

**From Ontology to Ethics: A Merleau Pontyan Approach to the  
Human–Nature Relationship**

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## Abstract

The thesis attempts at a philosophical reflection on the question of human-nature relationship in light of the serious environmental challenges that characterize the present age. Although there have been sustained efforts on the part of environmental philosophers to redefine various aspects of the human-nature relation and extend the domain of ethics to include the natural environment, the thesis observes certain limitations in the existing approaches. In doing so the thesis delves into the conceptual roots of the environmental crisis and identifies the role of philosophy as that of clarification of the ethical and metaphysical assumptions that characterize human attitude towards the natural environment. Contemporary environmental philosophers have argued that there are important and largely unnoticed connections between our worldviews, metaphysical systems, and forms of rationality, on the one hand, and environmental domination and exploitation, on the other.

These philosophers seek to address such deeper issues of the environmental debate which are rooted in the history of Western culture and society. Adopting a critical approach to our ingrained tendencies and presuppositions borrowed uncritically from the natural sciences, these philosophers see promise in the methods of phenomenology in bringing about a paradigm shift and in securing a new foundation for environmental philosophy. Such philosophers now give shape to an altogether new discipline called Ecophenomenology.

Within this new approach, many environmental philosophers have been particularly interested in the works of the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty as if his phenomenology supplies the key to an alternative worldview that is urgently called for in the present times. Thus, the present work will attempt to explore the relationship between human and nature in the context of the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty with special emphasis on the relation between ontology and ethics which emerges from his work.