described as an emotional connection to nature that arises from a person's early experiences with the natural world, both physically and contextually.⁷⁵ However, this bond's formation and development are dependent on personal traits and life events rather than being linear, fixed, or generalizable.⁷⁶

Irwin's Concept of Reciprocity and Mutual Nurturing (*Whenua*)

Whenua is another significant term that resonates with *whakapapa*'s genealogy, strata, and becoming-earth element. *Whenua* signifies "land" as well as "placenta." They can't be separated. The reciprocal nurturing of people and land is known as *whenua*. While *Whenua* is the word for the earth, it also refers to the placenta and umbilical cord, which are connected to a pregnant woman's body.⁷⁷

In the *Maori* language, people are always talked about in conjunction with the land. *Tangata*, the people, are rarely mentioned without *whenua*: *tangata whenua*. The metaphor is important because the placenta allows two distinct entities; the mother and the fetus to share a single body. It serves as a metaphor for difference, connection, and nurture.⁷⁸ In *Whenua*, the land is meant to protect and nurture people, and people are meant to protect and nurture the land. As Irwin contemplates the physical and philosophical implications of pregnancy another aspect of the *whenua* or placenta emerges. Unlike Pacific peoples who do not have the rhesus negative blood group system, her blood group is rhesus negative. This is a problem when the pregnant mother has rhesus negative blood, and her baby

⁷⁴ Cleary, A., Fielding, K. S., Murray, Z., & Roiko, A. (2020). "Predictors Of Nature Connection Among Urban Residents: Assessing the Role Of Childhood and Adult Nature Experiences," *Environment And Behavior*, 52(6), (2020), 579. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916518811431>"

⁷⁵ Giusti, M., "Human-Nature Relationships in Context. Experiential, Psychological, and Contextual Dimensions that Shape Children's Desire to Protect Nature," *PLoS One*, 14(12), e0225951. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0225951> (2019).

⁷⁶ Heezik et al, "Relationships Between Childhood Experience of Nature And Green/Blue Space Use, Landscape Preferences, Connection With Nature And Pro-Environmental Behaviour," *Landscape And Urban Planning*, 213, 104135. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2021.104135> (2021)

⁷⁷ Irwin, "Rewilding Policy Futures," 317.

⁷⁸ Irwin, "Ecological Ethics in the context," 10.

has rhesus positive, as the mother's body can reject the baby altogether. The role of the placenta becomes very clear in this example. The placenta is the organ that allows nutrients to cross from the mother to the foetus and back again. The placenta disaggregates the blood components into their raw chemical composition and translates the material components of blood and amniotic fluid as it circulates from mother to child and from child to mother without harming either of them. The placenta enables difference, and makes it possible to thrive without the blood cells of the baby attacking the defenceless cells of the mother, or, if the mother has antibodies to the rhesus factor, without her body reabsorbing the foetus at conception. Pregnancy is a unique metaphor. It is an antidote to the obsessive individualism of modernity. It strikes at the solipsist separation of mind from body. Two unique people (possibly more with multiple births) occupy the "one" body.

Within the protective realm of the mother's body, the placenta, also known as *whenua*, is a metaphor for a certain degree of autonomy and a way that these distinct individuals differ from one another: distinction within similarity.⁷⁹ The link between the indigenous people and the land, which includes fostering and protecting one another, is known as *whenua*. According to Deleuze and Guattari, this straightforward metaphor "returns the body and the earth to philosophy, without disabling the freedom and liberty that are such cornerstones of Enlightenment politics." *Whenua* is a differentiated "distribution of difference" and the mechanism for nurturing care.⁸⁰

Holism and Bioegalitarianism

The central popular tenant of ecological holism is the assertion that the whole is in fact greater than the sum of its parts. Holists believe there are certain properties or qualities that emerge at the level of the collective which do not attach merely to a collection of constituent individuals. For the environmental holist, then, a species is itself an entity, not merely a collection of specimens. The core idea of ecological holism is to regard the overall interests of the ecosystem as the highest value, rather than the interests of humans or individual constituent as the highest value, and the ultimate standard for evaluating human lifestyles, technological progress, economic growth, and social development.⁸¹ This concept (environmental holism) stands for the conservation of the entire ecosystem rather than its individual components of it. It is of the idea that human beings are obliged to conserve the

⁷⁹ Irwin, "Rewilding Policy Futures," 317.

⁸⁰ Deleuze G., and Guattari, F. *A thousand plateaus; capitalism & schizophrenia* (Trans. Brian Massumi), (London: Athlone Press, 1999.)

⁸¹ Yunhe Zhang, "A Comparative Study of Ecological Holism in the Works of Alai and Hardy," in *Philosophy and Social Science* Vol. 1 No.11, (2024), 8, DOI: 10.62381/P243B02.

natural world and should do so beyond the borders of specific component of the ecology. This is important because “holistic thinking offers a new and fresh perspective on how humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems are closely linked and interrelated; emphasising our intimate connections with the non-human world”⁸²

Bioegalitarianism as environmental theory holds that human beings are members of the earth’s community of life and as such “an integral part of the natural order of the earth’s biosphere” in the same sense and term as other living entities, since we are biological beings as they are and also product of evolution.”⁸³ It is the idea that all living things have equal value and are connected to each other. The theory asks for the extension of moral standing to both biotic and abiotic factors. Ruth Irwin could so boldly ask: What would happen if we accepted the call to embrace eco-egalitarian rights, respect, and connectedness that came from indigenous philosophy and the feminist critique of solipsist dualism? These political tactics are exerting pressure on the existing alienation hierarchy. She goes on to say that the Cochabamba Declaration (2000) outlines the rights of water in Ecuador. *Maori* in New Zealand have battled for the Wanganui River’s (2017) and the Urewera Mountains’ (2014) rights to personhood. The idea is gaining traction, and the Ganges River is similarly partially protected in India (2017). There may be significant political repercussions. Court action is now possible if deforestation endangers the Wanganui River's water quality. The river may also retaliate if multinational corporations attempt to take advantage of the freshwater resources there.⁸⁴

A Critique of Irwin’s Environmentalism

Irwin's environmentalism carries significant implications for environmental ethics, policy, and practice. Her philosophy does not only challenge the dominant paradigms of environmental management but also provides a transformative approach to tackling environmental crises. Her philosophy is relevant for environmental challenges in the following ways. First, her philosophy challenges dominant narratives and disrupts traditional Western narratives of human superiority and control over nature. By proposing a shift towards ecological

⁸² Michael Boyden, “Ecological Holism and Affirmative Biopolitics in John Steinbeck;s to a God Unknown,” *Comparative American Studies an International Journal*, (2025), 3, DOI: 10.1080/14775700.2025.2455013.

⁸³ Bassey, S. A., Orji, M. O., & Afolabi, O, “An Overview of Materialistic and Unified approach to Man - Nature Relationship,” *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis*, 3(3), (2020), 17-28.

⁸⁴ Irwin, “Rewilding Policy Futures,” 319.

integration and respect for all life forms and non-human entities, Irwin offers a compelling alternative to current exploitative practices.

In addition, her philosophy promotes sustainable development by advocating for a reciprocal relationship with nature, Irwin's philosophy aligns with the principles of sustainable development. Her emphasis on the interconnectedness of all life forms provides a moral and ethical foundation for policies that aim to reduce environmental impact and promote ecological health. Besides, her environmentalism encourages empathy and compassion towards non-human entities, fostering a sense of responsibility and care that extends beyond human interests. This perspective is crucial for developing ethical environmental stewardship practices.

Ruth Irwin's environmentalism is characterised by its philosophical depth, cultural sensitivity, and commitment to understanding the complex relationships between humanity and the natural world. Her thoughts on environmentalism especially in this challenging moment where the environment faces existential threat, and while her thoughts are valuable in its own right, a close look at her philosophy, it might face critiques from various perspectives.

First, Val Plumwood, an Australian ecofeminist philosopher critiqued Irwin's work for being too focused on individual experience and not adequately addressing structural and systemic issues. Ted Toadvine, an American philosopher who has critically examined Irwin's concept of reciprocity, arguing for a more nuanced understanding of human-environment relationships.

In the context of the extension of human rights to nature which Irwin advocates, Tanasescu writes,

The underlying assumption is often that all of these cases are fundamentally similar – part of a nature rights movement – and that they are (at least in theory) a radical solution to environmental degradation. But practice has not yet proven that these kinds of rights are a good mechanism of environmental protection. Instead, it has demonstrated that these rights are of various kinds, have appeared in different contexts, and embody tensions and contradictions that predate them.⁸⁵

This is also an area we can question Irwin's call for the extension of rights or moral consideration to non-human entities. Because there has never been a certainty that

⁸⁵ Mihnea Tanasescu, *Understanding the Rights of Nature: A Critical Introduction*, (Bielefeld: Verlag Press, 2022).

when non-human entities are giving the rights of personhood or moral consideration then it will end the environmental challenges the society is facing today. One could also ask of the kind of rights you want the non-human entities to share with human beings? There are always tendencies that the extension of this right will create more confusion than solve the environmental crises we face today, especially when it comes to the balancing of human needs and interests with those of non-human entities, which can be challenging in practice.

In addition, some philosophers are asking a critical analysis of who is driving, and benefiting from, the current system of human-nature expansionism, and of the institutional mechanisms they rely on to keep it in place?⁸⁶ Certainly, human beings are the ones overseeing and driving the whole process. As a result, one cannot rule out the human elements and biases involved in things of this nature. Take for instance, the right of personhood advocated for *Urewera* River in New Zealand is more about indigenous rights than rights of nature, because the fact that the *Te Urewera* management plan was drafted to focus on “the management of people for the benefit of the land,” not the other way around,⁸⁷ is a clear indication that land ownership is at the heart of the whole process. Those fighting for this expansion of rights of personhood to the river know what they are looking for and what they stand to benefit if that is fully granted. And that is why, governance arrangements, the intrinsic values that have been embedded in the whole process and the choice of representatives are in favour of humans and not nature.⁸⁸ But is natural for human beings to do things in their favour because our educational policy and practice are primarily humanist in orientation,⁸⁹ and coming from this background, people are more atoned to driving policies that will benefit human beings other than the non-human entities.

⁸⁶ Tzouvala, Ntina. *Capitalism as Civilization: A History of International Law*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

Natarajan, Usha, and Julia Dehm, eds. *Locating Nature: Making and Unmaking International Law*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 23.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108667289>.

⁸⁷ Macpherson, Elizabeth. “Ecosystem Rights and the Anthropocene in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.” In *Environmental Constitutionalism in the Anthropocene: Values, Principles, Actions*, Edited by Domenico Amirante and Silvia Bagni, London: Routledge, 2022, 168–86.

⁸⁸ Cribb, Miriama, Jason Paul Mika, and Sarah Leberman. “Te Pā Auroa Nā Te Awa Tupua: The New (but Old) Consciousness Needed to Implement Indigenous Frameworks in Non-Indigenous Organisations,” in *Alter Native: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 18, no. 4 (2022): 566–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801221123335>.

⁸⁹ John Quarry, “Wild and Willful Pedagogies: Education Policy and Practice to Embrace the Spirit of a More-than Human World,” in *Policy Futures in Education* 2021, Vol. 19(3) 291, Doi: 10.1177/1478210320956875.

In this paper, I see Irwin's call for eco egalitarian rights⁹⁰ as an effort in futility. The eco egalitarian rights as advocated by Irwin expands moral consideration beyond humans to include non-human entities. For centuries, society has been struggling for equal rights among human beings and it has been very difficult to achieve this. If egalitarianism is not achievable then calling for equal consideration for all entities, human and non-human as eco egalitarianism emphasises may not be possible. Irwin's call for the expansion of rights of personhood to other entities like mountains, rivers and trees⁹¹ is very problematic and unrealistic in practice and this generates a lot of arguments and debates.

Besides, the non-human entities Irwin is advocating for moral consideration and extension of rights of personhood do not request for such moral consideration. Non-human entities are not asking for equality from human beings, but for a responsible use of nature where humans can use the environment bearing in mind the negative consequence that await the exploitation of nature, overuse of natural resources especially for selfish interest. The environment wants to maintain order in created things but not ordering of the order.

The Relevance of Irwin's Environmentalism

In our time when environmental challenges are bedeviling the ecosystem, Ruth Irwin's environmentalism is relevant in several ways. First, Irwin's work that emphasises the interconnectedness of human and non-human entities, promotes a holistic approach and understanding of ecological challenges. Her use of *Maori* concept of *whakapapa* a genealogical taxonomy that highlights the interconnection and interdependence in human-nature relationship helps human beings to understand they are not alienated from nature but form part and parcel of nature which should be viewed and treated as one for the collective well-being of the ecosystem. It is this holistic view of the ecosystem that Irwin sees as one of the greatest ways of mitigating the environmental crises the environment is facing in our time.

Besides, Irwin's environmentalism is relevant in addressing climate change by reducing gas emissions which for her is being caused by individuals who pursue their maximal well-being with the absence of a particular obstacle – coercion by other men.⁹² She encourages restricting individual liberty that could cause great damage while pursuing individual interest so that other people who are suffering because of the selfishness of the few can become better. Her emphasise on the need for collective action, common good and individual responsibility can help reduce

⁹⁰ Irwin, "Rewilding Policy Futures," 319.

⁹¹ Irwin, "Rewilding Policy Futures," 319.

⁹² Irwin, "Rewilding Policy Futures," 308

the environmental crises affecting the ecosystem. Her work promotes ecological justice, recognising the rights and dignity of all living beings and ecosystems, and educating individuals about ecological justice and promoting advocacy for equitable environmental policies that will help us see value in nature regardless of their instrumental value or use to humanity. By ecological justice, Irwin advocates for a holistic approach to environmental decision-making, considering the impacts on all living beings and non-living entities.

Her environmentalism inspires education and activism, encouraging individuals to take action in protecting the environment. This environmental activism could also involve teaching critical thinking and problem-solving skills, empowering individuals to address environmental conflicts. This has become necessary especially as environmental challenges have become global. Each community is to be educated to take proactive measures in protecting their immediate environment which will foster awareness and promote behaviour change, contributing to climate action that will mitigate the impact of climate change.

Future Directions

Policies to combat environmental crises have been shaped by governments, organisations, and civil societies at various levels. These have included establishing carbon pricing, emission reduction targets, new energy policies, energy efficiency standards, implementing acceptable measures and mitigating climate change, and negotiating international agreements. Despite this, academics must keep coming up with ideas or ways to try stop environmental problems because they still exist. The following directions are suggested in this paper.

Binding environmental regulations: States should bolster environmental regulations and enforcement in their localities to protect natural resources and prevent pollution because, despite the fact that environmental issues may have far-reaching and global effects, they are still local in nature because they always start in a specific location. When landowners and businesses disregard environmental standards, the government ought to take away their land ownership and, in the case of businesses, their licenses.

Educate and increase awareness: At various levels, programs should be established to educate and train people on environmental issues and to promote awareness through a variety of channels. First, environmentalism should be taught in elementary school so that students can understand how to preserve and protect the environment as well as how interdependent and interrelated humans are with nature. The same understanding of how interconnected and reliant humans are on nature is to be fostered at the communal level. The detrimental

effects of deforestation, the overuse of chemicals and herbicides for fishing, and the overuse of natural resources, which can result in their depletion, should be communicated to the general public. In order to dissuade the locals from engaging in illegal mining activities, it is important to inform them of the long-term consequences of the operations. This will help them realise that the tokens they currently collect will not be sufficient to address the potential risks that these actions may cause in the future.

Public participation: It has been noted that local residents are typically left out of environmental decision-making processes. The majority of the time, policies that are put into place do not represent the needs and values of communities when the public is not included in the decision-making process on environmental issues. This makes putting those decisions into practice challenging. Because it does not reflect their needs and values, it is therefore necessary to always involve the locals and listen to them so that they may make their own decisions. They find it easier to accept and carry out such decisions when this occurs.

Organise community events: communities should be encouraged to carry out events such as clean-ups where polluted environment is cleaned and refuse dumps are evacuated. Such events can also involve tree planting and the awareness of the importance of green infrastructure around our environments be created. Here environmental fairs, to raise this awareness and promote action should be given by the government to make this process possible.

Support international agreements: governments at all levels should be encouraged to sign and implement international agreements, such as the Paris Agreements and the United Nations to address global environmental challenges. Here, governments must prioritise the common good rather than individual gain and interest. Those agreements should also be binding on all members without any room for individual discretion. There should be room for sanctions in situations where there are failures to carry out agreements reached by members and there should be in place instruments to ensure the fulfillment of agreements reached by the national body.

Conclusion

In contrast to the Western perspective of human dominance of nature (anthropocentrism), Ruth Irwin's environmentalism presents a convincing vision for reimagining human connections with the natural world by placing humans in intimate kinship with non-human species. Her theories on the interaction between humans and nature offer a foundation for comprehending how all living things are interconnected and the necessity of advancing an environmentalism that is more sustainable, egalitarian, and inclusive. Since there is no concrete proof that

her ideas on holism and bioegalitarianism, which support the extension of moral consideration and rights of personhood from human to non-human entities will address the world's environmental problems, they should be reexamined in order to support her environmentalism. This paper recommends the following in place of her call for the extension of personhood rights to nature: enforceable environmental regulations, public education and awareness-raising regarding environmental issues, public involvement in decision-making, planning community events that will avert environmental crises, and assistance to international governments. In light of all of this, embracing Irwin's environmental philosophy could benefit people in their daily lives. We are more than just logical beings cut off from the land. We belong to the wild and are connected.

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