

# Rethinking the Study of Nature: A Meta-epistemic View towards Sustaining Human Life

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ABSTRACT

This account claims that the study of nature goes beyond mere knowing and understanding. It attempts to illustrate the fact that human life and its existence must be prioritized, for only the human can apply both knowledge and understanding to oneself, others, and the environment, including its component mechanisms. Hence, a meta-epistemic rethinking is vital, in which the idea of sustainability essentially points to the human as the responsible and accountable agent of promoting life, human life above all, and its continued existence in a healthy environment.

## Introduction

The human is the only being who can know and understand.<sup>1</sup> But we, human beings, are also the only ones who can apply both knowledge and understanding to ourselves, other beings, and the environment, especially with regard to the promotion of life – human life above all. In promoting life, we assert about how we know and understand nature in which human life exists<sup>2</sup>, and through which we uphold and act upon its sustainable existence (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1993*).<sup>3</sup>

Studying nature can be enabling, offering us warnings worth heeding, presenting images and expectations worth working for; or, it can be disabling, obscuring what needs to be known and understood, and acted upon. It can either make or break the human and environment. It is one of the consequences of the chronic human and environmental health problems.

This account, therefore, elucidates on rethinking the concept of studying nature from a meta-epistemic perspective, and considers human existence and life for which the idea of sustainability is employed to mean that the human is ultimately responsible and accountable for upholding life and its continued healthy existence.<sup>4</sup>

## Knowing and Understanding

Studying nature, prior to its elucidation, employs the human faculty of knowing and understanding. This is perhaps one of the most ignored human faculties, considering the prevalence of indifference and complacency in the community. But there seems to be a remedy, since the human cannot totally ignore the fact that one can act with full understanding and volition. With this, the human stays at the forefront in knowing and understanding, and in acting freely with reason. Human deliberation entails a purpose. The human realizes in it that a thing, for instance, exists for a reason. The purposive aspect of existence is revealed in a free, human and deliberate choice of action. Deliberation is

necessitated by an action that is characteristically human, and in every choice of action, the human's decision may be either good or bad.

Freedom is exercised and limited when the human is faced with a set of choices of action.<sup>5</sup> These choices depend on the knowledge level that every human possesses.<sup>6</sup> Depending on the knowledge level of every human is a manifestation that freedom has limitations. No individual monopolizes freedom to act on something or someone. Every human is not totally free to act always on anyone or anything at any time, because no one knows everything. Knowing any course of action requires that the human should have understood it first. One must have fully deliberated on the matter before acting. Other beings do not have such a characteristic, and so, they can never be considered responsible or culpable. Truly, they are irrational and are devoid of volition.

Knowing leads the human to understand the state of affairs in the world. This shows a meta-cognitive part of the human, in which understanding becomes an essential requisite to action. Understanding enables the human to decide which among the options open can be taken appropriately as a course of action under the given circumstances. It guides the human to wisely act on something or someone. With reason and volition, ignorance and indifference would not have a place in decision-making. A decision to study nature is an offshoot of human experiences with the self and the world. But it seems that studying nature has revolutionized the way humans live because of what has been discovered in the world. Studying nature has evolved, yet most, if not all, sciences (physical, applied, natural, etc.) have focused on non-human entities. It has become fragmented to the extent that the human is overlooked. If this is the case, then fragmented studies that ignore the importance of humans cannot help the (human) community, even less, sustain its existence and life. These studies should have human life and existence as their main concern. The role of the human is also vital for it accounts for the promotion of a sustainable environmental existence and life – a goal