From Anattā (Non-self) to Environmental Ethics: Developing a Buddhist Philosophical Framework Beyond Strong Anthropocentrism

Praves Intongpan

Kasetsart University, Thailand.
Email: fhumpvi@ku.ac.th
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Abstract

This study examines three objectives: (1) to analyze *anattā* as a Buddhist philosophical critique of substantialist selfhood and strong anthropocentrism; (2) to examine how dependent origination and Buddhist ethical principles inform environmental ethics; and (3) to develop the Anattā-Based Relational Environmental Ethics Framework (AREEF). The study employs documentary research, conceptual and comparative philosophical analysis, and constructive theoretical synthesis, drawing primarily on the Pāli Canon and relevant scholarship.

The analysis yields three principal findings. First, *anattā* challenges the appropriation of the five aggregates as a permanent and autonomous self, providing a critical resource for questioning anthropocentric privilege without itself constituting an environmental ethic. Second, dependent origination elucidates the conditioned character of existence, while loving-kindness, compassion, non-harming, mindfulness, and moderation provide normative mediation between relational understanding and ecological responsibility. Moral obligations, however, cannot be derived from conditionality alone. Third, these insights are integrated into the Anattā-Based Relational Environmental Ethics Framework (AREEF), comprising six interrelated components: non-self, self-decentering, relationality, ethical transformation and de-instrumentalization, sufficiency and coexistence, and ecological responsibility.

AREEF advances a form of relational post-anthropocentrism that extends moral consideration beyond exclusively human interests without denying human moral agency or presupposing equivalent moral standing for all natural entities. Its original contribution lies in articulating a philosophically differentiated pathway from the critique of selfhood to ecological responsibility. The framework constitutes a constructive philosophical proposal rather than an empirically validated causal model, and its normative foundations and practical applications require further investigation.

Keywords: *anattā*; environmental ethics; anthropocentrism; dependent origination; Buddhist philosophy; ecological responsibility

1. Introduction

The environmental crisis of the twenty-first century has evolved into a constellation of systemic challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, ecological degradation, excessive resource exploitation, and unsustainable production and consumption patterns. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2021, 2024) characterizes these interconnected challenges as a triple planetary crisis encompassing climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste. These challenges reveal that the relationship between humanity and nature is not merely a matter of resource management but fundamentally concerns value, power, responsibility, and justice. The central question, therefore, is not simply how humanity should protect the environment, but why human beings continue to adopt modes of existence that undermine the ecological conditions sustaining their own lives and those of other living beings.

This study primarily challenges strong anthropocentrism, understood as the normative privileging of human interests as the exclusive or overriding criterion of moral valuation. It does not reject human moral agency or the legitimate consideration of human well-being. When nature is valued exclusively for its utility to humanity, other living beings and ecosystems become susceptible to appropriation, exploitation, and systematic undervaluation. Such an axiological hierarchy may legitimize excessive consumption and economic growth at the expense of ecological integrity and future generations. The problem, therefore, concerns not merely human beings as agents of ethical decision-making but the conceptual structure through which humanity positions itself above and apart from nature.

Contemporary environmental ethical theories, particularly biocentrism, ecocentrism, and deep ecology, have challenged anthropocentrism by extending moral consideration beyond human interests alone. Nevertheless, transcending anthropocentrism does not necessarily entail rejecting human value or moral agency. Rather, it requires reconsidering the conception of selfhood that legitimizes human axiological privilege. Whereas an isolated, autonomous conception of the self may reinforce possessive and dominative relationships with nature, a relational understanding of existence opens philosophical space to extend ethical consideration to other living beings and ecological systems.

Within Theravāda Buddhist philosophy, the doctrine of *anattā* (non-self) provides a critical philosophical foundation for interrogating such assumptions. *Anattā* does not deny personal existence; rather, it challenges the appropriation of

the aggregates and other phenomena as constituting a permanent, autonomous, and independently controllable self. The critique of substantialist selfhood does not logically entail rejecting anthropocentrism. Rather, it challenges one possible philosophical justification for possessive and exclusively human-centered relationships with nature. This critique is complemented by dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), which elucidates the conditioned and relational character of existence (Anālayo Bhikkh, 2020, pp. 55–63). Together, these principles offer philosophical resources for reconsidering the separation between humanity and nature and questioning the legitimacy of exclusively human-centered valuation.

Nevertheless, interpreting Buddhism as inherently ecological risks exceeding the available textual and historical evidence. Classical Buddhism did not explicitly formulate environmental ethics in its contemporary disciplinary sense, nor did it systematically articulate the intrinsic value or rights of ecosystems. Moreover, extending moral consideration from sentient beings to plants, water, rocks, and ecological systems remains philosophically contested (Capper, 2024). Buddhist environmental ethics must therefore avoid anachronistic interpretations and distinguish classical doctrinal foundations from contemporary constructive philosophical developments.

Although existing scholarship has explored Buddhist environmental ethics through dependent origination, compassion, non-harming, virtue ethics, and relational accounts of value, the literature examined here leaves room for a more systematic account of how substantialist selfhood, normative justification, and ecological responsibility relate. A central philosophical challenge is the transition from relationality to moral obligation: the conditioned and interdependent character of phenomena does not itself establish that humans ought to assume ecological responsibility. An ethical bridge is indispensable.

This gap concerns the philosophical integration of the literature examined, not a claim that comparable ideas have never been proposed.

To address this gap, the present study develops the Anattā-Based Relational Environmental Ethics Framework (AREEF) through a constructive philosophical synthesis of Buddhist metaphysical foundations, normative ethical principles, and practical implications. Its central proposition is that *anattā* does not constitute an environmental ethic in itself; rather, it provides a critical foundation for interrogating substantialist selfhood and anthropocentric privilege, thereby opening normative space for ecological responsibility. This framework's distinctive contribution lies not in replacing humanity with nature as a new center of value, but in transforming the very structure of selfhood, valuation, and ethical responsibility through which humanity relates to the natural world.

2. Research Questions

1. How does *anattā* challenge substantialist conceptions of selfhood, and what are the implications of this critique for strong anthropocentrism?

2. How can dependent origination and Buddhist normative ethical principles mediate the transition from the critique of selfhood to ecological responsibility?

3. How can these philosophical insights be integrated into a coherent Buddhist framework for environmental ethics beyond strong anthropocentrism?

3. Research Objectives

1. To critically examine *anattā* as a critique of substantialist selfhood and its philosophical implications for strong anthropocentrism.

2. To investigate the relationship between dependent origination, Buddhist normative ethical principles, and ecological responsibility.

3. To develop and critically assess the Anattā-Based Relational Environmental Ethics Framework (AREEF) as a constructive Buddhist philosophical approach to environmental ethics.

4. Scope of the Research

This study adopts a documentary and philosophical research approach, with its scope delineated across four dimensions: (1) selected Buddhist canonical texts and relevant scholarly literature; (2) the concepts of *anattā*, dependent origination, moral cultivation, and ecological responsibility; (3) comparative philosophical analysis of anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism; and (4) the constructive development of a primarily Theravāda Buddhist environmental ethical framework. The study neither presupposes a comprehensive environmental ethic in classical Buddhism nor seeks to generalize its conclusions across all Buddhist traditions. Its scope is conceptual and normative, not empirical.

5. Research Methodology

This study employs documentary and philosophical research integrating textual investigation, conceptual analysis, comparative analysis, and constructive synthesis. Rather than conducting a systematic literature review or empirical investigation, it critically examines selected Buddhist canonical texts and scholarly literature to develop a philosophically coherent environmental ethical framework beyond anthropocentrism. The methodology comprises five interrelated stages.

5.1 Documentary Investigation

Primary sources include the Pāli Canon (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996), particularly the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta (SN 22.59; S III 66–68), dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), and Buddhist ethical teachings. Secondary sources encompass scholarship on Buddhist philosophy and contemporary environmental ethics. Sources are selected according to conceptual relevance, scholarly credibility, and explanatory significance. Original doctrinal and soteriological contexts are distinguished from contemporary ecological interpretations to avoid anachronism.

5.2 Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis and philosophical interpretation are conducted across four analytical dimensions: metaphysical (*anattā* and the critique of substantialist selfhood), axiological (human-centered valuation), relational (conditionality and relational existence), and ethical (loving-kindness, compassion, non-harming, mindfulness, and moderation). Conceptual distinctions are maintained to avoid conflating metaphysical propositions with normative conclusions, while identifying relevant philosophical relationships, tensions, and limitations.

5.3 Comparative Analysis

Comparative philosophical analysis examines convergences and divergences between Buddhist philosophy and anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism, focusing on selfhood, moral valuation, moral consideration, human–nature relationships, and environmental responsibility. The analysis clarifies Buddhist philosophy's distinctive contribution without presupposing conceptual equivalence or reducing it to existing environmental ethical models.

5.4 Conceptual Synthesis

The findings are synthesized into the Anattā-Based Relational Environmental Ethics Framework (AREEF), integrating the critique of substantialist selfhood, relational understanding, and normative ethical responsibility. The framework comprises six interrelated dimensions: (1) *anattā*; (2) the decentering of the self; (3) relationality; (4) ethical transformation and de-instrumentalization; (5) sufficiency and coexistence; and (6) ecological responsibility. These dimensions constitute a coherent philosophical pathway linking self-understanding, moral valuation, ethical transformation, and ecological responsibility, rather than an empirically validated causal model.

5.5 Assessment of Philosophical Coherence

The proposed framework is critically assessed through five criteria: textual fidelity, conceptual consistency, logical coherence, normative justification, and explanatory adequacy. The assessment examines potential counterarguments, alternative interpretations, and conceptual limitations to avoid unsupported causal claims, unjustified normative inferences, and interpretations that exceed the documentary evidence. This assessment strengthens AREEF's philosophical defensibility while acknowledging the need for further empirical investigation of its practical effectiveness.

6. Research Findings

6.1 Anattā as a Critique of Selfhood and Anthropocentrism (Corresponding to Research Objective 1)

The analysis indicates that *anattā* does not directly establish nature's moral standing; rather, it challenges a conception of selfhood that may be invoked to justify possessive, exclusively human-centered relationships with the natural world. An examination of the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*): material form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volitional formations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) reveals that each is impermanent, subject to change, and resistant to absolute control. Consequently, none should be appropriated as "I" or "mine" in the sense of an enduring and substantial self.

This finding has significant implications for the critique of essentialism, insofar as *anattā* dismantles the assumption that human beings possess an intrinsic essence existing independently of conditions. This understanding opens philosophical space to conceive human existence as conditioned and relational rather than fundamentally detached from the world. The Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta supports the conclusion that appropriating the aggregates as self underpins attachment and suffering, whereas insight into their non-self character facilitates relinquishing such appropriation (SN 22.59).

From an environmental perspective, the critique of selfhood also bears significant implications for the critique of anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism arises not merely from how nature is valued but also from how human beings construct the distinction between self and other. When the self is conceived as an autonomous and isolated center, nature becomes susceptible to reduction to an external object or a resource for satisfying human demands. Accordingly, *anattā* can serve as a critical philosophical foundation for interrogating anthropocentrism, even though it does not directly constitute an environmental ethic. The findings thus suggest that *anattā* does not directly resolve whether nature possesses intrinsic value or rights. Instead, it

reorients the fundamental philosophical question from whether humanity is entitled to possess nature toward how humanity understands itself in constituting its relationship with nature. This reorientation marks a significant departure for transcending anthropocentrism.

The critique operates on three distinct levels: rejecting the aggregates as permanent substances; rejecting absolute appropriation; and interrogating self-interest as the ultimate measure of all value. The third level represents a constructive philosophical extension proposed by the researcher rather than an explicit environmental teaching articulated in the canonical discourse.

An important counterargument must nevertheless be acknowledged: individuals who reject the existence of a permanent self may continue to privilege exclusively human interests. Thus, *anattā* does not logically refute every form of anthropocentrism. It does, however, undermine the legitimacy of invoking an autonomous and isolated self as the philosophical foundation of human privilege.

6.2 From Anattā and Dependent Origination to Buddhist Ethics (Corresponding to Research Objective 2)

The analysis suggests that *anattā*, dependent origination, and Buddhist ethical principles perform distinct yet complementary philosophical functions that can be integrated into a coherent process for constructing environmental ethics. *Anattā* critically interrogates isolated and substantialist selfhood; dependent origination elucidates the conditioned arising of existence; and Buddhist ethics translates this understanding into moral dispositions and practical conduct.

In this respect, *anattā* constitutes the dimension of self-deconstruction, dependent origination constitutes the dimension of relationality, and Buddhist ethics constitutes the dimension of responsibility. Their integration therefore offers greater philosophical explanatory potential than applying any single principle in isolation. Brown (2004) argues that dependent origination may provide an important foundation for Buddhist environmental ethics by helping us understand existence in relational and interdependent terms. Similarly, Cummiskey and Hamilton (2017) explore the relationship between dependent origination, emptiness, and the value of nature without requiring the metaphysical assumption of a permanent self.

Nevertheless, dependent origination should not be simplistically interpreted as the proposition that everything is interconnected. Within classical Buddhism, dependent origination performs a fundamental soteriological function by explaining the conditions of suffering and liberation (Schmithausen, 1997, pp. 12–14). Its environmental application must therefore proceed through careful philosophical interpretation rather than assuming that Buddhism already contains a modern scientific theory of ecology.

At the ethical level, the findings indicate that loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), non-harming (*ahiṃsā*), mindfulness (*sati*), non-greed (*alobha*), and contentment (*santuṭṭhi*) can serve as mediating principles between internal transformation and behavioral change. As attachment to self diminishes and awareness of the relational and conditioned character of existence increases, there is greater scope to reduce harm, limit excessive consumption, and encourage responsible resource use.

These findings are consistent with Kaza (2018, pp. 432–451), who emphasizes the development of Buddhist environmental ethics at the levels of both virtue ethics and social ethics, and with Keown (2007, pp. 97–112), who regards the cultivation of moral character as a central mechanism of Buddhist environmental ethics. The philosophical argument proceeds through three propositions. First, human existence is conditioned and dependent upon other entities and processes. Second, avoidable suffering and harm provide moral reasons to consider reducing damage. Third, insofar as human actions affect the conditions sustaining life, human beings have moral reasons to assume responsibility for those consequences. The second proposition is an indispensable normative premise rather than a conclusion that automatically follows from the descriptive fact expressed in the first proposition. Harvey (2007, pp. 1–34) is particularly significant here because he extends the ethical problem beyond the absence of intent to harm to the question of unintended harm. In contemporary societies, individuals may not deliberately intend to damage the environment. Nevertheless, knowledge of the consequences of production and consumption provides moral reasons for modifying their conduct.

This perspective supports AREEF's transition from internal ethical transformation to behavioral responsibility. However, insight into *anattā* may provide a philosophical and motivational resource for reconsidering possessive consumption. Whether such insight leads to measurable behavioral change remains an empirical question.

6.2.1 Transformation of Motivation and Consumption Patterns

Another finding is that anthropocentrism operates not only at the conceptual level but also through economic practices, including excessive consumption, resource accumulation, unrestricted exploitation of natural resources, and evaluating nature primarily in terms of economic value. If the problem originates partly in attachment to self, many forms of consumption may be interpreted as manifestations of craving (*taṇhā*) and clinging (*upādāna*).

The proposed philosophical pathway moves from wisdom (*paññā*) and insight into *anattā* through reducing clinging (*upādāna*), sufficiency and moderation, and

mindful consumption toward ecological responsibility. This sequence is conceptual rather than a demonstrated causal relationship.

Contemporary scholarship on Buddhist environmental ethics likewise emphasizes consumption, climate change, non-harming, compassion, and mindfulness as significant dimensions of ethical transformation.

Applying craving and clinging to the analysis of consumerism offers a constructive philosophical interpretation. It does not imply that ecological degradation forms an explicit component of the classical twelvefold formulation of dependent origination. The reduction of desire must therefore be considered alongside market structures, access to alternative practices, and socioeconomic inequalities.

6.2.2 The Scope of Ethical Responsibility

AREEF distinguishes direct moral consideration of sentient beings from responsibility toward the ecological conditions that sustain life. While this distinction supports extending ethical concern beyond exclusively human interests, it does not settle whether non-sentient entities possess intrinsic moral value.

First, Buddhism does not explicitly formulate the rights of nature in the same sense as contemporary rights-based environmental philosophy. Inferring directly from loving-kindness, compassion, or non-harming that rivers, mountains, and ecosystems possess rights would therefore introduce philosophical categories not explicitly articulated in classical Buddhist teachings.

Second, extending moral consideration from sentient beings to plants, rocks, water, and entire ecosystems involves a considerably more complex philosophical problem than simply asserting the interconnectedness of all phenomena.

Ontological relationality does not automatically entail equivalent moral standing among all relationally constituted entities. Simonds (2023) further underscores this limitation by directly interrogating the possibility of constructing a Buddhist environmental ethic that encompasses rocks and waters. His analysis suggests that tensions between Buddhist philosophy and Western environmental ethics can be addressed by rationally reconstructing ethics from Buddhist philosophical principles rather than by directly imposing contemporary environmental ethical categories on Buddhism. In other words, relationality should not automatically be translated into moral equality. This is an essential philosophical constraint that AREEF must preserve to avoid a romanticized interpretation of Buddhism.

The framework proposes that animal suffering should receive direct moral consideration, while plants, water, soil, and ecosystems should be regarded as life-sustaining conditions and relational configurations deserving responsible care. The

question of the intrinsic value of non-sentient entities remains open to further philosophical inquiry.

6.3 The Synthesis of the Anattā-Based Relational Environmental Ethics Framework (AREEF) (Corresponding to Research Objective 3)

AREEF comprises six interrelated dimensions, each performing a distinct philosophical or ethical function (Table 1).

Table 1: *The Anattā-Based Relational Environmental Ethics Framework (AREEF)*

No.	Philosophical Component	Principal Function
1	Anattā	Critiques the appropriation of the aggregates as a permanent self.
2	Decentering of the Self	Interrogates the assumed privilege of individual and exclusively human interests.
3	Relationality	Recognizes causal conditions and the consequences of actions for life-sustaining relationships.
4	Ethical Transformation and De-instrumentalization	Establishes loving-kindness, compassion, and non-harming as normative principles.
5	Sufficiency and Coexistence	Translates moral dispositions into consumption practices and collective management.
6	Ecological Responsibility	Considers consequences for animals, communities, ecosystems, and future generations.

Note. Author's constructive philosophical synthesis.

AREEF's distinctive contribution lies in reorienting the research question. Rather than merely asking which Buddhist teachings are relevant to environmental concerns, it asks how Buddhist philosophy can explain humanity's transformation from an appropriator and controller of nature into a responsible participant within the relational networks sustaining life. In this respect, AREEF constitutes a theoretical architecture of transformation rather than merely a doctrinal inventory of environmentally relevant Buddhist principles.

The findings further indicate that AREEF shares important concerns with environmental ethical approaches that challenge anthropocentrism and extend moral consideration beyond exclusively human interests. Nevertheless, AREEF cannot be directly identified with either biocentrism or ecocentrism, since it does not propose that living beings or ecosystems should constitute a new axiological center. Instead, it emphasizes transforming the relationship between moral agents and the world.

The framework may therefore be analytically characterized as relational post-anthropocentrism: an approach that transcends anthropocentrism by transforming

self-understanding and relationality rather than by relocating axiological centrality from humanity to living beings or ecosystems.

The six dimensions constitute a sequence of philosophical reasoning and practical design rather than an empirically or statistically validated causal sequence.

7. Discussion

7.1 Anattā and the Critique of Anthropocentrism

The first and arguably most significant finding of this study is that *anattā* should not be directly equated with environmental ethics. Such an identification would conflate philosophical concepts operating at distinct analytical levels. *Anattā* is a Buddhist doctrine that challenges the appropriation of the constituents of experience, or the five aggregates, as constituting a self or as entities subject to absolute personal control. Environmental ethics, by contrast, is a branch of philosophy concerned with value, moral standing, and human obligations toward non-human entities and natural systems.

A more philosophically coherent relationship therefore involves understanding anattā as a critical foundation for interrogating the structure of selfhood and anthropocentric assumptions, then connecting this critique to environmental ethics through normative and ethical mediation.

This proposition aligns with central Buddhist canonical teachings, particularly the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, which does not explicitly formulate environmental ethics but clarifies the limits of appropriating the aggregates as self or as possessions of the self. In other words, *anattā* begins with the deconstruction of misconceptions concerning the moral agent rather than with the direct affirmation of the rights or value of nature (SN 22.59, S III 66–68).

This finding aligns with Schmithausen (1997, pp. 12–15), who cautions that constructing contemporary environmental ethics from early Buddhist teachings requires considerable interpretive care. Early Buddhism did not explicitly formulate the intrinsic value of nature in the same manner as contemporary environmental ethical theories. Consequently, interpreting *anattā* as a ready-made environmental ethic would exceed the available evidence. Understanding it instead as a critical philosophical ground for dismantling isolated selfhood and possessive relationships with nature constitutes a more defensible interpretation.

The study therefore proposes that *anattā* should be characterized as a critical philosophical foundation for environmental ethics rather than as environmental ethics itself. This formulation preserves the analytical distinction between the ontology and philosophical anthropology of selfhood, normative ethics, and

environmental ethics, thereby preventing claims that exceed the doctrinal evidence of classical Buddhism.

7.2 Connecting Relationality and Ethical Responsibility

The second finding indicates that *anattā* and dependent origination should be used together without being conceptually conflated to the point that their distinct philosophical functions are obscured. *Anattā* interrogates permanent and autonomous selfhood, whereas dependent origination elucidates the conditioned arising and cessation of phenomena.

Nevertheless, interpreting dependent origination merely as the interconnectedness of all things risks oversimplification and the excessive assimilation of Buddhism to contemporary ecological thought. This concern is supported by Schmithausen (1997, pp. 12–14) and critical scholarship in Buddhist ethics, which emphasizes that dependent origination in early Buddhism primarily elucidates the arising of suffering, attachment, and liberation rather than constituting a scientific theory of ecological interdependence.

The findings also align with Cummiskey and Hamilton (2017), who develop the relationship between dependent origination and emptiness into an account of the relational, non-instrumental, and impersonal value of nature. The value of nature need not be explained by reconstructing an enduring natural self or essence. Instead, it may be understood through relational configurations. The study therefore advances the qualified proposition that *anattā* and dependent origination are not environmental theories in themselves. They nevertheless offer philosophical resources that can inform environmental ethics when mediated through ethical principles such as loving-kindness, compassion, non-harming, mindfulness, non-greed, and responsibility.

This finding aligns with Kaza (2018, pp. 432–451), Keown (2007, pp. 97–112), and Harvey (2007), whose contributions show how Buddhist moral cultivation, intention, non-harming, and responsibility for the consequences of action may connect to environmental concerns. Harvey (2007, pp. 1–34) is particularly significant because his analysis extends the ethical discussion beyond the absence of harmful intention to encompass unintended harm. Although individuals may not intentionally seek to damage the environment, knowledge of the environmental consequences of consumption and production provides moral reasons to modify behavior. This perspective supports the transition within AREEF from internal transformation to practical responsibility.

Conversely, Sciberras (2008, pp. 215–240) cautions against uncritically applying Western philosophical categories, such as speciesism and intrinsic moral value, to Buddhism without examining whether they correspond to Buddhist conceptual

frameworks. These limitations do not diminish AREEF's philosophical significance. Rather, they strengthen its scholarly credibility. AREEF does not claim that *anattā* and dependent origination directly establish equivalent moral standing for all natural entities. Instead, it advances the more carefully qualified proposition that these principles open philosophical space for challenging the domination of nature and developing an ethics of responsibility toward life-sustaining systems.

7.3 The Contribution and Philosophical Position of AREEF within Environmental Ethics

Within biocentric environmental ethics, Taylor (1986) argues that human beings should recognize the inherent worth of living organisms. Ecocentric approaches, developed through the land ethic and ecological holism, emphasize the integrity and stability of ecological communities beyond the particular interests of humanity or individual organisms. AREEF shares with both approaches a rejection of humanity as the exclusive center of value. Nevertheless, it should not be directly classified as either biocentrism or ecocentrism because its justificatory foundations differ.

The characterization of AREEF as relational post-anthropocentrism is therefore appropriate as an analytical designation developed within the present study rather than as a claim to represent an already established school of environmental ethics. The term relational emphasizes that humanity is not displaced by nature as a new center of value. Instead, human existence is reconceptualized in terms of conditionality, relationality, and interdependence.

The term post-anthropocentrism denotes a movement beyond strong anthropocentrism without implying the wholesale rejection of human significance or moral responsibility. This distinction is particularly important because Le Duc (2022) argues that automatically characterizing religious environmental ethics as anthropocentric may obscure the role of human beings as morally capable agents responsible for addressing environmental crises. Transcending anthropocentrism should therefore not be understood as removing humanity from the ethical equation. Rather, it entails transforming humanity from the exclusive center of value into a responsible participant within ecological networks of value and relationality.

A significant contribution of this research is that AREEF should not be understood merely as an aggregation of Buddhist teachings. It is a framework that organizes Buddhist philosophical principles into a sequence of transformations: from the transformation of self-understanding to relational awareness, ethical transformation, behavioral change, and ultimately the transformation of ecological relationships. In this regard, AREEF aligns with Kaza (2018, pp. 432–451) and Keown (2007, pp. 97–112), both of whom emphasize cultivating moral agents rather

than merely prescribing rules for determining the moral permissibility of particular actions.

Kaza emphasizes cultivating personal virtue alongside social ethics, while Keown argues that virtue ethics is particularly compatible with Buddhism because it emphasizes the transformation of moral agents and the cultivation of moral character. AREEF extends these propositions by articulating a philosophical pathway explaining how the transformation of moral agency begins with the critique of selfhood and how this critique relates to subsequent ethical transformation. At this level, AREEF constitutes a theoretical architecture rather than a doctrinal inventory. Its philosophical significance lies not in the number of Buddhist teachings incorporated into the framework, but in its explanation of the distinctive functions these teachings perform in the process of transformation.

Nevertheless, the findings must not be interpreted as suggesting that transforming the ontology of selfhood alone is sufficient to resolve environmental problems. Contemporary environmental crises involve economic, political, technological, legal, and institutional dimensions, as well as structures of production and social inequality. A more defensible proposition is that transforming the conceptual structure of selfhood constitutes an important condition for transforming motivation, moral character, behavior, and social relationships. Such transformation must proceed alongside institutional and policy reforms.

AREEF therefore establishes a complementary relationship between inner transformation and outer transformation rather than privileging one over the other. Sustainable responses to environmental problems require transformations in individual consciousness, moral dispositions, and behavior, together with changes in economic, social, political, and institutional structures.

A further limitation is that the framework does not assign predetermined normative weights when the interests of individual animals conflict with ecosystem conservation. AREEF should therefore function as a framework for ethical inquiry and reasoned decision-making rather than as a prescriptive formula guaranteeing a single correct answer. Table 2 compares the general characteristics of these approaches without implying uniformity within each school of thought.

Table 2 *Comparative Analysis of AREEF and Environmental Ethical Theories*

Dimension	Strong Anthropocentrism	Biocentrism	Ecocentrism	AREEF
Primary ethical focus	Human interests	Living organisms	Ecological wholes	Relational responsibility
Philosophical orientation	Human-centered valuation	Respect for life	Ecological integrity	Critique of substantialist selfhood
Moral consideration	Primarily or exclusively human	Living beings	Ecological communities	Sentient beings and life-sustaining systems, with differentiated grounds
Normative foundation	Human welfare	Inherent worth of life	Ecological integrity	Compassion and non-harming
Human agency	Privileged moral agent	Moral agent among living beings	Ecological participant	Responsible relational agent
Practical orientation	Human-centered management	Respect for organisms	Ecosystem conservation	Sufficiency, non-harming, and coexistence

Note. Author's comparative synthesis; categories represent general orientations.

This comparative table helps clarify the distinctive features of AREEF in relation to existing approaches to environmental ethics. However, differences in philosophical foundations alone are insufficient to establish AREEF as a fully developed and distinct category of ethical theory.

8. Original Contribution to Knowledge

This study's original contribution lies in integrating critiques of selfhood, conditionality, normative ethical principles, and practical conduct at both individual and institutional levels. It does not discover new Buddhist doctrines or empirically demonstrate the effectiveness of AREEF. The six dimensions identified in Table 1 connect metaphysical critique, axiological reorientation, relational understanding, normative mediation, practical transformation, and ecological responsibility.

The contribution is fourfold:

First, the conceptual contribution distinguishes anattā as a critical philosophical resource from environmental ethics as a normative domain.

Second, the normative contribution identifies compassion, non-harming, and related Buddhist ethical resources as an indispensable bridge between conditionality and responsibility.

Third, the theoretical contribution integrates these insights into AREEF, organizing six interrelated philosophical dimensions within a coherent framework.

Fourth, the practical contribution proposes a preliminary framework for developing criteria for environmental decision-making.

The contribution therefore lies in constructive philosophical integration and normative clarification, rather than in discovering previously unknown Buddhist doctrines or empirically demonstrating environmental outcomes.

AREEF advances a relational approach to moving beyond strong anthropocentrism without denying human significance, reducing environmental responsibility to individual moral cultivation, or presupposing equivalent moral standing for all natural entities.

8.1 Illustrative Application

The application of AREEF to waste management within Buddhist monasteries may begin with a critical reconsideration of consumption needs, followed by an assessment of the consequences of waste for local communities and animals. The principle of non-harming may then guide the selection of alternative practices, including the reduction of single-use materials and the systematic monitoring of actual waste generation. This example proposes subsequent practical investigation rather than an empirically established finding of the present research.

9. Conclusion

This study has examined the philosophical potential of *anattā* for developing a Buddhist environmental ethic beyond strong anthropocentrism. Its central conclusion is that *anattā* does not itself constitute an environmental ethic but provides a critical resource for questioning substantialist selfhood and the presumptive privilege of exclusively human interests. Dependent origination complements this critique by clarifying the conditioned nature of existence, while compassion, non-harming, and related Buddhist ethical principles provide the normative mediation needed to extend moral responsibility beyond humanity. These insights have been integrated into the Anattā-Based Relational Environmental Ethics Framework (AREEF), a constructive philosophical framework that differentiates and connects self-understanding, moral valuation, relationality, ethical cultivation, practical conduct, and ecological responsibility.

The significance of AREEF lies not in replacing humanity with nature as a new center of value, but in reconsidering the relationship between moral agency, valuation, and the ecological conditions sustaining life. The framework remains a conceptual and normative proposal, and its theoretical foundations, practical applicability, and empirical implications require further investigation.

10. Recommendations

10.1 Recommendations for Theoretical Development

AREEF should be further developed as a framework of relational Buddhist philosophy through further investigation of the relationships among *anattā*, dependent origination, emptiness, and conceptions of nature across different Buddhist traditions. The designation ecocentric Buddhism should not be used without sufficient philosophical analysis, since it may anachronistically impose contemporary environmental categories on classical Buddhist thought.

10.2 Recommendations for Practical Application

The principles articulated within AREEF may be further developed into a Buddhist Ecological Decision-Making Framework in subsequent research. Buddhist teachings should not be employed merely as instruments of environmental publicity. Rather, they should be translated into explicit and assessable criteria for ethical decision-making.

10.3 Recommendations for Future Research

1. Empirical Research: Future studies should investigate whether mindfulness practice and contemplation of *anattā* influence consumption behavior and environmental responsibility.

2. Comparative Philosophical Research: Further research should examine AREEF in relation to deep ecology, biocentrism, ecocentrism, and environmental virtue ethics.

3. Cross-Traditional Buddhist Research: Comparative investigations should explore the philosophical resources of Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna Buddhism in the development of environmental ethics.

4. Environmental Policy Research: Future studies should investigate the development of AREEF into an analytical instrument for environmental policy assessment.

11. Research Limitations

The present study is limited to the philosophical analysis of selected documentary sources. It does not constitute an exhaustive review of the relevant literature, nor does it empirically evaluate the application of AREEF in practical settings. Consequently, the study cannot definitively establish causal relationships or conclusively substantiate the international originality of the proposed framework.

The framework does not conclusively resolve the intrinsic moral value of non-sentient entities, establish definitive priorities in cases of conflicting moral interests,

or demonstrate causal relationships between insight into *anattā* and environmental behavior. Its contribution should therefore be understood as a provisional conceptual and normative framework whose philosophical adequacy, distinctiveness, and practical effectiveness remain open to further investigation.

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