

# Between Pragmatic Relativism and Deep Ecology: A Philosophical Inquiry into Ecological Decision-Making in Rural Philippines

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## ABSTRACT:

Environmental ethics literature has long debated which philosophical framework, anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, or biocentrism, best guides human ecological behavior. In developing-country contexts, particularly in rural Southeast Asia, ecological decision-making is inextricably bound with survival imperatives, rendering single-framework environmental ethics insufficient for both moral analysis and practical guidance. This study addresses that gap by examining the philosophical reasoning of trained philosophers when confronted with the lived reality of poverty-driven deforestation in the Philippines. Drawing on qualitative data gathered through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with nine philosophy professors, this paper established the three interconnected findings: first, survival-driven ecological decisions carry philosophical legitimacy that single-framework ethics cannot accommodate. Second, anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, and biocentrism each fail independently to address the moral complexity of poverty-embedded ecological choices. Third, the convergence of these frameworks toward a responsible, bounded use of natural resources represents a sophisticated philosophical response grounded in contextual relativism. These findings contribute to the emerging discourse on postcolonial environmental ethics and propose Contextual Ecological Ethics (CEE) as a framework for ecological decision-making in the Global South. The paper calls for interdisciplinary, community-embedded approaches to environmental ethics education that honor both ecological integrity and human dignity.

**Keywords:** philosophical pluralism, environmental ethics, deep ecology, ecological decision-making, contextual relativism, Global South, Philippines, qualitative research.

## Introduction

The global crisis of deforestation persists not because people are ignorant of ecological duty but because, in many communities, the decision to cut trees is also a decision about survival, family welfare, and economic dignity. In a developing world like the rural Philippines,

forests are not merely ecological assets but are also livelihood resources, immediate income sources, and, for many families, the only viable response to poverty. The philosophical question this reality poses is not simply whether cutting trees is ethically wrong, but whether existing environmental ethics frameworks are adequate to

the moral complexity of ecological decisions made under conditions of deprivation.

The dominant frameworks of environmental ethics, such as anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, and deep ecology, were largely developed within Western philosophical traditions and tested against Western socio-economic realities (Guha, 1989; Plumwood, 2002). Their application to the Global South has been criticized for importing normative assumptions that do not account for the survival conditions of the rural poor (Guha & Martinez-Alier, 1997). Despite this critique, the philosophical literature on ecological decision-making in developing-country contexts remains thin, particularly on how trained ethicists reason about this tension when they encounter it directly.

This paper addresses that gap. It examines the philosophical reasoning of philosophy professors in Davao City, Philippines, who were invited to critically analyze why people in their communities choose to engage in logging despite knowing its ecological consequences. Rather than offering another account of the sociological causes of deforestation, this study excavates the ethical reasoning processes of professional philosophers when confronted with real-world moral complexity, a methodological orientation that is underrepresented in both environmental ethics and qualitative research literatures.

The central argument of this paper is that philosophical pluralism, the reasoned convergence of anthropocentric, ecocentric, and biocentric perspectives, is not a failure of ethical commitment but a theoretically defensible response to the irreducible complexity of ecological ethics in the Global South. This argument builds on Norton's (2003) convergence hypothesis while extending it into the domain of survival-embedded ethical reasoning and engages postcolonial environmental philosophy to propose a contextually grounded framework for ecological ethics education and policy.

### 1. Theoretical Framework

2. This study is anchored in three intersecting theoretical traditions: philosophical pluralism in environmental ethics, contextual relativism in

moral philosophy, and postcolonial critiques of deep ecology. Together, these traditions provide the conceptual architecture for the Contextual Ecological Ethics (CEE) framework proposed in this paper.

### 3.1 Philosophical Pluralism in Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics has historically been organized around competing singular frameworks. Anthropocentrism assigns moral value exclusively to human beings and treats nature as instrumentally valuable insofar as it serves human interests (Passmore, 1974). Ecocentrism, associated with Aldo Leopold's land ethic, extends moral consideration to ecological systems as wholes, arguing that the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community are the primary standards of ethical evaluation (Leopold, 1949). Biocentrism, as developed by Paul Taylor (1986), holds that all living organisms have inherent worth by virtue of being teleological centers of life.

Each framework has generated substantial philosophical literature and practical advocacy. Each has also been criticized for its internal limitations: anthropocentrism for fostering exploitative relationships with nature (White, 1967); ecocentrism for potentially subordinating individual welfare to systemic ecological concerns (Guha, 1989); and biocentrism for offering limited guidance when human needs conflict with the welfare of other organisms. Norton's (2003) convergence hypothesis offers a partial resolution, arguing that despite their theoretical differences, these frameworks tend to converge on similar practical policy recommendations when applied carefully and comprehensively. This study extends Norton's hypothesis by examining convergence not as a theoretical proposition but as a lived philosophical practice under conditions of survival-embedded moral complexity.

### 3.2 Contextual Relativism in Moral Philosophy

The second theoretical pillar is contextual relativism in moral philosophy, particularly as articulated through DeRose's (2009) epistemic

contextualism and de Sa's (2010) account of faultless disagreement. These frameworks share a core commitment: that the truth, value of moral claims, is not fixed independently of the context in which they are made. An agent who cuts trees because it is the only available means of feeding their children occupies a morally different position from a corporation that clears forests for profit, even if both perform the same physical act.

Contextual relativism has salience in post-colonial settings where the conditions of moral agency, economic stability, access to alternatives, and political voice are not equally distributed. To apply a universal ecological ethic without accounting for the unequal distribution of survival conditions is itself a form of ethical failure. The philosophy professors in this study intuitively understood this, and their reasoning reflects a sophisticated contextual relativism that the literature has not yet adequately theorized.

### **3.3 Postcolonial Environmental Ethics and the Limits of Deep Ecology**

The third theoretical pillar draws on postcolonial critiques of deep ecology, particularly the foundational critique offered by Ramachandra Guha (1989) in his landmark essay on radical American environmentalism and wilderness preservation. Guha argued that deep ecology reflects the priorities of affluent, post-industrial societies and is ill-suited to the realities of the rural poor in developing countries, for whom nature is not a wilderness to be preserved but a resource on which survival directly depends. This argument has been developed by Martinez-Alier

(2002), who distinguishes between the 'environmentalism of the rich, which is concerned with aesthetics, wilderness, and post-material values, and the 'environmentalism of the poor, which is concerned with livelihood, health, and survival.

This theoretical tradition provides critical leverage for interpreting this study's findings. The participants did not reject ecological ethics; they rejected the application of ecological ethics frameworks that ignore survival conditions. Their reasoning is not anti-ecological; it is a demand for an ecological ethics adequate to the Global South.

### **3.4 Contextual Ecological Ethics: An Integrative Framework**

These three theoretical traditions converge on a shared proposition: that ecological ethics in the Global South requires a framework that is philosophically pluralist, contextually sensitive, and postcolonially aware. This paper terms this framework Contextual Ecological Ethics (CEE). CEE does not abandon the insights of anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, or biocentrism. Rather, it integrates them within a meta-ethical architecture that recognizes the conditions of moral agency as ethically relevant, the convergence of frameworks as theoretically legitimate, and the demands of survival as philosophically serious. The three established frameworks are held in productive tension, governed by the contextual filter of the agent's material conditions, and converging on the ethical standard of responsible and bounded use of natural resources.

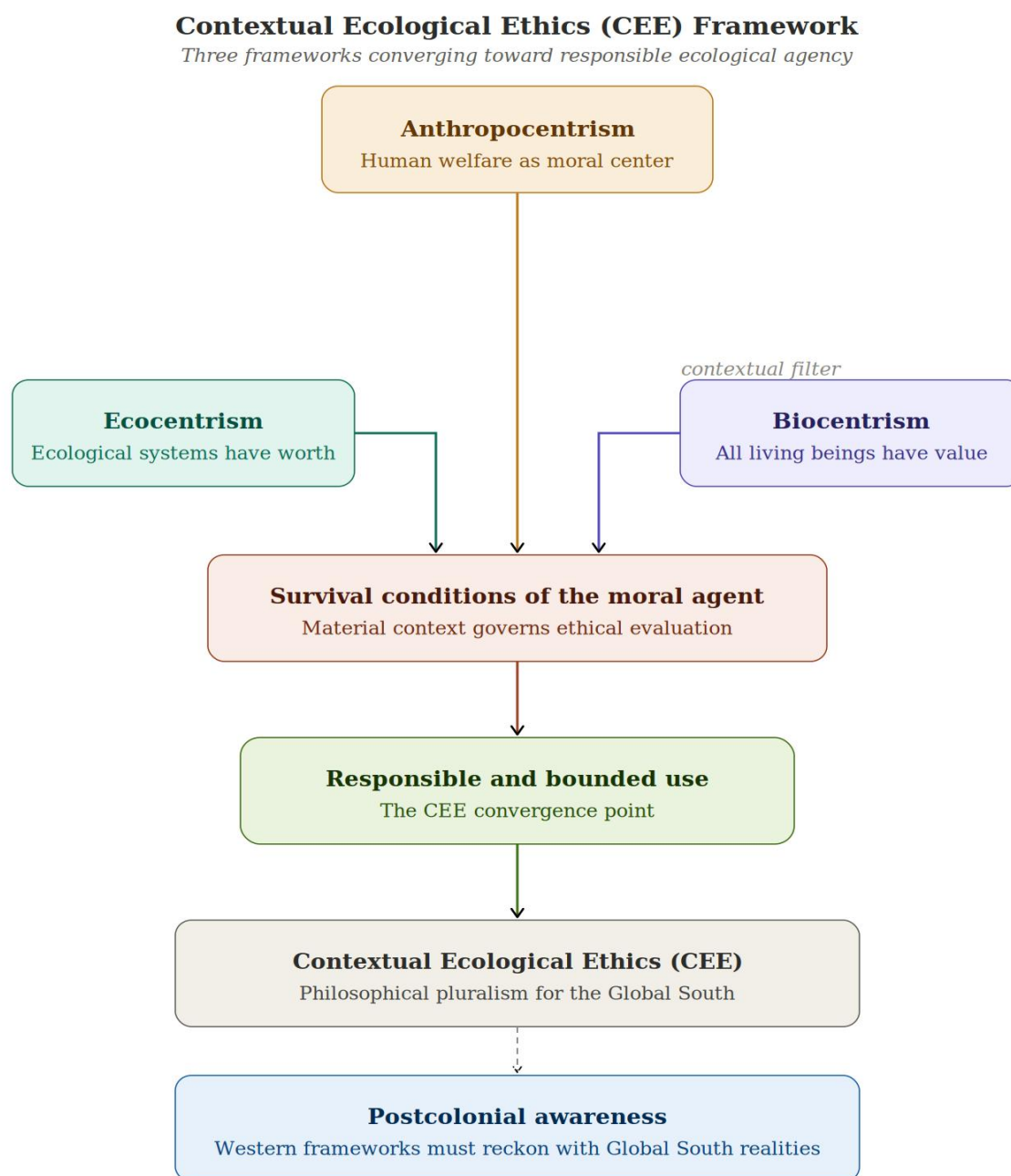


Figure 1. The Contextual Ecological Ethics Framework (Cayogyog & Nall, 2026)

#### 4. Researchers' Positionality

Reflexivity demands transparency about the researchers' position in relation to the phenomena under study. As Filipino academicians, philosophy professors, and community development practitioners based in Agusan del Sur, a region where logging and its ecological consequences are lived realities, the researchers occupy a position of both proximity and responsibility in relation to this study's subject matter.

This positionality is not a methodological weakness but an epistemological resource. The researchers' familiarity with the ecological, economic, and cultural landscape of rural Mindanao informed the design of the focus group discussions and the interpretive sensitivity brought to the data. At the same time, the researchers maintained a commitment to analytic rigor and theoretical fidelity throughout the study, ensuring that personal proximity did not collapse into advocacy or over-identification with any single perspective in the data. The

researchers' dual-role involvement in the focus group discussions, as facilitators and as participating intellects, is disclosed transparently and addressed through the structural safeguards described in the methodology section.

## 5. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. The choice of a qualitative approach reflects the epistemological nature of the research questions: understanding how professional philosophers reason about morally complex ecological situations requires attending to the texture, complexities, and internal logic of their thinking, knowledge that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative instruments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study is specifically anchored in a phenomenological-interpretive approach, informed by what Piantanida and Garman (2009) describe as the experiential-theoretic transition model: a methodological stance in which participants lived experiences and theoretical frameworks are treated as mutually informing sources of knowledge.

### 5.1 Research Design

Data were generated through two complementary qualitative methods: focus group discussion (FGD) and individual in-depth interviews. The FGD served as the primary generative method, creating a structured deliberative space in which participants could engage each other's perspectives, challenge assumptions, and develop their reasoning collectively. The individual in-depth interviews provided an opportunity for participants to elaborate, stress, and extend positions formed in the group setting, away from the social dynamics of peer deliberation. This dual-method design is consistent with the study's theoretical interest in philosophical reasoning as a social and intersubjective practice.

The researchers assumed dual roles throughout data generation: as facilitators of the FGD, maintaining structured dialogue while ensuring equitable participation; and as participating intellects, contributing to the discussion without dominating it. The researchers' written

reflections during the FGD were included in the data corpus and informed the reflexive dimension of the analysis (Finlay, 2002).

### 5.2 Study Site

The study was conducted in universities in Davao City, Philippines, offering philosophy courses. Davao City was selected for two reasons. First, it hosts a cluster of institutions with active philosophy programs, making it a productive site for purposive sampling of philosophy professors. Second, its local governance has been consistently associated with strong environmental policies, creating a socio-political context in which ecological concerns are a live and contested feature of public life. Broader Mindanao provides the ecological backdrop: sustained pressures from logging, agricultural expansion, and corporate plantation development have produced real and visible ecological consequences in the communities surrounding Davao City. The participants were not reasoning about hypothetical ecological scenarios; they were reasoning about conditions they could observe in their own environment.

### 5.3 Participants

Nine philosophy professors participated in the study, selected through purposive sampling based on substantive expertise in philosophy and institutional diversity across multiple Davao City universities (Tongco, 2007; Patton, 2015). Their teaching specializations spanned ethics, environmental philosophy, political philosophy, Asian philosophy, phenomenology, philosophy of education, philosophy of science, epistemology, logic, metaphysics, and philosophy of religion, providing broad theoretical coverage. All participants are identified by code (P1–P9) to protect anonymity.

Theoretical saturation was determined through iterative analysis: after the seventh and eighth participant interviews, no substantively new thematic categories emerged; the ninth interview confirmed this saturation (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Fusch & Ness, 2015). The final sample of nine participants is consistent with ranges recommended for phenomenological and



interpretive qualitative studies involving expert informants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

#### 5.4 Data Generation

The FGD was conducted using a semi-structured facilitation protocol developed from the study's research questions and the theoretical literature. The protocol guided the discussion through three phases: an opening phase in which participants described their general understanding of the ecological situation in their communities; an analytical phase in which they applied their philosophical training to poverty-driven logging; and a reflective phase in which they articulated their personal positions and considered philosophy's contribution to ecological ethics in the Philippine context. The facilitation approach drew on Casey's (2000) techniques of recalling, delineating, and imagining. FGDs were audio-recorded with participant consent and documented through field notes. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with five participants following the FGD, using an interview guide developed from emerging themes identified in preliminary analysis of the FGD data (Charmaz, 2014).

#### 5.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2021). RTA was selected because it is explicitly suited to research with a theoretically oriented purpose, allowing both inductive and deductive engagement with data while foregrounding the researchers' active role in knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis proceeded through six phases: familiarization with the data; generating initial codes; constructing themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and writing the analysis. The researchers maintained a reflexive journal throughout, documenting analytical decisions and moments of interpretive uncertainty as an audit trail for the analytical process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).

#### 5.6 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical protocols for qualitative research involving human participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All participants provided voluntary informed consent before participation, with full disclosure of the study's purpose, methods, and expected use of findings. Participant identities, institutional affiliations, and any identifying information are protected using participant codes. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without consequence and were offered the opportunity to review thematic summaries of their contributions before final analysis.

#### 6. Results and Discussion

The analysis produced three overarching themes that constitute a progressive philosophical argument. Theme 1 establishes the moral legitimacy of survival-driven ecological decisions. Theme 2 demonstrates the failure of single-framework environmental ethics to address this moral legitimacy adequately. Theme 3 proposes philosophical pluralism, converging on responsible and bounded use of natural resources, as the contextually most defensible ethical response. Each theme is presented below with supporting participant data and theoretical interpretation.

##### 6.1 Theme 1: The Philosophical Legitimacy Of Survival

The participants consistently recognized the profound moral weight of survival-driven ecological choices. Rather than treating the decision to cut trees for livelihood as a simple ethical failure, they articulated it as a genuine moral dilemma, a conflict between two genuine goods, each with serious philosophical standing.

##### 6.1.1 Survival And Ecological Responsibility As Co-Equal Moral Claims

The participants understood poverty-driven logging as a site of genuine moral conflict, not merely a social problem to be solved through education or policy. The philosophical force of survival as a moral claim was articulated with

striking clarity. One participant described the dilemma thus:

"Should he not heed first to his child crying for food? Ecological ethics asks something real of people. But so does hunger. These are not different kinds of claims, they are both moral claims, and they are both serious."— P3

This formulation reflects a position grounded in contextual relativism (DeRose, 2009): the moral evaluation of an act cannot be separated from the conditions under which it is performed. An agent who cuts trees because a child needs food occupies a morally different position from one who destroys forests for profit. The participants were attentive to this distinction, not as a way of excusing ecological destruction, but as a prerequisite for honest ethical analysis.

The theoretical significance of this insight lies in what it demands of environmental ethics frameworks. Any framework that cannot accommodate the moral weight of survival, that treats hunger as ethically irrelevant or as automatically subordinate to ecological concerns, is not morally rigorous. It is, as Guha (1989) argued, a framework calibrated to the conditions of the affluent, not of the poor.

### **6.1.2 The Ideal and the Pragmatic: Economic Precarity as Moral Context**

Participants drew a careful distinction between idealized ecological behavior, what a perfectly rational and economically secure agent ought to do, and the pragmatic choices available to agents under conditions of economic precarity. This distinction maps closely onto what Martinez-Alier (2002) calls the 'environmentalism of the poor': an ecological stance that is not indifferent to nature but that cannot afford the luxury of prioritizing ecological preservation over immediate survival.

"We say people should not cut trees. But what are the alternatives we are offering them? If there is no alternative, then condemning them is not ethics, it is cruelty dressed as philosophy."— P1

This participant's formulation anticipates a central implication of the CEE framework: that

the ethical evaluation of ecological behavior must always ask what conditions of choice the agent faces. The 'preference for easy money' that some observers interpret as moral failure is, in many cases, a rational and morally coherent prioritization under conditions of limited choice.

### **6.1.3 The Socio-Political Dimension: Structural Injustice and Moral Accountability**

Several participants extended the moral analysis beyond individual actors to the structural conditions that produce poverty-driven logging. They identified a distribution of moral accountability that is frequently obscured in both popular and academic discourse:

"Those who benefited directly from logging — the real beneficiaries — are those people in a position of power. The poor man in the forest carries the moral blame. The businessman in the city carries the profit. This is not an accident. It is a structure."— P5

This analysis draws on a tradition of structural ethics that sees individual moral choices as embedded in, and shaped by, larger social and economic structures (Tabara & Pahl-Wostl, 2007). The participant's insight that the distribution of ecological blame does not match the distribution of ecological benefit is both empirically accurate and philosophically significant: it demands that environmental ethics engage with political economy, not only with individual choice.

Connecting this to the postcolonial frame: the structural conditions that make poverty-driven logging rational are not natural, they are the product of colonial and post-colonial economic arrangements that have consistently extracted value from forest-dependent communities while distributing ecological costs to the same communities. A CEE framework must be aware of these structural dimensions if it is to be more than a philosophical gloss on existing inequalities.

## **6.2 Theme 2: The Failure of Single-Framework Environmental Ethics**

Having established the philosophical legitimacy of survival-driven ecological decisions, the

participants turned to a systematic analysis of whether existing ethical frameworks are adequate to address this reality. Their conclusion was consistent: no single framework, applied in isolation, is equal to the moral complexity of ecological choices made under conditions of survival necessity.

### **6.2.1 Anthropocentrism: Legitimate But Insufficient**

Participants acknowledged the philosophical legitimacy of anthropocentrism, the recognition that human beings have a special standing in ethical reasoning, and that human welfare is a genuine and serious moral concern. At the same time, they identified its central limitation: unrestricted anthropocentrism provides no principled basis for ecological restraint.

"If the world were only anthropocentrically oriented, the world would be meaningless without humanity — and humanity would make the world meaningless by consuming it. The logic of anthropocentrism, taken to its conclusion, is ecological catastrophe."— P2

This participant's formulation is consistent with the critique advanced by White (1967) in his foundational essay on the historical roots of the ecological crisis: that the Judeo-Christian tradition's anthropocentric worldview, its insistence on human dominion over nature, is historically implicated in the exploitative relationship with the natural world that has produced the ecological crisis. The participants did not reject anthropocentrism outright; they rejected its sufficiency as a standalone framework.

### **6.2.2 Ecocentrism and Biocentrism: Morally Serious but Contextually Impractical**

Ecocentrism and biocentrism received a more complex treatment. Participants respected their moral seriousness, their insistence that nature has value independent of its utility to human beings, but identified their practical limitations in contexts where survival is at stake.

"If one adopts a purely ecocentric view, man should bow down to nature. But man cannot bow down to nature when his children are hungry.

The framework is beautiful in the classroom and impossible in the forest."— P6

This critique echoes Guha's (1989) argument that deep ecology is a framework calibrated to the post-material concerns of affluent societies. It is not that ecocentrism is philosophically wrong because participants consistently affirmed its core moral intuition that nature has intrinsic value. The problem is that it provides no tools for navigating the conflict between that intrinsic value and the survival needs of human beings who depend directly on natural resources for their lives.

Biocentrism faced a similar critique. Taylor's (1986) argument that all living organisms are teleological centers of life with inherent worth generates a moral symmetry between human and non-human life that cannot easily accommodate the practical prioritizations that survival demands. Participants found biocentrism philosophically compelling but practically inadequate as a sole guide to action.

### **6.2.3 The Intrusion of Industrialization: Frameworks Analyzed in a Socio-Economic Vacuum**

Participants also critiqued the existing frameworks for their tendency to analyze ecological behavior as though it occurred in a socio-economic vacuum, as though the global demand for timber, the corporate structures of logging, and the political economies of forest governance were not morally relevant features of the landscape.

"The frameworks are designed for a world where the choices are clean. In the real world, the choice to cut a tree is connected to a market, to a corporation, to a government policy, to a history of colonization. The frameworks say nothing about this. They analyze the act as though it were free of context."— P4

This is a significant theoretical critique. It implies that the failure of existing frameworks is not merely a matter of practical application but of philosophical architecture: they are designed for a simplified moral world that does not exist. The CEE framework, by contrast, builds contextual



sensitivity into its foundations, treating the structural conditions of moral choice as morally relevant from the outset.

### 6.3 Theme 3: Philosophical Pluralism as Contextual Ecological Ethics

Having established both the moral legitimacy of survival-driven ecological decisions and the inadequacy of single-framework approaches, the participants converged on philosophical pluralism as the most defensible ethical position. This convergence was not a compromise, a splitting of the difference between competing views. It was a philosophically reasoned conclusion, arrived at through sustained deliberation, that the complexity of the moral situation demands a framework adequate to that complexity.

#### 6.3.1 The Convergence of Frameworks Through Deliberation

The FGD produced a remarkable instance of philosophical convergence: participants who began with different primary commitments, some more anthropocentric, some more ecocentric, arrived through sustained engagement with each other's reasoning at a shared position grounded in philosophical pluralism.

"We really should not concentrate on any one perspective. Each framework sees something real about the human-nature relationship. The mistake is to think that one of them sees everything."

— P8

This participant's formulation is a precise articulation of Norton's (2003) convergence hypothesis: that the major environmental ethics frameworks, despite their theoretical differences, point toward compatible practical conclusions when applied carefully and comprehensively. What this study adds to Norton's hypothesis is the empirical observation that trained ethicists arrive at convergence not by reading theoretical arguments but by reasoning through real moral complexity in dialogue.

#### 6.3.2 Responsible and Bounded Use: A Convergent Ethical Standard

The ethical standard toward which participants converged was articulated consistently across the group: responsible and bounded use of natural resources. This standard integrates the core moral insights of all three frameworks, human welfare (anthropocentrism), ecological integrity (ecocentrism), and intrinsic value (biocentrism), without sacrificing any of them to the others.

"We cannot avoid cutting some trees. Life requires this. But let us not cut beyond what we need. Let us not cut what we cannot replace. Need, not greed. Use, not exploitation. Sustainability, not depletion."

— P2

This ethical formulation has a double character that is philosophically significant. It is, on one hand, a practical standard that can guide actual decision-making in forest-dependent communities. On the other hand, it is a theoretically grounded position that integrates insights from anthropocentrism (human need is morally legitimate), ecocentrism (ecological systems must maintain integrity), and biocentrism (other life forms have value that places limits on human use). The standard is not a middle ground between these frameworks; it is a synthesis that holds all three in productive tension.

#### 6.3.3 Deep Ecology as Aspiration, Not Prescription

Several participants expressed personal commitments to what amounts to a contemplative or virtue-based ecological sensibility, a deep attunement to the natural world that resonates with the aspirational dimension of deep ecology (Naess, 1973). Crucially, however, they distinguished between this as a personal spiritual or philosophical practice and as a prescriptive ethical standard for others.

"I sit in my garden and I feel the presence of life in every flower, every plant. I know that each of these has value beyond what it can do for me. This is my practice. But I cannot demand this

practice of someone who does not know where the next meal is coming from."— P6

This distinction between aspiration and prescription is one of the most philosophically subtle contributions in the data. It suggests that deep ecology's vision of a transformed human-nature relationship is not philosophically wrong; it is, in fact, an admirable orientation toward which the CEE framework can aspire. But it cannot function as a prescriptive demand on agents who lack the conditions for contemplative ecological practice. The CEE framework accommodates this by treating deep ecological sensibility as a horizon toward which responsible bounded use points, not a standard to which all agents must immediately conform.

#### **6.3.4 Philosophy Alone Is Insufficient: The Demand for Interdisciplinary Action**

A final dimension of Theme 3 is the participants' recognition that philosophical pluralism, however theoretically sophisticated, cannot resolve the ecology-survival tension without structural transformation. Philosophy alone, even the most contextually sensitive philosophy, cannot provide the alternative livelihoods, economic security, and institutional support that would allow communities to make ecological choices without sacrificing survival.

"Philosophy can show people why the forest matters. It cannot feed their children. If we want the forest and the children, we need more than philosophy, we need politics, economics, and community."— P9

This is a philosophically honest recognition of the limits of ethics as a practice. It does not diminish the contribution of the CEE framework; it situates that contribution accurately within a broader landscape of social action. Ecological ethics education, alternative livelihoods programs, indigenous land rights, and community-based forest governance are not substitutes for each other, they are mutually necessary conditions for a world in which ecological integrity and human dignity are no longer in conflict.

#### **6.4 Cross-Thematic Discussion: The CEE Framework as Emergent Theory**

The three themes constitute an integrated philosophical argument that moves through three logical stages: establishing the moral legitimacy of survival (Theme 1), demonstrating the inadequacy of single-framework ethics (Theme 2), and proposing philosophical pluralism as a contextually adequate response (Theme 3). This progression is not merely analytical; it mirrors the actual structure of the participants' reasoning during the FGDs, suggesting that CEE is not a framework imposed on the data but one that emerges from it. This has important implications for how the CEE framework should be understood. It is not a deductive proposal, a framework constructed from theoretical premises and then validated against data. It is an inductive-abductive construction: a theoretical formalization of reasoning patterns that trained philosophers naturally arrive at when confronted with real moral complexity. This gives CEE a kind of empirical grounding that purely theoretical frameworks lack. Three specific theoretical contributions deserve explicit statement. First, this study provides empirical support for Norton's (2003) convergence hypothesis in a non-Western, developing-country context, a context for which the hypothesis was not originally designed and in which it has not previously been tested. Second, this study extends the hypothesis by identifying contextual sensitivity, attention to the survival conditions of moral agents, as a necessary component of convergence in Global South settings. Third, this study contributes to the postcolonial environmental ethics literature by providing a Philippine voice to that discourse and grounding its critique not in abstract theoretical argument but in the actual reasoning of professional philosophers who inhabit the intersection of Western philosophical training and Global South ecological reality.

#### **7. CONCLUSION**

This paper set out to examine how trained philosophers reason about the moral tension between ecological responsibility and survival

necessity in the context of poverty-driven deforestation in the Philippines. It asked not whether people should cut trees, but what the philosophical reasoning of professional ethicists reveals about the adequacy of existing environmental ethics frameworks when confronted with the irreducible complexity of survival-embedded ecological choices. The findings, emerging from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with nine philosophy professors in Davao City, converge on an answer that is both theoretically generative and practically urgent.

### 8. Summary of the Argument

The paper's argument moved through three interconnected stages. The first establishes that survival-driven ecological decisions are philosophically legitimate, the rational and morally coherent responses of agents caught between two genuine goods in a context where only one can be honored at a time. An environmental ethics that condemns these agents without acknowledging the structural conditions that produce their choices is not morally rigorous; it is morally evasive. The second demonstrated that this moral legitimacy cannot be adequately honored by any single existing framework of environmental ethics: anthropocentrism licenses unlimited exploitation; ecocentrism and biocentrism, applied without contextual sensitivity, demand ecological sacrifice from those who can least afford it. The third proposed philosophical pluralism, the reasoned convergence of multiple ethical frameworks, as the most defensible basis for ecological ethics in communities where survival and ecology are in direct tension.

### 9. The Theoretical Contribution: Contextual Ecological Ethics (CEE)

The primary theoretical contribution of this paper is the Contextual Ecological Ethics (CEE) framework, which synthesizes the three stages of the argument into a coherent ethical architecture. CEE makes four theoretical claims:

First: Survival conditions are ethically relevant to the moral evaluation of ecological behavior. A framework that ignores the material conditions

of moral agents is not neutral; it is systematically biased toward agents whose survival is not at stake.

Second: Philosophical pluralism is not moral relativism. Integrating the human-centered insights of anthropocentrism, the systemic insights of ecocentrism, and the intrinsic-value insights of biocentrism is epistemically more honest and practically more adequate than theoretical monism. Third: The convergence of frameworks under conditions of contextual pressure confirms and extends Norton's (2003) convergence hypothesis, documenting it as a lived philosophical practice rather than a theoretical abstraction. Fourth: Environmental ethics in the Global South requires postcolonial awareness. CEE is a demand for an ecological ethics that takes the Global South seriously, on its own terms, within its own material and political conditions.

### 10. IMPLICATIONS

For environmental ethics theory, CEE contributes to three ongoing debates: moral monism versus pluralism (Norton, 2003; Stone, 2009); the postcolonial critique of mainstream environmentalism (Guha, 1989; Martinez-Alier, 2002; Plumwood, 2002); and virtue-based environmental ethics (Bannon, 2013; Goralnik et al., 2012). For environmental ethics education, CEE implies a move from pedagogies that present a single framework as correct toward pedagogies that cultivate pluralist reasoning, contextual sensitivity, and community engagement. For policy, the findings confirm that ethical education alone cannot change ecological behavior: policy must provide the material conditions, alternative livelihoods, economic stability, and land tenure security, without which ecological responsibility becomes an unfunded mandate on the most economically vulnerable.

### 11. Closing Statement

The philosophy professors in this study did not resolve the tension between survival and ecology because it is not a tension that philosophical argument alone can dissolve. What they did, through careful, honest, and philosophically serious reasoning, was demonstrate that the

tension can be inhabited with integrity: that it is possible to take both human dignity and ecological responsibility seriously, simultaneously, without pretending the conflict does not exist. That demonstration is itself a philosophical contribution. The Contextual Ecological Ethics framework this paper proposes is an attempt to formalize and extend it to give the convergent reasoning of these philosophers a theoretical architecture adequate to the world as it actually is, not as we wish it were.

## 12. Limitations and Future Research

This study has four principal limitations, each of which generates a corresponding direction for future research.

First, geographic and institutional scope: conducted in Davao City with philosophy professors, the findings cannot be assumed to reflect reasoning in rural areas, other Philippine regions, or other Global South countries. Future research should test the CEE framework across a wider range of contexts, including rural Philippine communities, other Southeast Asian countries, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia.

Second, the absence of ecological actor voices: the participants reasoned about communities of loggers and farmers, but those communities were not themselves participants. A fully postcolonial environmental ethics study would center those voices through participatory research designs, community-based participatory action research, photovoice, and collaborative ethnography that position ecological actors as co-investigators rather than objects of analysis.

Third, researchers' dual role: despite structural provisions including a facilitation protocol, complementary interviews, and a reflexive journal, the researchers' presence as both

facilitator and participant may have shaped the direction of participants' contributions. Future studies should consider designs that more fully separate these roles or employ more granular member-checking.

Fourth, temporal scope: the data reflect a particular historical moment. Longitudinal research designs tracking changes in philosophical reasoning as ecological and policy conditions evolve would add important temporal depth. Four priority directions for future research are: (1) cross-national extension of the CEE framework; (2) community-centered participatory research centering the voices of ecological actors; (3) pedagogical application of CEE in Philippine higher education; and (4) longitudinal study of philosophical reasoning under conditions of significant policy change.

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