

# Laudato Si: A Resurgence of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism Towards ‘*Buut* and *Utol*’ For An Environmental Ethical Sustainability

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**Abstract:** Caring for the environment becomes an urgent concern due to the massive devastation that humanity suffers due to natural calamities. In this paper, I present the eastern traditions, particularly Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism, and Laudato Si in dealing with the environment. Using the lens of *buut* and *utol*, I argue that Laudato Si is only a resurgence of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism in dealing with the relationship between human beings and the environment.

**Keywords:** anthropocentrism; ecocentrism; object; subject; Hinduism; Buddhism; Taoism; *buut*; *utol*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental ethics becomes a hot topic across the globe after issues of climate change and global warming shake the general notion that planet Earth is so big that it cannot be affected by the abuses of the human person. But such notion turns out to be a myth. Series of calamities hit humankind so hard during which time the world claims to be advancing in science and technology. Yet such advancement of science and technology doesn't stop calamities to claim thousands of lives, destroy properties and affect so badly the economies of devastated communities in a global scale.

Academic discussions and movements, both secular and religious, gang up to respond to this urgent call. "Environmental ethics is based on the idea that morality ought to be extended to include the relationship between humans and nature" [1]. One form of this extension is known as anthropocentrism, i.e., human life is the most important life form and other forms of life are important if they affect to be useful to humans [1]. Another form of extension is ecocentrism, i.e., nature as the originator of life and all forms of life have intrinsic value aside from its usefulness [1]. Are these approaches the right environmental ethics and sustainable?

The purpose of this paper is to present Laudato Si and the eastern traditions, particularly Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism, on environmental ethics. Employing the Filipino principle of *buut* (consciousness) [2] and *utol* (the merging of the "I" and the "other"), I bring into surface the inconsistencies of the anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. Further, this Filipino principle brings into light Laudato Si as a resurgence of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism's environmental ethics. Furthermore, the said Filipino principle leads Laudato Si towards a concrete environmental ethical sustainability.

## 2. THE POPULAR TRADITIONS ON ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

### 2.1 The Emergence of Anthropocentrism and Ecocentrism

The teaching of the Roman Catholic Church states that "in the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labor and enjoy their fruits. The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race [3]. From this

teaching, importance of the human person weighs more than any other life forms during the modern period with the advancement of science and technology [4]. Anthropocentrism meets some criticisms; thus the birth of ecocentrism. Iain Hamilton Grant points to science and technology as the culprit of objectifying nature [5]. Ursula Heise points the finger to the combination of modern culture and the desire of a consumerist individual that leads to the objectification of nature and proposes a solution to this problem of objectification, i.e., a dialogue with nature [6].

## 2.2. Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism's Environmental Ethics

Hinduism embraces “non-violence” which promotes equal care both to the living and the non-living creations of nature such as plants, animals, air, water, land (earth), hill and forest [7]. Buddhism begins with a “no-self” and this extends to the dissolution of the distinction between human beings and nature; thus not putting human beings above and over nature but on equal footing [8]. Taoism embraces the Tao, both the way and speech, in a model of measuring norm in relation to nature by which Earth has Heaven as its measuring norm, Heaven has Tao and Tao has Nature [9].

## 3. WHICH LACKS WHICH?

Anthropocentrism puts more weight on human life form more and over any other life form. This approach endangers other life forms to be significant if and only if they serve to benefit the human life forms. It puts the human person to possess authority over nature and everything in it. It draws a sharp distinction between human beings and nature. Realizing the mistake in such an approach, it tilts the other way; thus the existence of ecocentrism.

The environmental ethics of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism always recognizes the value of nature on equal worth with human beings. Nature has never been regarded as the other, rather part of the self for the existence of the other is the existence of the “I” and the dissolution of the other is also the dissolution of the “I” [10].

## 4. LAUDATO SI

It starts with “Laudato Si, mi Signore” translated as “Praise be to you, my Lord”. Pope Francis uses this line as a reminder from St. Francis of Assisi himself who praises God for a home, the environment, which he always refers as a sister with whom every human being shares life with, and as a mother who, always, has open arms to embrace everyone and everything. Such praise to the Lord God is made possible through a Sister or a Mother Earth who sustains and governs humanity and produces vegetation of various kinds – coloured flowers and herbs [11].

Laudato Si compensates what anthropocentrism and ecocentrism lack, i.e., an integral environmental ethics. But such attempt is not new anymore. This is the position of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism all throughout history in terms of the relationship between the human person and the environment.

## 5. BUUT AND UTOL

*Buut* is a Visayan word (particularly Cebuano and Boholano) which means wish, desire, motive, mood, disposition, state of mind, thoughts, mind, intention, will, awareness, conscience and consciousness [12]. *Buut*, has the capacity to become consciousness. As consciousness, it is beyond the Tao for the Tao is the method or speech but *buut* is not just the Tao but itself is the *buutan*, somebody who possesses the *buut*. *Buutan* is the liberated self. So it is the *buut* (self) which gives rise to the *buutan* (Self).

*Utol* comes from a Filipino (Tagalog is recognized as the origin) word *kaputol* which means extension. An *utol* has an equivalent term in Tagalog *kapatid*. *Kapatid* is translated in English

term as brother or sister. But *utol*, being a *kaputol*, is far richer than the English equivalent brother or sister. When an individual says *utol* to his/her brother or sister or a friend, the “*ka*” disappears. This disappearance means that the “I” calling the other *utol* is also an *utol*. There is no difference now between the “I” and the “other”. Both of them is *kaputol* with *ka*, being the “I”, and *utol*, being the other. The *ka* loses itself and joins in *utol*. In the same manner, the *utol* loses itself being a mere extension but joins and finds itself as “I”.

## 6. LAUDATO SI NEEDS *BUUT* AND *UTOL* FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICAL SUSTAINABILITY

Though Laudato Si often recognizes nature as a Sister or a Mother, of which traces are found in Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism, the distinction between the “I” and the “other” still remains. Calling nature a Sister or Mother makes the relationship between human beings and nature closer and intimate but not as one and the same.

The Filipino principle of *buut* and *utol* does not only make such relationship closer and intimate, rather it dissolves the “I” into the “other” and vice versa. Thus, nature is not anymore treated as the “other”, i.e., different and apart from the “I”. Rather, nature becomes an extension and part of the “I”. Nature and human beings are not different and separate, rather one and the same. To call nature as *utol* is to treat her, not only as a sibling different and separate from the self though close and intimate, the same way a human being treats his or her own self.

## 7. CONCLUSION

*Buut* and *utol* as an integration of the self as a consciousness which relates himself/herself to the *utol*, not as “other” but an extension of himself/herself. Thus an *utol* is a Self, a realization of the self. This is the same realization that is applied to the environment and everything in it; thus properly calling the environment and everything in it as *utol*, far richer than Laudato Si and St. Francis’ claim of sister or brother which is a resurgence of the environmental ethics of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism.

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