



# On The Transcendence of Marx’s Humanized View of Nature Over Non-anthropocentrism Ontology of Wild Nature

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## Abstract

The ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism which is reflected in the concept of “wild nature” in its philosophical ontology hopes to solve ecological and environmental problems through “the absence of people”. The original intention of establishing the ontology of “wild nature” was to save people from the deteriorating ecological environment, but in the end, it fell into a logical dilemma of destroying people. However, the starting point and ultimate purpose of solving ecological and environmental problems should be based on “real people” and “real society”. Based on the historical materialist position, Marx’s humanized view of nature not only advocates the necessity of the naturalization of humans and the practicality of humanization of nature, but also provides scientific guidance for getting out of the ontological dilemma of “wild nature” in the ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism.

**Key words:** The ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism; “Wild nature” ontology; Marx’s humanized view of nature

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## INTRODUCTION

As the opposite of the ecological culture of anthropocentrism, the ecological culture of non-

anthropocentrism calls for a new ethical turn. It tries to reveal the wrong guidance behind the ecological crisis from a non-human perspective to solve ecological problems in the post-industrial era and change human’s arrogant attitude towards nature. However, the ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism has faced a lot of criticism since its emergence. The criticism actually question the ontology of the ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism. For emphasizing the importance of “wild nature”, the ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism attempts to turn the object into subject in traditional ethics. Therefore, the ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism often faces criticism of traditional ethics, including ignoring the intermediary of society and practice and specific factors that nature generates in social history, putting nature outside the historical dimension and presenting the historical nihilism in terms of historical perspective. Based on real human beings and society, Marx’s humanized view of nature integrates “natural history” and “historical nature” into the dialectics of human practice and provides scientific guidance for getting out of the dilemma of the ontology of “wild nature” of non-anthropocentrism.

## 1. NON-ANTHROPOCENTRISM ONTOLOGY

In the ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism, the concept of “wild nature” is considered to be “areas and ecosystems that are minimally disturbed or undeveloped by humans” (Chen,2009,p.153). Based on cutting-edge discoveries in emerging sciences such as ecology and quantum science, non-anthropocentrists has constructed “wild nature” and highlighted the pre-existence of nature compared with human beings. This pre-existence proves the ethics that human beings, as the children of nature, should serve nature and deduce the necessity of maintaining nature from human transformation and destruction. “Throughout the various claims of

environmental ethics, whether it is its intrinsic value theory of nature, its practical methodology of reverence for life, or its holistic epistemology of anti-scientific way of thinking, all of them take the original ecological view of nature as the 'axiom' or 'starting point'" (Sun,2005,p.48). In other words, "wild nature" is not only the ontology on the philosophical pedestal of non-anthropocentrism but also the ultimate demand expected by the ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism.

### 1.1 The Pre-existence of "Wild Nature"

In terms of the pre-existence of "wild nature", modern cosmology and physics have opened up the new understanding of the universe with theories such as relativity and the Big Bang, which have made human beings realize that they are living in an ever-evolving cosmic story and that all the life existing on the earth is a product of the time-longitudinal evolution of the universe-earth-life, and that all of it belongs to the overall story of the co-facilitated emergence of time and space. Billions of species on earth have woven the spatial and temporal field for the birth of the human species with their infinite creativity, together with geographical conditions, cosmic energies (such as solar energy), and so on. Non-anthropocentrism accordingly views nature as an existence that predates human existence, humans as a product of nature's evolution, and believes that humans should maintain nature's self-existing wilderness state without human intervention. Therefore, in both the physiological and existential significance, human beings are subordinate to nature and should not destroy its primitive state, or else they will bring about their own destruction. For example, Ralston, the founder of the "natural value theory", once said: "Nature is an evolutionary ecosystem, and humans are only later entrants; the main values of the earth's ecosystem (good) have long been before the emergence of human beings." (Ralston,2000, P.4)In his view, "wild nature" embodies the integrity of nature and intrinsic value of nature. The intrinsic value of nature does not depend on human evaluation systems. Ralston clearly pointed out that human beings should turn philosophy to the wild at this level of thinking, which means that they should begin to realize that nature has its own value.

### 1.2 The Systematicness of "Wild Nature"

In terms of the systematization of "wild nature", the principle of multiple effects in ecological science reveals that ecosystems are complex organisms and that everything has a unique ecological significance in its location. Therefore, "the more distinctive the individual is, the more necessary and valuable it is to the whole, and the more the individual needs the whole in order to exist." (Sackse,1991, P.144)For example, Leopold, the founder of "ecocentrism", believed that the branches of ecosystems such as the land, rivers, mountains, and the atmosphere that exist within the earth are the constituent organs and

components of the earth's overall ecosystem and at the same time, the branches of ecosystems "compete and cooperate each other." (Leopold, 2014, p.158) Aaron Ness, the founder of "deep ecology", views nature as the seamless web of countless basic biological elements. All existences are considered to be knots in this "seamless web or field of inner relations" (Lei, 2000, p.156), and there is no clear-cut boundary between human beings and other existences in the seamless web. A person with deep ecological consciousness should directly see certain value relationships between these beings, and not just a simple reflection like a mirror image in the human eyes.

### 1.3 The Self-organization of "Wild Nature"

In terms of the self-organization of "wild nature", non-anthropocentrism believes that nature, like humans, has subjectivity and dynamism, which is embodied in nature's ability to self-regulate and self-repair. Modern science has revealed that all things in nature are products of specific conditions and it is the generation, development, and evolution of its own self-organizing forces. In this sense, the abundance and unfolding of nature's relationships prove that nature has a self-regulating system to realize its own "interests, desires, needs, and well-being in relation to its own rise and fall." (Tanaka, 2001, p.162) Although nature is the mother of life, it has been eliminated and sifted out countless species and beings in the course of its long evolutionary journey. At the same time, nature autonomously clean up the lower life forms in order to provide suitable environments for the higher life forms. In this evolutionary process, all kinds of life are reshaping nature in their own unique ways, making nature a living system. Therefore, non-anthropocentrism believes that human beings should not interfere with or interrupt nature's own evolutionary process but should allow nature to exist in its own ways. Nature will regulate and manage itself according to its own laws. For example, Ralston argues that the self-systematics of "wild nature" determines "its ability to drive a complete and glorious history" and to evolve "designedly" towards its own higher values. (Tanaka,2001, P.162)

To sum up, "wild nature"constitutes the ontological foundation of the ecological culture of non-anthropocentrism with its natural attributes such as pre-existence, systematicness, and self-organization.

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## 2. DILEMMA OF NON-ANTHROPOCENTRISM ONTOLOGY OF "WILD NATURE"

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"Wild nature" ignores the social and practical qualities of human beings and one-sidedly examines nature in isolation from the practical activities of human beings, thus it disconnect "natural history" from "historical nature". This has led to an unsolvable logical paradox in its reasoning.

## 2.1 “Wild Nature” is Illusory One

“Wild nature” considers nature to be pre-existent, and the source and foundation of human beings. Therefore, human beings are essentially part of nature. No matter how the rational thinking of human beings develops, it cannot be separated from the human body, this means the real human being does not exist and the natural world itself only exists. In short, “wild nature” is “the substrate from which life is hatched and the place which man is produced.” (Ralston, 2000, p.210) Whether it is the uncontaminated “wild” in Ralston’s view, the “land” in Leopold’s eyes that radiates maternal light, or “Walden Lake” that Thoreau loved, they are nature that all abstract and separate from human beings. Obviously, the way of non-anthropocentrism argument is flawed. They overemphasize the commonality between nature and humans, and use the existence of commonality to justify the rationality of “wild nature”. However, the existence of commonality does not eliminate the actual difference between human beings and nature, and it is the existence of the non-identical difference between human beings and nature that establishes human beings as the only moral subjects.

The existentialist philosopher Heidegger’s understanding of nature is very similar to that of “wild nature” in this thesis. In his view, the existence of the subject is more fundamental than “common exposure” between the subject and the original world. Thus, Heidegger emphasizes the need to rethink the meaning of nature with Leibniz’s criterion, that “nature is life, refers to the overall existence of the being” (Heidegger, 2018, p.313). The emergence of any being is realized on the basis of nature, like the Dasein, which is the origin and source of all beings. Human beings, as mortals, are fundamentally incapable of transcending the prerequisite status of nature. Nature, in Heidegger’s sense, abstracts humans from all historical connections. Nature places humans in an isolated state, and make humans submit to the so-called “‘historically capable’ concept” that he weaves. (Tillich, 1999, p.111) However, for Marx, this priori, abstract nature and “wild nature” is simply a beautiful fairy tale and a metaphysical illusion in the minds of humans. Even the assumptions of the minds belong to the practical activities of human beings, because “since you raise the question of the creation of nature and man, you also abstract man and nature.....This is meaningless” (Marx, 2009, p.196).

In short, “wild nature” is a very harmful eco-fascist approach that seeks to eliminate real human beings from the irrelevant, abstract, and priori natural world. This absurd and brutal ecological totalitarianism is, in fact, the elimination of the sons of nature in its name of nature.

## 2.2 “Wild Nature” is Agnostic

The philosophical connotation of “wild nature” is very similar to that of the substantial in Spinoza’s philosophy

and “being-in-itself” in the sense of Kant’s priori philosophy. In Kant’s view, “being-in-itself” in the ontological realm leads the human world of phenomena, and human beings could never reach the ontological realm from the phenomenal one. Human beings, however, can grasp the appearance of the external world by means of innate forms of knowing (such as the categories of space and time) so that all the things that human beings know are fixed by perceptual forms. However, in this sense, humans are trapped by the limitations of their own rationality and only know what they can know, resulting in an inability to fully and completely know “being-in-itself” of the ontological realm. Thus, for human beings, “being-in-itself” is both the source and the ultimate destination of cognition.

Then, the abstraction of “wild nature” is not different from the one of “being-in-itself”, and real people can never even touch or think about nature at the “wild nature”. In Husserl’s phenomenological theory, objects in epistemology are constructed by people according to the intentional activities of preconsciousness. The object itself is thinkable only insofar as it concerns consciousness, and it is absurd to replace the being of the empirical object itself with a selectively inexperienced being. In other words, it is false that the leap from intentional content to intentional object cannot be realized from apparent intentionality. Thus, the self-existent, original “wild nature” is illusory and unthinkable as a metaphysical mirage. People’s connection with the external world can only be realized by real physical and mental activity. The key to solving the subject-object problem does not lie in ignoring the differences and constructing monism or solipsism with commonality as the pivot but in providing a communication scene between the subject and the object with the help of an intermediary as a bridge. In Marx’s view, this intermediary is equal to practice. All the characteristics of “wild nature” are abstracted by non-anthropocentrism through real activities. As a concept of nature, as soon as “wild nature” only first form a cognitive object of the non-anthropocentrists’ cognition, this cognitive object can be transformed into their subjective image, on the basis of which they can form the cognition of various characteristics of “wild nature”.

Thus, the ontology of “wild nature” faces a dilemma. Non-anthropocentrism is unable to account for the forces that shaped them as human beings or a nature. If they are completely shaped by nature, where does their idea of “wild nature” as belonging to the human mind come from? If they were shaped entirely by human society, then their “wild nature” would be self-destruction without proof.

## 2.3 “Wild Nature” Belongs to Objective Naturalism

Based on the latest findings of ecology, non-anthropocentrism takes “wild nature”, which is self-

existing, primitive, and uninvolved with human beings, as the ontological basis of their ecological culture and demands that people yield to the "wild nature". Then, this kind of "wild nature" is similar to the objective naturalism of the enlightenment period, which is actually a kind of "philosophical thought and viewpoint that explains all phenomena by natural causes or natural principles" (Feng, 1992, p.607).

As the master of objective naturalism, Feuerbach, like the non-anthropocentrism, overemphasizes that people are passive creatures of nature, "nature itself appears to humans as a sacred entity, presented to humans, and imposed upon them." (Feuerbach, 2010, p.7) The manifestation of human initiative becomes an inferior means of earning a living in Feuerbach, and the human being in Feuerbach's view may not be called a human being, but only an animal, because the value and uniqueness of the human being are obliterated. The actual needs of human beings are confined to the "ideal of the pigsty", they only know how to eat, drink, reproduce, and enjoy themselves. Nature under this non-anthropocentrism view of nature represented by Feuerbach is stagnant, frozen, devoid of human activities, and dissolving history into the void. To a certain extent, the "wild nature" argument of pre-existence and self-organization also conforms to the prior nature in Hegel's logic, which means human's self-consciousness is originally a part of the self-consciousness that nature places on human beings, but the self-consciousness of nature is destroyed because of people's labor. Thus, in order to avenge nature, it seeks back its own self-consciousness in people, and people have to ask nature to reclaim their self-consciousness. Such an argument is, in Marx's view, "a game of spinning on one's heels" (Marx, 1960, p.559). In order to prove that "wild nature" is a divine supreme being, the non-anthropocentrism, like Hegel, first set up human beings as small and humble existences, and then in the light of deep ecological consciousness, they sublimate themselves to the level of the realm of heavenly-human unity in which the integration of the object and the self that "what is in the universe is his own business". (Lei, 2012, p.45).

Therefore, in this philosophical purport, the ontology of "wild nature" equates human beings with natural objects such as "lice" and places the realization of human beings' happiness in the mysterious power of nature. However, since the time when ancestors used their hands, legs, and other natural forces to create the first tool to satisfy their own needs and process natural objects, human beings have transcended the pure animal world and have begun to carve their own historical imprints in the nature. This fact shows that human existence is a human practice, not a "gift" of nature.

### 3. MARX'S HUMANIZED NATURAL WISDOM THAT TRANSCENDS THE NON-ANTHROPOCENTRISM ONTOLOGY OF "WILD NATURE"

Marx's natural view of humanization witnesses the wildness and spontaneity of nature, as well as the personality and society of nature, through the objective activities of human beings. It not only affirms the pre-existence and organic nature but also affirms the subjectivity, dynamism, and transcendence of people. The realization of natural attributes and human nature can be dialectically unified through the practical activities of human beings, and the "natural history" and "historical nature" have reached a concrete and historical unity, thus stepping out of the dilemma of the non-anthropocentrism of "wild nature" ontology.

#### 3.1 Nature is Objectified One

Unlike "wild nature", which simply reduces nature to an abstract, non-human, and self-existing sense, Marx's humanized view of nature holds that nature is not merely wilderness in its original state but also a real and sensible object of people, which entering into the field of vision and scope of practice as an object of sensible activity and an object of sensible cognition. In fact, any natural being must be an objective existence in order to be included in the realm of human cognition and transformation. The non-anthropocentric's view of nature only stays in the antecedent dimension of "wild nature" and refuses to accept that nature is transformed by human objectifying activities. As Marx criticized Hegel's conception of nature, "what is understood abstractly, what is self-conscious, and what is defined to be separate from human, are also nothing for human." (Marx, 2009, P.220)

Although Marx, like non-anthropocentric, recognized that nature is prior and self-organizing, Marx realized nature on a deeper level as more objective, personal, and social. For Marx, respecting the prior and self-organization of nature is only for the purpose of enabling human beings to better understand and transform nature. Since ancient times, the nature we were in has never been a impersonal "wild nature", but rather a nature that is impregnated with the essential characteristics of self-existing and conscious sensual activities of human beings, a nature that carries human values in it, and a nature of history. Thus, "wild nature" can only acquire its own realistic and objective significance through human cognition and transformation, and only nature mediated by human object activity can become the sensual world of human reality.

In fact, the idea of "wild nature" put forward by non-anthropocentrism does not follow the trends. As early as the 19th century, "the true socialists", represented by Rudolf Matei, advocated an abstract, non-historical, and

mystical view of nature, calling on people to abandon the dirty and ugly real world and return to the pure and beautiful natural world to find happiness. The true socialists believed that human beings could automatically achieve happiness by following the example of the lilies of the field, abandoning the objectification of nature and embracing it, and that “only natural things are true things, and true things are moral things.” (Marx, 1960, p.545) Humans can only achieve happiness by surviving in a comfortable way in pristine nature, so “why should we divide it into people, animals, plants, and stones? We are all objects!” (Marx, 1960, p.551) In response to “the assertion of this absurd statement”, Marx sarcastically said, “Look at the lilies of the field! See how the goats devour them ... See how the shepherdess and assman trample on them in their lechery!” (Marx, 1960, p.557) Marx’s main irony here is that the true socialists do not see the heterogeneity between humans and nature, believing that in their view of nature, “All the differences in the development stages of the three realms of nature, geology, and history have disappeared without a trace.” (Marx, 1960, p.548) In essence, the non-anthropocentric view of “wild nature”, like the view of nature of the true socialists, is also called “childish philosophical mysticism” by Marx. (Marx, 1960, p.558).

In short, unlike non-anthropocentrism, Marx’s understanding of nature does not remain at the level of wild and self-existing intuition level but rises to a high level of understanding objectivity and grasping the meaning of nature, which is at the same time, the superiority of Marxist philosophy over the old materialist philosophy of the past. Thus, “the natural world formed through industry, although in the form of alienation, is the true and humanistic nature.” (Marx, 2009, p.193) It is only by seeing nature as mediated by human sensual activities and objectified nature, that non-anthropocentric can return from the nature of the wild on the other side to the nature of reality and sensibility on the side.

### 3.2 Human Beings are Objective Beings

Unlike “wild nature”, which reduces the nature of human beings to naturalness, the Marxian concept of humanized nature holds that human beings are not only natural beings but also object beings. First of all, people are object of natural beings, and their natural attributes can only be realized through objective activities. By objectifying nature through objective activity, people can maintain their existence as natural beings. Even if they transcend the natural attributes, they still need objects independent of themselves to confirm their existence as long as they remain real beings. If people are not surrounded by any objects, they must be “an imaginary being, an abstraction” (Marx, 2009, p.211). Moreover, people’s consciousness and subjectivity can only grow and be characterized through their objectivity because human consciousness is accumulated in a long history of objectivity; it is the

historical product of all previous objectifying activities of human beings. (Marx, 2009, p.191). In a nutshell, the process by which human beings confirm their own essential power through their objectifying activities, and reification of natural objects into pictures is the process of their activities as real beings.

Secondly, humans are objects of social beings. According to Marx, people transcend naturalness and achieve sociality by breaking self-existing from their own relative fixity through objective activity. For example, in *The Holy Family*, Marx criticizes Proudhon’s National Economy by saying “The object, as the existence of human beings, as the object existence of human beings, is also the fixation of human beings for others, which is their relationship with others and their social relationship.” (Marx, 2009, P.268) The implication of this abstract passage is that it is only in the midst of objectifying activity that man can see not only nature as object but also others. If people do not work together in a certain social form, they cannot engage in objective activities. “Any relation of man to himself is realized and expressed only through the relation to others”. (Marx, 2009, p.164) In the words of phenomenology, “Others face each other in their co-dasein in the world.” (Heidegger, 2018, p.171) Thus, it is only in the co-dasein (such as human society) that the natural attributes of the human can become a prerequisite for the social attributes of the human.

Finally, human beings are objective species beings. At the time of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx perceived the specificity of consciousness in relation to non-human beings and its universality in relation to human beings, and argued that human consciousness embodies the self-existing and universal dimensions of objective activity and that human consciousness and rationality are the birthplace of freedom (Marx, 1995, p.167). Thus, both human freedom and human universality are born from human consciousness and spirituality in generative theory, which constitutes a major difference between human and non-human beings. The human being emerges from the animal as a conscious being through objective activities, and through conscious activities, the human being treats nature as a spiritual object at the level of thought and is able to treat nature as his material object at the level of reality, thus constituting the meaning of the universality of the human being. In the same way, it is through conscious activity that humans are able to distinguish their life activity, which seeks the meaning of their existence, from the instinctive life activity of animals, and this constitutes the species characteristics of humans — “free and conscious activities”. (Marx, 2009, p.162) As far as man himself is concerned, he can treat himself as a universal, free being, and not as mindless animal or as an instrument for the realization of his own purposes. As far as the objects of nature are

concerned, man can move freely in a wider field of nature than the animals do, and can regard nature as an intuition of his own essential power. Therefore, the unity of man and nature is realized not in the way of things but in the way of people.

In short, while confirming the naturalness of human beings, Marx also made it clear that real human beings are not merely some natural, social, and spiritual attributes, nor are they a simple combination of many attributes, but are “natural beings, conscious beings, class beings, social beings, and a unity of active and passive beings” (Zhang, 2023, p.80). However, “wild nature” forgets “to start from the empirical, corporeal individual, not in order to be ..... to be trapped in it, but rise from it to the ‘human’” (Engels, 2009, p.25). Therefore, only this “real man” can consciously assume the ethic of caring for nature in order not to cause the death of himself and his “inorganic body.”

### 3.3 Humanized Nature is a Reasonable Direction of Existing One

“Wild nature” considers nature as self-existing and pre-existing one, and human beings as pure naturalness, and the unity of human beings with nature as the simple unity of nature with nature. Such a banality can be found as early as in Feuerbach. In Feuerbach's view, humans can live in harmony with nature only if they passively cater to nature, give up their active transformation of nature, and return to the life scene of primitive humans. About this, Marx criticized, “(Feuerbach) fails to see ..... that even the simplest objects of ‘emotional certainty’ is provided to him due to social development, industrial and commercial interactions.” (Marx, 2009, p.528) Thus, starting only from man's naturalness, Feuerbach could see only the mere intuition and feeling of nature. What this mere intuition and feeling can give back to him can only be the self-existence, predetermination, and wildness of natural objects. Marx's humanized view of nature sees the wildness and self-existence of nature and the society of nature through the objective activities of human beings. It not only affirms the prior of nature but also does the subjectivity, mobility, and transcendence of human beings. In Marx's view, the entire natural world is “The entire living and emotional activity of the individuals who make up this world” (Marx, 2009, p.530). These attributes of nature and the realization of these attributes of man are combined in the practical activity of man. In other words, only a humanized nature is a rational dimension of existing nature.

For real human beings, it makes no sense to simply discuss that self-existent nature, which is far removed from the reality of human life, “Only meaningful when humans are seen as something different from nature” (Marx, 2009, p.530). Although existing nature is the occult prerequisite of this historical process, existing nature only has realistic meaning when human practice has a

existing nature as its object. At the same time, once man's practical activity acts on a self-existent nature, then the self-existence of a existing nature has to be replaced by humanized view of nature. In essence, humanized nature is essentially existing nature that has been transformed by human practice based on human needs. As the fixed result of practical activities, humanized nature can be said to be the completed work of humans; however, this work is not completely and absolutely humanized but also contains the aspect of self-existence. The self-existence of this work is to be further developed and recast by human practice, and its human nature is in the process of being consumed and discarded. It is for this reason that Marx said: “As long as human beings exist, natural history and historical nature are mutually restrictive.” (Marx, 2009, p.516)

The temporal unity between human beings and nature, which has been established through various practical activities by human beings at different times, is completely ignored by non-anthropocentric. “Historical nature” and “natural history” are obscured at the same time. Therefore, non-anthropocentric completely equates the nature of humans with that of animals. When human vital activities encounter challenges and difficulties in nature, they have to resort, as Feuerbach did, “Every time human seek help from the external nature, which is not yet been under the dominion of man” (Marx, 2009, p.549). However, the practical achievements of mankind, such as “new inventions” and “industry”, are always challenging this non-human “wild nature”, resulting in wild nature “The bases generated through this have become smaller and smaller” (Marx, 2009, p.549).

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## CONCLUSION

To sum up, it is not feasible to adopt an impersonal, abstract, and metaphysical view of “wild nature” that excludes historical processes to look at people's perceptual world and the things of nature. The sensual world of people and the things of nature are process existences that are historically generated and historically faded in the practical activities of human beings. The “humanized nature” and the “humanization of nature” are both aspects of the same process of human practice. Marx's natural view of humanization proves the dialectical unity between “natural history” and “historical nature” and reveals the picture of communism in which human beings and nature coexist harmoniously. “This kind of communism, as completed naturalism, is equivalent to humanitarianism. And as completed humanitarianism, communism is equivalent to naturalism. It is the true solution of the contradictions between humans and nature, as well as humans and humans”. (Marx, 2009, p.185) Only an ecological view bred out of this philosophy can truly solve the real ecological problems.

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