

## The Virtue of Moderation and Environmental Ethics

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**Abstract.** This study is a contemporary revisit to the ancient philosophical concept of moderation, and how it impinges on environmental ethics in contemporary time. The study attempts a concise but clear conceptual analysis of the concept of moderation. It inquires critically into the conceptions, which some ancient philosophers (Aristotle and Epicurus) have on it and how they raised it to the status of virtue. The study agrees with Aristotle on his doctrine of moderation, but dissents with his requirement for virtuousness for its excessive rigidity, which would make it impossible to be virtuous in moral sphere. Thereafter the study presents Epicurus' argument that one can only achieve the goal of life through pleasure which results from moderation. It then attempts an extension and application of the concept to both theory and practice with specific references to politics and law and holds that to be virtuous in these regards is to avoid extremes and adopt the practice of moderation. Thereafter, the study focuses on environmental ethics. It attempts a brief analysis of the meaning of environmental ethics. It argues that although people have been concerned about environmental care since ancient period, environmental ethics as an academic discipline in contemporary time result mainly from the threat which result from anthropogenic impact on nature. It argues that although there is serious threat resulting from human interaction with nature, this does not justify prohibition of interaction with nature; rather, it calls for moderation to ensure genial living, as well as to ensure the preservation and sustainability of the environment and its

resources. It concludes by highlighting succinctly the relevance of moderate living and moderate use of material possession and environmental resources. Finally, it opines that the ability to apply moderation appropriately to concrete issues is a virtue.

**Keywords:** Moderation, Mental and sensual pleasures, Virtue and vice, Politics, Justice, Environmental ethics, Ecosophy, Eco-ism

### 1. Introduction

The concept of moderation is not alien in philosophy. Some philosophers of antiquity were engrossed with the philosophical rumination on the concept. In fact they raise it to the status of virtue. But philosophers from the medieval to the contemporary periods hardly talk of it as a philosophical concept and virtue.

This work is an attempt to renew energy with the concept. However, it is impossible to exposit the concept of moderation in all its aspects of human discourses and activities here. For this reason, it is only a sparing treatment of the concept that will be made; but this is to be done without compromising reason and logic. The task here is to ask and answer, among others, what moderation is, what it is concerned with, how and with what it can be applied and by extension, what it is not concerned with, and how and with what is cannot be applied. Its examination shall be extended to both theory and practice. The study will also extend its consideration to environmental ethics and how

its sustainability impinges on moderation. Specifically, the study will examine how the application of moderation in the use of natural resources can ensure genial living and the conservation and sustainability of the natural environment. The study employs the methods of conceptual and critical analyses.

## 2. Moderation as a Philosophical Concept

Moderation as a philosophical concept may be conceived differently, but with a common denominator of avoiding extremes. Moderation is the process of eliminating, or avoiding, or lessening extremes. It is a way of life which emphasizes perfect amounts of everything; that is: not indulging in too much or too little, but instead striking a balance or locating a mean between two vices of excess and defect. It is the avoidance of extremes in actions or opinions, or mediation between extremes. Moderation is also a principle of life. In ancient Greece, the temple of Apollo at Delphi bore the inscription *Μηδὲν ἄγαν* (μηδὲν ἄγαν), which means: ‘Nothing in excess’. From this inscription, doing something “in moderation” means not doing it in excess.

In Taoist philosophy, moderation is considered as a key part of one’s personal development and religion and it is one of the three jewels of Taoist thought. There is nothing that cannot be moderated including one’s actions, ones desires and even thoughts. It is believed that by moderation one achieves a more natural state, faces less resistance in life and recognizes one’s limits. As a principle of Taoist Philosophy moderation is a lifelong process which attempts to moderate oneself in all he does as there is no specific goal and since there is no specific guide one can use. It is thus an ongoing internal process (The Free Encyclopedia, 2007). One of the barriers to moderation is our very human propensity to label entities good or bad in absolute terms rather than weighing them as a part of a complex whole. The question generated from this brief exposition is: is moderation actually possible in everything as the Taoists would want us to believe? This question and many more will be answered in what follows.

## 3. The Notion of Moderation in Aristotle and Epicurus

As mentioned at the beginning, the concept of moderation among others attracts the attention of some philosophers and some philosophical schools of antiquity. These philosophers and philosophical schools include Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Confucius, Buddha, stoicism and skepticism (Airoboman, 2014, pp. 94-95). Here attention will be limited to the consideration of the positions of Aristotle and Epicurus in understanding the involvement of ancient philosophers in the concept.

**Aristotle:** For Aristotle, moderation leads to the achievement of the highest good. “Fundamentally, and in every situation we call anything good when it performs well its characteristic function.... Our approval or disapproval of anything may be said to express our view of what it is and what it is meant to be” (Tsanoff, 1981, p. 335). For him, man’s highest good is “the good by which all others are judged, in man’s fundamental activity, in the realization of his distinctive capacity” (Tsanoff, 1981, p. 335). The attainment of this highest good must be the product of rationality. To be able to act rationally, we must avoid extremes and maintain a balance.

Our reason has to contend with irrational desires and impulses which do not know due measure, and even when our better insight shows us the right course, we need practice to follow it reliably.... In any situation we are apt to err through excess or through deficiency. Between these counter vices of too much and too little is the virtue of just enough, the rational or golden mean (Tsanoff, 1981, p. 335). Thus, Aristotle raises moderation to the status of virtue.

In explaining moral virtues, Aristotle analyzes human personality into three elements – passions, faculties and states of character. These elements *are not in themselves blameworthy or praiseworthy.... Experience shows that the states of character which enables a person to fulfill his or her proper function aim at an intermediary point between the opposing extremes of excess and deficiency. The morally*

*virtuous person, then, always chooses to act according to the “golden mean”, but ... the mean is not the same for all individuals* (Denise, 1996, p. 39).

In buttressing the fact that the mean is not always the same for all individuals, Aristotle noted that “[i]n everything that is continuous and divisible, it is possible to take more, less, or an equal amount, and that either in terms of the thing itself or relatively to us; and that equal is an intermediate between excess and defect”. By an intermediate with the object is meant “that which is equidistant from each of the extremes, which is one and the same for all men. For instance if ten is many and two is few, six is the intermediate, taken in terms of the object, for it exceeds and is exceeded by an equal amount” (Sahakian, 1974, p. 39). This is arithmetical. But the intermediate relative to us is not to be taken in this manner. For example, if ₦10000.00 is too much for a meal for an individual at a time, and if ₦50 is too little, it does not follow that ₦5025.00, which is the intermediate is the moderate amount because it exceeds and is exceeded by an equal amount of ₦4975.00. ₦4975.00 may still be too much for a meal based on the prevailing economic situation. Mean as it means here is not necessarily an arithmetical average but striking a balance of just enough in a line of too much and too little. The sufficient amount for food for the individual here may depend on a number of factors: the cost of food, the age of the individual, the stomach capacity, the type of job the person does, his or her health conditions and some other variables.

Again, if for example, it is too much to have sex forty-nine times a month and too little to have sex once a month, it does not follow that the mean should be twenty five times in the continuum. This is because twenty five times may still be an excess. It does not also mean that once is too little. To find the mean of just enough will depend on age, interest, state of health, the honest desire of spouse, vocation and state of life. State of life because the Eunuch by his state is not able and the celibate by his or her vocation cannot because even engaging in it once will make him or her vicious. In avoiding excess and defect we seek the intermediate and

choose it; but this intermediate is not in the object but it is relative to us. It is important to note that there are instances where there can be no excess (truth, honesty) and defect or lack (corruption, adultery).

Aristotle also connects moderation with happiness. According to him, moderation is a criterion of happiness. He argues that the state of happiness of the individual results from a life governed by reason, moderation, and the actualization of potentialities. If moderation is a criterion of happiness, then it must be a virtue because whatever conduces to happiness must be virtuous.

While Plato defines virtue in terms of excellence, Aristotle defines it in terms of habitual moderation. This is why for Aristotle virtue consists in the means between two vices – excess and defect. Put simply, moral virtue is moderation between two vices or extremes - excess and defect. This mean is prescribed by right reason. Or as Aristotle puts it, the mean is defined as what “right reason prescribes” (Sahakian, 1974, p. 56). “Virtue then is a state of deliberate moral purpose consisting in a mean that is relative to us, the mean being determined by reason” (Sahakian, 1974, p. 56). Now, how do we find the mean? “To find the mean... consists in doing the right thing, to the right person, at the right time, in the right way, for the right purpose, and to the right extent” (Sahakian, 1974, pp. 56-57). According to Aristotle to locate this mean is sometimes difficult. This is why it is not easy to be virtuous. He puts it that: *it is so hard to be virtuous; for it is always hard to find the mean in anything, e.g. ...anybody can get angry ...anybody can give or spend money, but to give it to the right persons, to give the right amount of it and to give it at the right time and for the right cause and in the right way, this is not what anybody can do, nor is it easy. This is the reason why it is rare and laudable and noble to do well* (Sahakian, 1974, p. 57; Aristotle, 1990, 2.9).

While one will agree with Aristotle on this doctrine of moderation but his requirement for being virtuous is contestable because it is too

stringent. It will make it excessively difficult, if not impossible to be virtuous in moral sphere.

Since it is difficult to locate the mean in our actions, to be virtuous in moderation therefore is a Herculean task. But in Aristotle's conception, to act rightly is to do as he requires. Now what is right act? The right act is a single or isolated instance of moderation. It is the performance of the right thing, to the right person, in the right way, to the right extent, for the right purpose, at the right time, and so on. A single right act does not constitute virtue. "Virtue is a personality characteristic that results from the regular practice of the right act until it becomes a habit of the individual" (Sahakian, 1974, p. 58). What this means is that virtue or vice is not the result of a single act, but a disposition, or a regular practice of the act. This implies that it is habit that makes the individual virtuous or vicious. By extension of argument, moral virtue does not consist in inactions but in avoiding evils and doing good in ones actions; it consists in right acts that comes from moderation.

Teleology which is cardinal to Aristotle's entire philosophy is also extended by him to the good life or morality of moderation. Before anything is judged good or bad, right or wrong, first and foremost the purpose it is meant to serve must be known. Its goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness, depends on its conformity or otherwise with this purpose. This suggests that what is good or right in one situation may be bad or wrong in another. This is because one thing may serve different purposes at different times. We shall now turn attention to the views of Epicurus.

**Epicurus:** The focal point of Epicurus' ethics is peace of mind and absence of pain. For him, it is moderation that can lead to the attainment of good, undisturbed life. Regarding how this can be achieved, Epicurus argues that the good life consists in maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. This maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain "does not mean dedicating our lives to the more obvious physical pleasures such as those afforded by food, drink, and sex. Rather, Epicurus taught that the good life is a life of moderation devoted to health and peace

of mind, for he assumes that the pleasure of tranquility and serenity were the greatest pleasures available" (Barcalow, 1994, p. 74). From this analysis it is obvious that although he prescribes pleasure as the standard of morality, it is not sensual pleasure but mental and intellectual pleasure. To achieve this mental pleasure, one must be detached from excessive material propensity and be content with little possessions. This is because the accumulation of material wealth increases the sources of mental disturbance. This mental disturbance robs one of peace of mind and eventually happiness which are not only essential prelude but are also central to mental pleasure.

In the opinion of Epicurus, the pleasure we need to pursue is maximum durable pleasure, which consists in health of body and tranquility of the soul.

Epicurean hedonism would not then result in libertinism and excess, but in a calm and tranquil life; for a man is unhappy either from fear or from unlimited and vain desires, and if he but bridle these he may secure for himself the blessings of reason. The wise man will not multiply his needs since that is to multiply sources of pain; he will rather reduce his needs to the minimum (Copleston, 1962, p. 152).

To avoid multiplication of sources of pain is to reduce one's need to the minimum, that is, to locate a moderate point in the continuum of excess of needs and defect of needs; in other words, it is the satisfaction of the basic necessity of life. Even with respect to ascetism the Epicureans teach moderation. Frederick Copleston (1962) puts it that "... the Epicureans ethic leads to a moderate ascetism, self-control and independence" (p. 152). Buddha (Omogbe, 2004, pp. 62-63) actually exemplified this in his search for enlightenment. Extreme austere life did not achieve for him this enlightenment, instead, he achieved it in moderation, hence his philosophy of the midway as prelude to enlightenment.

It is obvious in Epicurus that it is only through pleasure, which results from moderation, one is able to achieve the goal of life; that is: freedom

from disturbance and its consequent life of blessedness. Emmett Barcalow argues that “Epicurus believed that the best way of life for a human being is a life focused on maintaining health and tranquility.... .. maximum pleasure and minimum pain come from a life of moderation, over indulgence in the pleasure of the senses have painful consequences” (Barcalow, 1994, p. 75). “To accustom one’s self therefore, to simple and inexpensive habits is a great ingredient in perfecting of health, and make a man free from hesitation with respect to the necessary uses of life” (Copleston, 1962, pp. 152-153). It is evident from the above that for Epicurus, moderation leads to perfect health condition. It makes a man to appreciate the necessary use of life, that is: not to refrain from satisfying the basic necessity or comfort of life.

Epicurus sees the need to choosing and living a life of moderation. He prefers this life of moderation because if the desire for physical pleasure is not controlled or subjected to moderation, it becomes insatiable. Insatiable desires lead to frustration and pain-mental disturbance. Since insatiability leads to mental qualms, one should be satisfied with moderate possessions. He avers that “[t]he wealth demanded by nature is both limited and easily procured; that demanded by idle imaginings stretches on to infinity” (Epicurus, 1940, p. 36; Barcalow, 1994, p. 75). Since human wants cannot be satisfied because when present wants are satisfied more wants arise, the best thing to do is to focus on acquiring and satisfying basic necessities rather than luxury. The satisfaction of basic necessities does not require much work as the acquisition of luxuries requires.

In the opinion of Epicurus, although pleasure is necessary for the good life, “[e]normous quantities of pleasure are unnecessary for the good life; continence followed by moderate satisfaction will suffice; danger lurks beyond moderation” (Sahakian, 1974, pp. 25-26). To live a pleasant life is to be free from anxiety and possess the sweetness of mental serenity. He argues that mental pleasure is superior to sensual or material pleasures. Even when we possess the greatest of human needs, this possession and anything that is associated with unlimited

desires cannot end the disturbance of the soul nor can it create true joy. Hence one should only try to satisfy the necessary desires. It is this satisfaction of necessary desires that will make a man independent in all things because “in reference to what is enough for nature every possession is riches, but in reference to unlimited desires even the greatest wealth is not riches but poverty” (Epicurus, 1926; Albert, 1969, p. 73). What produces the good life is within the reach of all humans. This is the keeping of desires at minimum.

The preceding arguments show clearly that Epicurus does not suggest or prescribe elimination of desires. Rather, his contention is that desires should not be eliminated completely nor should they be allowed to develop fully. This is because some desires are natural and thus necessary, while others are artificial and thus unnecessary. The artificial desires are not only unnecessary to health and tranquility or peaceful, happy and pleasurable living, they are destructive to them. The natural desires are the desires that must be fulfilled to preserve bodily health and mental peace. The satisfaction of these desires, in addition to the freedom from pain leads to happiness, the goal of life.

Like Aristotle, Epicurus raises moderation to the status of virtue. According to him, virtue is a condition of tranquility of the soul. In his conception, virtue leads to pleasure and happiness. “Virtue such as simplicity, moderation, temperance and cheerfulness, are much more conducive to pleasure and happiness than unbridled luxury, feverish ambition and so on” (Copleston, 1962, p. 153). Elsewhere, it is put this way: “the hallmark of virtue is tranquility, the more desirable virtues being cheerfulness, simplicity, and moderation” (Sahakian, 1974, p. 26).

Even the Sceptics and the Stoics recommend moderation to enable one achieve happiness and a life free from the disturbances of the world. This is a common denominator which runs through the thoughts of various philosophers and philosophical schools involved in moderation in antiquity. Having made some representations of the views of some philosophers about

moderation, attention will now be devoted to how and why moderation should be put into concrete use in daily living.

#### 4. Moderation in Practice

The task here is to examine and exemplify how the applications of moderation can improve human wellbeing through some fields of human discourses. Focus will be restricted but inexhaustibly to politics and dispensation of justice, and then later and in details to environmental ethics.

**Politics:** Just as moderation is a personal virtue, so also it is a political virtue. But some individuals among which are moralists and religionists have disapproved of the desires for political power. This is probably because power is often misconceived to corrupt. But if human society must continue, if people must be organized, if people must cooperate and cohabit, if there are alignments in human needs and interests, and if there are conflicts in these human interests, then the exercise of power is inevitable. It is undeniable that some “people do attempt to have power over others viciously and irresponsibly. Such ambitions for power are tempered in cunningness and the achievement of its ends. Yet there can also be a will to power that allows one to recognize the claims of others, and to have a sense of oneself as a person among persons” (Casey, 1990, p. 141).

Therefore, the exercise of power is important in achieving some honest results and in resolving some problems and issues. For instance, some individuals who are able to identify some socio-political as well as other problems, and have sincere desire to resolve them may be constrained because they do not have the political power to do so. Therefore, to be able to do so, there is, in the first instance, the need for political power. The desire for power itself is not bad; it is the inordinate and insatiable desire for it that is despicable - an extreme or political vice of excess. A will to power is not and should not be conceived as intrinsically evil. John Casey (1990) argues that “[i]t is central to all human beings.... It can certainly be a human strength, going with imaginations and greatness of mind,

and not something contemptible. It cannot be simply ruled out as human excellence” (p. 141). He added that as a matter of fact, ambition and love of power “are not contemptible... and childish dispositions, even if they are dangerous and disturbing. In a public setting they may not even appear repulsive” (Casey, 1990, 142). It is the inordinate desire for it that is repulsive and contemptible. If properly and moderately sought and used, it constitutes virtue because there must be exercise of power to achieve cohesion in human and societal engagements.

Erroneously, some people abstain from politics because in their thinking they want to be just, honest, moral, respectable and so on. But apolitical disposition or the suppression of desire for political power is not a virtue. Rather it is political inaction. In this case, virtue consists not in political inaction but in seeking political power with fairness and using it appropriately when acquired. It consists in actions properly directed. A man is not and cannot be considered honest, just, good, clement, moral, noble, generous, and so on, until he overcomes their vices of dishonesty, injustice, evil, cruelty, immorality, ignoble, miserliness and so on, respectively. He must also have positive disposition towards these values and constant habit of doing them. The point being made here is that a man is not virtuous unless he overcomes vices. This is why apolitical disposition cannot be morally justified in a political community. If everybody in a political community is apolitical, such a community will be in disarray: chaotic, barbaric, anarchical, disordered, conflictual and insecure. These are some reasons for thinking not only of the blemish, burden and inconveniences of a just political engagement but also of the danger of insecurity, chaos and anarchy of political failure due to apolitical attitude.

To be able to address social and political problems in the contemporary world, there is the need to be politically involved but in moderation in this political desire, and in seeking for entrusted power and authority for governance. On the one hand, excessive desire for political power can make man unjust, vicious and malicious. This is a vice of excess. On the other

hand, to completely lack the desire is another vice, and in this case, of deficiency.

Thus, it is improper to suppress ambition for political power. Things seem not to be working in most political communities, not because politics is a dirty game as often misconceived, but because people of good character and sincere intention extricate themselves from the game, and then it is hijacked and played by dirty men in a dirty manner after becoming the masters and lords of the game. Edmund Burke once said that the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing. If good men abstain and refuse to do something, evil men will become actors; and so evil will triumph leading to vices and possible breach of political order through apathy, disloyalty, insecurity, lack of trust and possible emergence of socio-political insurgences. Then deception, oppression and repression become norms as instrument of social control. In this way, the essence of political community is defeated, while sorrow, poverty and deprivation reign amidst abundance, as the dividends of government and governance.

If we must have a good political and social structure, good men must be politically involved. Aristotle once said that “man is a political animal”. To suppress this political tendency is to act in contrary to human nature. Therefore, virtuous men need to be politically involved but in moderation in the desire and quest for acquisition of political power and in the exercise of this power. The ambition for political power need to be moderate or else, the seekers become unjust like the unjust villain. These are probably why Milan Kundera (2012) puts it that: “[e]xtremism means borders beyond which life ends, and a passion for extremism, in art and in politics, is a veiled longing for death”. This is a clear warning of the danger of taking to political extreme and why we must embrace political desire with moderation and be just with political power.

**Dispensation of Justice:** In the dispensation of justice, punishment and reward should be appropriate to the nature and degree of offences and good deeds respectively. For example,

cruelty, that is, the desire to make people suffer should not be the focal point in the dispensation of justice; otherwise people will suffer unjustly, beyond the degree and nature of the offences they commit. This will be injustice in the dispensation of justice. On the other hand, although clemency, that is, the inclination to be merciful, lenient, forgiving, or compassionate is not intrinsically a vice, it need not be over extended or else, it becomes a vice. Punishment should be appropriate and proportionate to the degree of offences committed. Those who dispense justice should not for the sake of clemency ignore the deterrent efficacy of a just punishment. If clemency is to be upheld in all situations, then murderers, arsonists, assassins, looters, kidnappers or hostage takers and perpetrators of other crimes will not be punished or reprimanded appropriately or commensurately. This will encourage social vices, and throw society into disarray because perpetrators will take undue solace in and undue advantage of clemency. Plea bargain, as applicable in Nigeria is a clear example. If offenders are not punished according to the degree and nature of their offences, we should not expect honesty, accountability, transparency, docility, and the like in public and private life in corrupt and morally bankrupt societies. The central focus here is that in punishment there should be a just measure. In the dispensation of justice, therefore, justice would consist in moderation or appropriate reward and punishment. As George MacDonald puts it, “[m]oderation is the basis of justice” (2012). And in Plato’s thinking, justice results from moderation. “Justice is right distribution of emphasis in valuation and choice, giving each aspect or interest of our nature its due recognition, without neglect and without excess” (Tsanoff, 1981, p. 334). This concept of moderation supervenes with the environment; and it is relevant to its preservation.

## 5. Some Ancient Reflections on the Environment

Since ancient period, philosophers have been concerned about the environment, its challenges and care. Here, attention will be limited to the views of Plato and Han Fei Tzū. For instance,

Plato lamented land degradation that denuded the hills of Greece in the fourth century B.C. He argued that Greece was once blessed with fertile soil and clothed with abundant forests of fine trees. As the trees were cut to build houses and ships, heavy rain washed the soil into the sea, leaving only a rocky “skeleton of a body wasted by disease. Springs and rivers dried up while farming became all but impossible” (Cunningham and Cunningham, 2012, p. 20.) This implies that the human misuse of nature is not unique to modern times. It also implies the consequences that could result from immoderate use of available resources in nature.

Ancient philosophers were also aware of the impact of overpopulation on natural environment and social order. For example, the Ancient Chinese philosopher and legalist Han Fei Tzū, who lived between 300 and 200 B.C, was concerned with, and philosophized regarding the impacts of population explosion on nature and the consequent social disorder. He reflected on the problem which population growth has for a world of limited resources. He traces the problems of scarcity, poverty, poor standard of living, hunger, and social vices to population increase (Airoboman, 2017A, pp. 43-44). According to him, it is not human wickedness that is responsible for social ills but the inadequacy of the resources of nature to meet the need of an increasing human population. He argues that: *in the past when men did not plough, they had plenty of natural kernels and grains to eat. When women did not weave, they had plenty of furs and feathers to wear. Though not engaged in labour, they lived on rich food. All that was possible because men were few and things were many (italicized mine). Therefore, there was no quarrel among the people. So it was that even without large rewards and heavy punishments, the people could be kept in peace. Now, suppose there is a man who has five sons, each of whom in turn has five. Then, even during the life of the grandfather, there are already twenty-five descendants. Suddenly, therefore, men are many and things few. The people, though they work hard, live on poor food. This leads to quarrels among the people.... Thus, the moderns strive against one another not because they are wicked*

*but that things are few* (Chai with Chai, 1961, p. 217).

From this submission, we can infer that Han Fei Tzū would blame some social ills of today, such as bribery, corruption, embezzlement, kidnapping, oil bunkering, environmental degradation, and other similar ills of our time, on limited natural resources and the inability to put available ones to moderate use. This shows the evident connection between environmental scarcity and social disorder. Now, what is environmental ethics,? and how can human interaction with nature be mediated with the virtue of moderation?

## 6. Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics studies human moral obligation to the natural environment, including the scope and justifications of such obligations. It can also be conceived as a discipline, which studies the ideal moral relations which should exist between humans and the rest of the natural environment, as well as the extent and reasons or bases for such human moral relations. Eugene Hargrove puts it that environmental ethics is the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship of human beings to the environment and its nonhuman contents (Hargrove, 1996, p. 77). It is the part of philosophy which considers the extension of the boundaries of the conventional or the traditional anthropocentric ethics from human beings to the other parts of the natural world. It offers “the ethical principles governing” the relationships which “determine our duties, obligations, and responsibilities with regard to the Earth’s natural environment and all the animals and plants that inhabit it” (Taylor, 2011, p. 3). Environmental ethics can also be considered as the theory and practice about appropriate concern, values and duties regarding the natural world. While classical ethics is concerned with people relating to people in justice and love, environmental ethics starts with the human concern for a quality environment (Rolston III, 2003, p. 517). Environmental ethics is not only “preoccupied with the value of the environment or nature as a whole” (De Roose, 1987, p. 4); it is also concerned with man’s moral treatment of animals and plants,

both individuals and species, as well as the non-living part of the natural environment. While traditional ethics is concerned with the way people relate to people in a moral way, environmental ethics considers the extension of morality from human beings to the non-human parts of the natural environment and future generations.

One of the debates in environmental ethics is concerned with the aspect(s) of nature which has moral worth and whether such moral worth is intrinsic or instrumental. This would determine the kind and extent of morality that should be accorded such part of nature. This kind of moral debate concerning nature and the resultant moral attribution to the non-human environment is relatively new, compared to the history of ethics in philosophy. Most dominant in the philosophic arena till contemporary time is the conventional anthropocentric ethics, which considers morality only in relation to human beings. Since the emergence of the consciousness of moral considerations of, and its subsequent extension to non-human parts of nature, thinkers have also been concerned with the consideration of extending morality to future people who do not yet exist.

Significant attention in environmental ethics as an academic discipline in contemporary time results mainly from the threat, which results from anthropogenic impact on nature (Airoboman, 2017A, pp. 32-38). Such threats result from the problems of pollution, desertification, stratospheric ozone depletion, biodiversity drawdown, global warming, toxic pollution, deforestation, ocean degradation, arable land loss, urban sprawl, among others (Bender, 2003, pp. 29-62; Airoboman, 2017A, pp. 41-56; Airoboman, 2017B, p. 150; Jamieson, 2008, pp. 8-13; Asthana and Asthana, 2012, pp. 8-13). Annabel Rodda (1991, pp. 8-44) chronicles such problems and their causes and effects. According to James Speth and Peter Haas (2006, pp. 44-51), three of the most obvious causes or drivers of deterioration are population, affluence and technology.

## **7. Moderation in Environmental Ethics**

Although there are serious threats resulting from human interaction with nature at alarming rate (The World's Worst Disaster, 1997), which may seem to justify prohibition of interaction with nature, but a relapse into the primitive stage of man will not do contemporary man any good either, since he has tasted the pleasantness and benefits of civilization, which result from this same interaction with nature.

Jean Jacque Rousseau would have concurred to this view, if he were still alive. After philosophizing that civilization and learning are the origins of moral decadence in the world, Rousseau did not suggest a return to the state of nature, but a way out of the existing predicament. Since interaction has liberated man from the hazardous and burdensome mode of survival, and has swayed him away from a life of innocence, simplicity and minimal needs and satisfactions, it would be difficult, if not impossible to return to that state where life would be boredom, burdensome, anachronistic and uncongenial to him. Humans, therefore, need to make a balance between the unwholesome, brutish, voracious and insensitive exploitation of nature, and the blatant rejection of intervention with nature. Hence, there is the need for moderation to ensure the preservation and sustainability of the environment and its resources and also to ensure genial living simultaneously.

In making decisions concerning the environment, we are faced with many challenging questions. Some of such questions are whether we should continue depleting nature for the sake of only immediate human consumption and to put our future life and those of our progeny in jeopardy. Since we know that we can cause massive and permanent damage to natural resources and the ecosystems, how we can cause them, and how we can prevent or remedy them, such knowledge exacts a moral obligation of moderation on us "to act with care, foresight and, at times, with forbearance and constraint" (Jeffery, 2005, pp. 105-106) to avert the damage. Part of the reasons for environmental ethics is to provide remedy to damages already done to the environment, and to avert further damage in future interaction.

This is because if the environment is ravaged and unprotected, the world would not exist as we know it now. It would not also be genial for us and for future people. Environmental ethics therefore, prescribes how we ought to relate prudently with the environment to avoid abuse and the consequent danger for both human beings and the general environment.

In philosophy, virtue ethics is not concerned with the prescriptive engagement or character of traditional ethical theories such as utilitarianism, duty ethics, divine command theory, situation ethics, and so on. Rather, it is concerned with the goodness of character. It is concerned with what a good person would do at any time, as a moral point of reference. Environmental virtue ethics is an emerging issue in environmental ethics. Some of its proponents rely on the approaches to virtue ethics in traditional ethics. They attempt to explain “what is wrong with environmental destruction and what is good about environmental preservation” (McShane, 2009: 416; Sandler and Cafaro, 2005; Sandler, 2007). They are committed to showing why people should act in environmentally responsible way. They also aim at bringing to fore the virtues manifest in environmental protection (McShane, 2009, p. 416). In what follows, the concept of moderation as virtue will be considered *pari passu* with environment, and in relation to environment ethics and environment conservation.

Felix Airoboman argues that there have been ambivalent views regarding human interaction with the natural environment and the consequences arising therefrom - the promise of earthly paradise and the fear of imminent and inevitable doom. This ambivalence calls for moderate interaction with nature and moderate use of environmental resources. Despite the warnings and fears of consequent danger of exhaustion of natural resources and the consequent collapse of the environment, there seems to be the need to continue to interaction with nature but with caution to ensure its continuity. In the first instance, avoidance or prohibition of interaction with the environment will prevent man from making a congenial living because the treasure of nature, which will make life better for humans, are not made easily

available to him by nature; but they are hidden in nature. For instance, [p]eople have died of various diseases before herbs or other medicaments were discovered to cater for such diseases. People have died of cold and wild beasts before sources of warmth and shelter were discovered or invented by humans. Most of the solutions to the problems confronting mankind in his” daily living “are found through interaction with nature. This implies that the solutions to most of the predicaments that have afflicted mankind in ages are hidden in nature. These solutions can only be unraveled by reasonable interaction... The result of interaction makes life congenial and safe. It makes the world a better place for human habitation. Complete avoidance of interaction with nature would make life boring, unsafe, unprogressive, unproductive, uncivilized, and so on (Airoboman, 2014, p. 95).

Nevertheless, excessive, careless, brutish, egoistic and callous exploitation of natural resources will deplete it unprecedentedly to peril, and this will spell doom for humanity. “Today science and technology are human inventions and they are effective tools at human disposal used to interact with the environment. Now that humans have discovered the key to the secrets of nature (science and technology) he must exercise caution, or else he will wipe out not only his object of existence but also his very existence itself” (Airoboman, 2014, p. 95). Anatoly Rakitov noted that today, there is *the real, actual complex, contradictory and extremely dangerous situation that has come about in the modern world as a result of the disturbance of the ecological balance, environmental pollution, the danger of exhaustion of natural resources, and the prospect of social degradation of mankind as a result of the destructive consequences of scientific and technological advance* (Rakitov, 1989, p. 230).

He argues that “[m]an’s effect on his environment has become so destructive in recent decades through the great increase in the power of modern equipment and the building of huge cities, roads, industrial enterprises, and export systems, that people have begun to talk about the death of nature and the crisis of the

environment” (Rakitov, 1989, p. 197). Such negative consequences from the various environmental feedbacks, which result from human activities, threaten the continued survival of mankind and the natural environment. Mankind may wipe out his existence, as well as the object of his existence, with his own activities, unless he exercises cautions.

The implication of the preceding view is that unless humans are able to use science, technology and other means of interaction at his disposal with nature wisely, there would be threat of danger including the danger of extinction. By his own invention, man may become an endangered species. This is why, for now, the victory of science and technology, or more generally the perceived human victory over nature need not to be over-celebrated because these same tools or modes of interaction with nature are capable of inflicting irreversible doom when excessively, carelessly, brutishly and unwisely used. In short, they are capable of wiping out both human and non-human existence.

As a result of this diametric opposition between the hopes and fear of human interactions with the natural environment, Felix Airoboman argues for the need to be moderate in this interaction to make life congenial and at the same time sustain the environment and avert the doom that threatens from its excessive exploitation. He calls for eco-wisdom or ecosophy, which as he describes it, “involves moderate interaction with nature to ensure sustainable development” (Airoboman, 2014, p. 96). It involves a transition from egoism to eco-ism in our dealings with the natural environment. This means the focus in our relations with nature should not solely be self-centered or self-interest induced or anthropocentrically motivated but also in the prime interest of the natural environment and its sustainability.

## 8. Conclusion

Moderation is relevant in our use of material possession and in our interaction with the natural environment. The habit of moderation can be

beneficial in concrete living. Since the world and the conditions of human existence are dynamic, one should not expect constancy in this world, in these conditions of human life and in the environment we interact with. Charles Okpei (1999) argues that “[t]he stupor of good fortune may not last forever. When the tide of such short-lived fortune ebbs, one is forced to return to square one.... Many cannot avoid the style of living which their bonus cannot sustain for long” (p. 88). Hence there is always the need to strike a balance by saving for the rainy day. There is also the need to strike a balance between brutish exploitation and complete prohibition of the use of natural resources and interaction with the natural environment to ensure its continuity and our genial living. It is the wisdom of moderation that will enable the state or individual to keep surplus (without squander) in time of abundance.

The individual or nation that is not moderate in spending, in the exploitation and use of natural resources or that is involved in callous, unrestrained use of nature’s resources, or that is unable to articulate its values and needs in time of abundance and ensures it saves for rainy day to avoid impoverishment in future is “like the river which flows very fast during the rains and so leaves its bed dry after the rains, because it has poured all the water it got from the rain into the sea” (Okpei, 1999, p. 88). They will have the prize of prodigality to pay. Such people or nations find themselves later in penury, confusion, regret, and chaos, among others. Living a moderate life involves a life style that is not beyond one’s means and environment capacity. We need to avoid excessive intervention in nature to avoid running it dry. We must avoid extremes to ensure genial living and maintain sustainability. As noted by Aristotle in his *Politics*, “the correct use of material property involves both temperance and liberality” (Stocker, 1990, p. 133), just as the correct use of the environment implies a mediation of temperance and liberality, that is, moderate, sustainable intervention. Both absolute rejection and blatant, unbridled approval of interaction with nature would consist in vices of defects and excess respectively at both ends. Liberality is a means

or moderation between miserliness and extravagancy. Hence liberality can be conceived as a virtue. The ability to apply moderation appropriately to concrete issues is a virtue. It is a practical demonstration of moral wisdom.

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