

# Indigenous Oromo Morality as a Solution to Environmental Problems

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**Abstract:-** The problem of environment has lately drawn attention from many philosophers which led to some of them starting to heavily criticize the existing Western Moralities for failing to address this problem and focusing too much on human being alone. As a solution to this problem, some thinkers proposed new model of morality, while some others suggested looking into indigenous moralities for a solution. This paper discusses and proposes Indigenous Morality of the Oromo of East Africa as a solution for this problem of environment the world is currently faced with. The paper starts off by highlighting concepts like Waaqa, Ayyaana and Safuu which are basic to the moral thought of the people, and then discusses in detail the moral relation between the people and the environment as a whole. After thoroughly discussing key concepts that make up Oromo environmental ethic, the author argues that this new perspective found in the Oromo environmental ethics can solve most, if not all, of the environmental problems of our time.

**Keywords:-** Safuu; Oromo Morality; Environmental Ethics; Indigenous Morality Oromo Environmental Ethics.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Every society has language, culture, political system, religion, philosophy, morality, legal systems and others which could be indigenous or peculiar to a given society, even though there are also times when societies share same morality or religion, or at least, some aspects of moral or religious thinking. Like any other society the Oromo society of East Africa has its own language, indigenous political system, indigenous religion, and indigenous moral system.

The Oromo are native African ethnic group found in the empire of Ethiopia and to a smaller extent in Kenya. The Oromo makes up a significant portion of the population occupying the Horn of Africa. With a population of 30 million, they constitute the single largest ethnicity in Ethiopia and the wider Horn of Africa. This is approximately 35% of Ethiopia's population according to the 2007 census. They are the majority of the peoples living in Ethiopia. Starting from the earliest times, they all used to speak the same language- Afaan Oromo, used to have one indigenous religion- Waaqeffannaa, one indigenous political system- Gadaa System, and abide by same moral system- Safuu.

The concern of the paper, in general, and of this section in particular is Safuu. However, in order to have a full grasp of Safuu, we have to be clear first with what is at the heart of Safuu itself- Waaqa (God).

## II. SAFUU AND WAAQA

### A. Waaqa

In Oromo society the word Waaqa has two meanings. One is the vault of the sky as we see it, and the other approximates what the English word *God* connotes. God, in English language, is “the creator and ruler of the universe- the Supreme Being.”<sup>1</sup> However, Waaqa in Oromo sense comprises more than what is merely meant by *God*. “It comprises more, [because] it includes countless particular manifestations of [Waaqa] in this world, particularizations of his creative works which are conceived as beings. Hence the word ‘divinity’ will often be a better translation than ‘God’”<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, Waaqa is the sole creator of the cosmos and the sole giver of life. For the Oromo, the existence of Waaqa is confirmed by the very existence of life, heaven and earth, and also by the orderly movement that takes place between and within them. Furthermore, Waaqa is seen as the source of all life; and the act of giving life, in fact, is reserved to Him alone.<sup>3</sup> The Oromo do not think Waaqa created only human being. In some religion it is believed that God *made* man and *created* other beings. But the Oromo think Waaqa created just all things.

Waaqa creates everything through *ayyaana*. According to GemetchuMegersa, *ayyaana* refers to that by which and through which Waaqa, God, creates everything. He further explains that *ayyaana* is in fact both that which causes something to come into being and that which becomes what it has caused.<sup>4</sup> In short, “Ayyaana, for the Oromo, is the creative act of thinking in which a thought becomes that which it mentally represents.”<sup>5</sup> As it is Waaqa's exceptional act to give life, wherever there is life there is Waaqa. “The presence of life means the presence of [Waaqa]. Whenever

<sup>1</sup> Concise Oxford English Dictionary

<sup>2</sup> Lambert Bartels, *OROMO RELIGION: Myth and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia- an Attempt to Understand*, (Berlin: Reimer, 1983), 89.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>4</sup> GemetchuMegerssa, “The Oromo Worldview”, *Interdisciplinary Seminar of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies* 1 (June 6-7, 1998), 41.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 44.

you say ‘There is no life’, you say: ‘[Waaqa] is not there.’<sup>6</sup> Likewise, according to the Oromo, Waaqa is the source and guardian of truth and justice. He knows everything, can do anything, and nothing *good* happens on the earth without Him. He is omniscient. No one can escape from Waaqa with his evil deeds either in his heart/thought or in action. We can understand this thinking from the Oromos of Metcha. AsafaDisasa once said: “Ganamaanba’ aniif Waaqajalaahinba’ ani,” meaning that *man may set out early in the morning but he never will escape from Waaqa*.<sup>7</sup> No matter how early one sets out or how fast one can run, drive or fly no one will ever escape from the eyes of Waaqa. They refrain not only from doing something bad but also from even thinking evil thoughts, for they think Waaqa can see what they think in their heart. There is a proverb in Oromo culture: *Waaqnigaraadhagaakeessayyuuniarga-* Waaqa even sees in the heart of a stone. It is this Waaqa who is the giver and protector of Safuu. It is Waaqa who looks after Safuu. Waaqa rewards those who respect and protect safuu and withdraws from those who do not. The idea of Waaqa’s withdrawal needs further explanation.

In Judeo-Christian thought God punishes, directly, those who do not live according to his word. But in the Oromo’s view Waaqa (God) does not punish anybody for not respecting Safuu. He only withdraws from them. Waaqa, while withdrawing from those who do not respect safuu, He, on the other hand, rewards those who have respect for safuu with blessings. The punishment, in fact, could be what happens as a result of withdrawal of Waaqa. The Oromo believe that when Waaqa withdraws life diminishes in all of its forms. There will no longer be fertility, peace, good health, material well-being and so on. “... [A]s a result of [Waaqa’s] withdrawal,” explains Bartels, “man is left victim to minor evil powers. It is these minor powers, rather than [Waaqa] himself that strike man with misfortune: for example, sickness or madness.”<sup>8</sup> The extra motivation for respecting safuu, as one can understand from the idea of Waaqa’s withdrawal, is not fear of the punishments Waaqa might inflict. Rather it is a respect for Waaqa and one’s desire to get Waaqa’s blessing.

### B. Safuu

Safuu is not a concept that can be defined using just a word or a statement. The Oromos use of the word in their daily life makes it too difficult to do so. MirressaGamtesa is quoted by Bartels saying the following about the conception of Safuu in MaccaaOromoo<sup>9</sup>. “[Safuu] stands for everything that we do not understand, including a person’s evil deed...”<sup>10</sup> The other speaker, AsafaDisasa, says: “Having [safuu] means that you know how to behave according to the laws of our ancestors...”<sup>11</sup> WaqumaTolera, another member of the Macca Oromo further explains safuu saying: “People

say ‘[safuu]’ when they hear things they do not want to hear. They also say ‘[safuu]’ of things they do not understand; it is as if they say: ‘We do not understand these things. Only Waaqa knows.’”<sup>12</sup>

From the above quotes we can understand that safuu is a multifunctional concept. Sometimes it is said of behavior; sometimes of the majesty of Waaqa (God); and sometimes of the things beyond one’s understanding. However, it is most commonly conceived, amongst the Oromo as a whole, as a principle of deep moral honor and accountability based on respect for Waaqa (God).

For the purpose of this paper, I use Safuu only as a moral concept. The other thing is that there is no word of equivalent meaning with English words *moral* and *immoral* in AfaanOromoo. So I am going to use “It is safuu” or “It is against safuu” or “It is breaking safuu” to say *it is immoral*. *Being moral* will have the same meaning as “respecting safuu” or “knowing safuu” throughout this paper. For example: i) John is moral = John respects/knows safuu. ii) It is immoral to kill = It is safuu to kill. iii) Telling the truth is moral = Telling the truth is respecting/upholding safuu. If one says *there is safuu* between people and/or things, it does not mean there is *immorality* between them. It is to say that *there is an ethical relationship* between them. Moreover, safuu is the concept all Oromo share regardless of where they live.

Safuu is not the law of man. Human laws cannot be considered as safuu. Human laws are made by men to address certain problems. Safuu is not made for and given to the Oromo by man; only Waaqa gives safuu. “It is [Waaqa’s] will that [safuu] exists.... [Safuu] is something from [Waaqa] and the earth.”<sup>13</sup> Thus Waaqa (God) wills safuu to exist, not man or any other creature. Man only finds out and abides by it. Oromo people have laws, but they never see these laws and safuu as equivalent. The two, according to the Oromo people, are totally different. The following words of ShagerdiBukko clearly points out the difference between laws of man and Safuu:

The law of MakkoBilli<sup>14</sup> was a good law; so it was that people accepted it. The [safuu] comes from [Waaqa] and the earth. We never say: ‘[safuu] comes from MakkoBilli’; we always say: ‘[Safuu] comes from [Waaqa].’ Nor do we ever speak of the *law of [safuu]*; we speak of the law of MakkoBilli.<sup>15</sup>

However, the Oromo think safuu is the basis of the laws of man. Every man-made law must conform to safuu. If there is any law that contradicts safuu, that law would be rejected right away.

<sup>6</sup> L. Bartels, op. cit., 97.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>9</sup> Maccaa Oromo is a group of Oromo people inhabiting the Western part of Oromiya.

<sup>10</sup> L. Bartels, op. cit., 331.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 333.

<sup>14</sup> In Macca oral tradition MakkoBilli is a person whose appearance coincides with their birth as a distinct Oromo tribe, when they emerged from the water of the Ghiberiver. It was at this moment that MakkoBilli proclaimed his law.

<sup>15</sup> L. Bartels, op. cit., 335.

The Oromo think Waaqa created everything with boundaries between and within each of them. Each one of them is given a place of their own and lives according to their own ayyaana. All of them are different from each other, and unique. Each of them has to keep the distance<sup>16</sup> put by Waaqa between them, and follow their own way. This is a cosmic and social order, the Oromos think, Waaqa put there; and that to which every creature must conform. None of the creatures, including man, should overstep the boundary Waaqa put between them. It is this cosmic and social order, in general, that we call Safuu. *Safuu is respecting this Waaqa-made cosmic and social structure, living only according to one's own ayyaana, letting others live according to theirs, and keeping the distance between oneself and the others.* According to the principles of Safuu, every creature, especially human, has the responsibility to maintain this cosmic order. Every creature lives just the way it is created to live or, in other words, according to the ayyaana of its own. Therefore, it is not good to try to alter the way things function. It is safuu to change world-order. There is this idea that *things are at their best state when they are allowed to be the way Waaqa has created them* which underlies this kind of respect. Everything in nature exists the way its nature allows it to exist, and it is wrong to try to change the lifestyle of any member even if changing it best serves human interest. Breaking safuu results in a cosmic-disorder.

Safuu is not in anybody/anything. It is between everyone and everything. Waaqa has already put safuu out there. It is up to man to understand it and exhibit it towards everyone and everything. It is this understanding of safuu that makes one wise, according to the Oromo. But it has to be noted that the Oromo give emphasis not only to the understanding of safuu, but also to its exhibition. A wisdom that is not practicalized is not worth having. Therefore, a wise man is a person who understands safuu and exhibits it. "A wise man", GemetchuMegersa states, "is not a man who merely knows; it is rather a man who lives his knowledge."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, a morally wise life is lived when one understands safuu and exhibits it through keeping the distance between oneself and all other creatures, and through paying due respect to all things.

The other point worth mentioning is that of Waaqa's being bounded by safuu. The Oromos think that Waaqa, being the source and the sole giver of safuu, even is not beyond safuu. There is safuu for Waaqa himself. There is an expectation and assumption that people have about the nature of Waaqa, and it is safuu for Waaqa to not live up to the assumptions and expectation of people. Waaqa has to live like Waaqa, not like man. He has to be patient, merciful, generous, etc. If Waaqa fails to exhibit the Waaqa-like characteristics, if He does not respect safuu, the people stand

<sup>16</sup> Here, and throughout the thesis, distance should be understood metaphorically, not literally. It is not the actual physical amount of space between two things. Distance in the context of safuu has to be understood as the moral relationship between all things, respect, care and concern for all things.

<sup>17</sup> G. Megerssa, op. cit., 43.

up against Him and ask Him to be more like Waaqa. This keeps the balance between creator and creature.

Accordingly, for the Oromo, having absolute control over his creations, the creator cannot do whatever he likes to his creation, especially when the things are against safuu. The creator has to pay due respect to his creation, and has to keep the distance between him and his creation. In the Oromo context, Waaqa has to be bound by the safuu He has given the people. Like people keep the distance between them, other creatures and Waaqa, Waaqa also has to keep the distance between Him and the people so that the cosmic-order would not be spoiled. Note that safuu is not in anything; it is between everything. One of the informants of Bartels, while explaining about safuu between him and his children, says: "... [safuu] is not something in [the children], nor is it in me, it is between us: they pay respect to me and I pay respect to them, and we do this in many different ways."<sup>18</sup> The extension of this thought clearly explains that there is also safuu between Waaqa and man. Thus Waaqa Himself is not absolutely absolute to go against and beyond safuu.

Freedom and freewill is an essence of morality. If we are forced to make some decisions, we would not be considered as moral even if the decision we made is a moral decision, for we are forced and we did not make the decision on our freewill. When one looks at safuu and Waaqa, it may seem to be like simply following some orders from a Supreme Being which does not involve our freewill. But when the principles of safuu and the role of Waaqa in Oromo society are closely examined, it becomes clear that honoring and dishonoring safuu is down to the will and choice of the individual. Man is absolutely free to abide and not to abide by safuu. Nobody, not even Waaqa (God) is involved in our moral decision making.

God of the Oromo does not give specific commandments like, for example: You shall not kill; You shall not commit adultery; You shall tell the truth; etc. These kinds of duties are what people themselves derive from the general principle of safuu that is already there using their rational capacity. It is up to the people, or the individual in that community, to make particular moral laws. The Oromo never speak of any kind of commandment that Waaqa has given them. They only speak of how Waaqa created all things putting distance between them so that the cosmic-system operates properly, and that they have to keep this distance so as to keep the balance of nature. You look at the universe, at nature, and make a decision that enhances the proper functioning of the cosmos in addition to the decision's consequence for yourself. Making such a decision totally depends on the agent, and no any external body forces the agent. The God of the Oromo does not force any moral choice and does not punish anybody for not acting morally. He only rewards those who uphold safuu, and withdraws from those who are evils, for His nature, particularly holiness, makes it impossible for God to be in the lives of the evils.

<sup>18</sup>L. Bartels, op. cit., 333.

In general, safuu is not about specific laws. It is about specific acts and laws conforming to the general principles of the cosmic-order. One has to remember that the general principle of safuu is to make the cosmos harmonious and the world a better place for all things by keeping the distance between all things. There is the general system, cosmic-system, and every man has to aim at keeping this general cosmic-system healthy, for when the general system is unhealthy there is no way that the member of the system remains healthy. Man is absolutely free in choosing specific course of action and way of life. However, what one chooses must be something that conforms to the general principle of cosmic-system. Here one might ask such a choice is not a choice based on one's own reason and freewill, since there is already a principle to which our choice has to conform. But I think this kind of question is not logical. It is true that unless the whole system is healthy the member of the system cannot be healthy. Man has to keep the system in harmony to live a harmonious and happy life. Therefore, it is logical to act and choose a course of action that conforms to the general cosmic-principle to make the cosmos a better place for everyone. What is illogical, I think, is to use one's own reason and freewill for self-destruction.

### III. SAFUU AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

As indicated previously, in the Oromo universe, Waaqaa made everything to have moral standing. But only human being is considered to be moral agent by virtue of its rational and linguistic capacity. However, before directly proceeding to the discussion of Oromo indigenous environmental ethics, it is better to see how Oromo society and individuals view nature- its living and nonliving contents. Oromo society believes nature to be a bridge between their creator, *Waaqa*, and themselves. Thus, they have a great respect for nature as a whole. We can understand this by simply looking at the way they pray and give thanks to their Waaqa. Ancient Oromo people do not build a church or chapel for the purpose of prayers or thanksgiving. They rather gather under a green tree, most of the time they use *Odaa*, or they gather on the side of a river. They think that nature as a whole is a gift of God to them and that they should handle it with great care. They have this belief that all life belongs to Waaqa and that man is not free to dispose of it *as he wishes*. That is, man has to show ethical manner toward nature and its constituents. Man has to uphold and respect the safuu that Waaqa gave for the goodness of humans, animals and nature as a whole.

Here it is important to recall the discussion about *ayyaana* in the first part of this section. *Ayyaana* is both that which causes something to come into being and that which becomes what it has caused. Everything has its own *ayyaana*, and hence should live according to its own *ayyaana* while, at the same time, respecting others' *ayyaana*.

[Safuu] implies that all things have a place of their own in the cosmic and social order, and that they should keep this place. Their place is conditioned by the specific [ayyaana] each of them has received from [Waaqa]. Every creature, and

especially man, has to act according to its own [ayyaana] and to respect others' [ayyaana].<sup>19</sup>

It is this thinking, together with respect for life that Waaqa has given, that underlies the principles that make up safuu's aspect of environmental ethics. Every creature lives as its *ayyaana* makes it live. It is a responsibility, especially for man, to live in accordance with its own *ayyaana*, and to respect others' *ayyaana*. To live contrary to one's *ayyaana* and/or not let others live according to their *ayyaana* is a sin. It is safuu; it is immoral. Humans do what their *ayyaana* lets them to do, and so do animals. The place they live, the way they live, what they eat and where they eat is conditioned by the specific *ayyaana* of each creature.

Moreover, when we say man lives according to its *ayyaana*, it does not mean it is *ayyaana* that forces every specific moral decision-making of man. For instance, if a man engages in stealing, we cannot say it is his/her *ayyaana* that makes him/her steal and hence should not be held morally responsible, for he/she is only acting according to his/her *ayyaana*. That is not how *ayyaana* works. *Ayyaana* is very general. In this case we can say it is the *ayyaana* of man, in general, that makes man rational and moral being. It is man's *ayyaana* to be conscious, rational and moral being. In short, it is man's *ayyaana* to be able to make rational decisions and be a moral agent. Moral decisions like committing adultery, stealing, telling the truth, helping the poor, etc. are independently made by the agent. *Ayyaana* has nothing to do with the specific moral decisions we make, but with the general ability to make moral decisions. *Ayyaana* does not make choice for man; it only makes man *able* to make decisions. For example, your *ayyaana* makes you *able* to use and learn language, but what language you prefer to use and learn, from the other available languages, is your independent choice. The same works for other animals too.

This kind of belief results in two things: not taking away life of any animal, and not denying a means of survival from any creature either. The Oromo believe that it is safuu (immoral) to take away a life that Waaqa (God) gives-including a life of lower creatures. The following is an advice an old man of the Oromo told adults: "My sons, when you leave your old house because you have built a new one, don't set fire to it. There are many little creatures in that old house. It is not good to kill all that life."<sup>20</sup> This view is by itself absolutely non-consequential, i.e. they refrain from killing those lives not because they are useful to the people but because they are creatures of intrinsic value. It is out of the respect for safuu that Waaqa has given which, if they fail to dispose, Waaqa turns his face away from them.

It is safuu to kill any kind of animal for any purpose. But they, the Oromo, make this claim with exceptions. They think that there are some animals that Waaqa blesses for them to kill for some special purposes. Even though the Oromo people kill animals for their food and practice hunting, the do these discriminatorily. They do not just kill anyone of them

<sup>19</sup> L. Bartels, op. cit., 170.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.,92.

and eat their meat. According to the practice of this people, one should not kill young and female goats, sheep or cow, for it is safuuto kill a young animal that is still capable of procreation. This is so not because it is, by itself, to the advantage of the people but because it is just safuu. If the advantage of the people alone is considered, they would kill such animals since it is a meat of young animals that is more tasty and delicious than the old ones. But killing young animals is safuu and they refrain from doing that regardless of their knowledge of which meat is more delightful to eat. And during hunting one should not kill any kind of animal while it is eating, drinking and mating. It is unethical or it is violating safuu. It is also safuuto kill a young animal that is likely to produce offspring in the future. Particularly a hunter should not kill female animals. One can only kill an animal that would be of less importance, old and non-productive.

The other thing that should be considered is the safuu that exists between the Oromo people and wild animals. It is evident that they take care of the animals to make their survival and procreation possible. As they are part of nature, Oromo people respect animals as ends in themselves which disregards the pursuit of benefit for the agent. The Oromo treats both domestic and wild animals with great care, even though the degree of care varies. For example, they do not kill young wild animal even during hunting as we have already seen. Very interesting thing is the attitude these people have towards wild animals that eat their farm crop. An old man once said that “[p]eople do not like a man who curses the monkeys and birds, when they come to eat his crop.”<sup>21</sup> It is important again to recall the concept of ayyaana here. Every creature, including man and other wild and domestic animals, live according to their own ayyaana. It is, then, safuu not to live according to one’s own ayyaana and not to let others live according to their ayyaana. Thus if a monkey comes to a man’s farm and eats her crop, it is the monkey’s ayyaana that makes it to do so. They, the Oromo, think Waaqa has given man more crop than He has given the wild animals putting their, the animals, share in what is given to man.

People are not angry with the birds and animals when they eat their grain. True, they chase them away, but in former times they would always do so with soft words without insulting them. They would say: ‘*Ushe, ushe*, may [Waaqa] make you feel satisfied with little.’ [Waaqa] has given man more grain than [He] has given to the animals and birds, and if the latter come to eat from it, they would do this with [Waaqa’s] permission; without it they would not come. [Waaqa] himself causes them to do so; it is their [ayyaana]. Therefore, man should never curse them... and he should never say to them in anger: ‘May [Waaqa] ‘eat’ you!’<sup>22</sup>

True, the people will not let the animals eat all of their crops, nor do they let them over-eat from just one place. They chase them away with soft words while also blessing them saying: *may Waaqa cause you feel satisfied with little*. Even when the animals get out of control and tend to eat too much

of their grain, they do not think of exterminating such harmful animals. Bartels states that people prefer to keep watch on their crops day and night at considerable pains to themselves rather than exterminating such harmful animals and pests systematically.<sup>23</sup> They rather perform a ritual at different times to bless the animals and to pray to Waaqa so that He makes them feel satisfied with little and prevent hail and storm from harming their crops. One should note that, here, they pray that hail and storm should not come at all, when the animals should come but only not eat too much.

Moreover, during harvest time people do not take the entire crop to home; they leave some of it behind for animals that can feed on the kind of that crop. They leave behind the share of the animal that Waaqa put in their crop. They do this in order to avoid mistreating God’s creature and not to deny the animals a means of survival. Denying a means of survival to animals is tantamount to taking their life away; an act which is considered as the highest breach of safuu.

Furthermore, no traditional Oromo individual cuts down a tree without planting a tree in place of it at least before two years. Even if she has planted a tree in place of the one she is cutting down, one should not cut a tree that is straight and capable of growing; instead one ought to cut down a tree that is less straight, incapable of growing and not so much good if left to exist. One should not dump waste materials, garbage and dead body of animals by riverside and pollute the river. This is not only for the sake of animals and humans who use the water of that river for drinking but also for the harmony and beauty of the cosmic-order. It is safuu to cut down a tree and pollute river. This works timelessly. It works during peace and war time. Milkeessaa told me that the safuu that governs or guides the Oromo people during peace-time also enlightens them during war-time. For instance, “it is safuu to burn enemies’ forest and pollute their water.”<sup>24</sup> It is rarely possible to find something that can show a respect a particular society has for a nature than this. In the eyes of the Oromo, particular content of the environment, even if it is the property of an enemy, is not an enemy itself. You shall not destroy them. It is safuu.

Oromo people in general, as I said earlier, have a great respect for nature and its all constituents. Besides their usefulness in their life, the Oromo treat animals with great ethics which is only different from, but not less than, the ethics they have to treat other fellow humans. In conclusion, when one looks at the Oromo philosophy of humans, animals, or nature in general, he/she proves that it is very friendly. There is no severe exploitation. One should note the difference between using and exploiting something/someone<sup>25</sup>. Even Oromo people treat in an ethical

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.,343.

<sup>24</sup>Midhega, Milkessa. Interview. 6 May 2015.

<sup>25</sup> To use something is to do something with a particular tool, method, service, ability, etc in order to achieve a particular purpose, or to do a particular job. Man always gets services of different kind from other men and her environment, and sometimes uses other men in order to achieve her goal in life. On the other hand, to exploit is to treat someone/something

<sup>21</sup>L.Bartels, op. cit., 342.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 343.

way an animal they have little respect for. Take donkey, for instance. Calling someone a donkey, or *harree* is an insult in Oromo society as a result of little respect they have for it. But they still treat donkey in an ethical manner. It is immoral to load a pregnant donkey (They say: *Harreerimaafe'uunsafuudha*). Therefore, it can be generalized that Oromo society has a friendly relationship with nature as a whole, and treat the whole nature ethically. Their attitude and worldview is environmentally very friendly.

These attitude and worldview are based on the philosophy of *interconnectedness* and *interdependence*. Some points can evidently be derived from this philosophy. It implies that: i) human beings are members of the earth's community same as all other species; ii) all species are part of a system of interdependence; iii) all living things pursue their own good in their own ways according to the *ayyaana* of each, and iv) human being is only different but not inherently superior to other living things. They do not have dualistic worldview. They do not think of themselves and nature as different. The Oromo do not claim they are out there or outside of nature. They think *they are part of, and in the order of nature; and all are interconnected that everything depends upon one another*. Animals and nature, in general, have no one except humans to take care of them and hence man should treat all of them with the Safuu that Waaqa has put between them. This way, they think, they will respect and uphold the safuu that Waaqa has given and get His blessings. Evidently, treating nature with respect and upholding Waaqa'ssafuu has a double effect. By keeping Waaqa'ssafuu: i) they keep the environment healthy and make the world a better place to live in; and ii) they get blessings from Waaqa for upholding His safuu.

Generally Safuu is a deep moral principle that is based on respect for nature and observing the distance Waaqa put between things. Everything-living and nonliving-has intrinsic value that persons pursue as an end. Safuu is a moral law Waaqa has given to man for respecting the harmonious relations of these things. All things exist according to the *ayyaana* of their own. Safuu is a holistic moral concept. What matters in moral decision-making is not the interest of a single entity, but that of the entire universe. Oromo morality, safuu, is based on the idea of oneness of the universe. The action of anybody takes into consideration the consequence of the act on the whole universe. As in consequentialism, it is not the consequence of an act for the agent or for the whole human being that determines the morality of an act, but rather

unfairly in order to gain an advantage, or to use someone/something for one's own advantage, even when this is morally wrong. With regard to humans, the problem is not using them but it is using them against or without their consent and treating them only as a mere means to one's end. With nature, the problem is not using them without their consent (for animals and other members of nature either lack consent or humans do not understand their consent), but the problem lies with lack of wise utilization of nature and in considering them as lacking intrinsic value and hence mere means to our goal.

the general wellbeing of the cosmos. In this respect, safuu is very similar to modern Ecocentrism. Ecocentrism is a philosophy or perspective that places intrinsic value on all living organisms and their natural environment, regardless of their perceived usefulness or importance to human beings. In safuu the moral end is the maintenance of the cosmic-order, not the attainment of pleasure and avoidance of pain. A man who leads her life according to the principles of safuu refrains from engaging in an action that would bring her an immediate pleasure if she knows that the act will spoil the cosmic order in the long run. At the center of a moral decision making is not the agent, but the cosmos.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Both of the dominant Western Moralities- Deontology and Teleology- are criticized for their little to no concern for the environment and doomed environmentally unfriendly moralities by many ethicists. This is mainly because these moralities put only human at the center of moral decision making and render moral worth and moral standing to human being alone.

However, Oromo do not have in mind the wellbeing of human being alone while acting. They rather have in mind the general well-being of all the constituents of the cosmos-including living and nonliving beings. Every member of the cosmos matters alike to the Oromo. It is a holistic morality. The wellbeing of other creatures holds as much weight as the wellbeing of humans do. Here it is worth noting the Oromo view of nature and man. For the Oromo, human being is in the world to the same extent animals and other nonliving beings are. They do not speak of the world and themselves separately. They think they are in the world. They do not think they are what they are independently of the world. They are what they are as a result of their being-in-the-world and what they made of themselves. Consequently, according to safuu, everything matters. Everything holds moral value. Therefore, when the issue of morality is raised, the morality of the specific action is considered with regard to every member of the cosmos; not only with regards to human beings. The consequences of the act to everything have to be considered.

Generally, safuu considers the wellbeing of the cosmos as a whole. Whatever action a man engages in, it is safuu regardless of the good consequences of the action for the agent if it disturbs the cosmic and social order. In safuu, no one except the whole universe itself is at the heart of our moral decision making. No man is the center of moral decision making. No man's interest is given the highest priority in formulating morality. In fact every man's interest should, according to safuu, be maintaining the smooth functioning of the cosmic-order. Accordingly, every man's action is directed towards one end- *keeping the balance of nature by paying deep respect to nature and keeping the distance Waaqa has put between each member of the universe*.

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**APPENDIX**

No	Name of Informants	Age	Date of Information	Place or District
1	GalataaTulluu	52	2015	DembiDollo
2	GammadaAbdallaa	78	2014	Bale, Goba
3	JabessaMardassa	70	2015	Sebetta
4	MilkessaMidhega	32	2015	Finfine
5	SilgaaBadhaasaa	90	2014	DembiDollo
6	Sheka Ahmed	82	2014	Arsi