

Environmental ethics- A philosophical approach for the conservation of environment

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ABSTRACT

Environmental ethics is the branch of ethics which tries to study and analyse the philosophical perspective for the protection of the environment, its importance for human existence, ecological niche and scientific development. This paper deals with the merits of environmental ethics and demerits of damaging the environment. This paper explains the concept of “environmental consciousness” which is significant to care for man and environment. The main questions in this paper are: why we study environment ethics to conserve our existence, what is the need of environmental consciousness, what types of steps we should follow to save life, what is the connection between man and environment, What is environmental disturbance, is scientific technology and modernism helpful in conserving the environment or harmful to it. All these questions are explained and clarified critically by the literature of environmental ethics. This paper shows the future of environmental ethics to sustain our life and also the role of the philosophers and philosophies that has imparted literature of environmental ethics from ancient to modern era. Environmental ethics can provide the guidelines for putting our beliefs into actions and help us to decide what to do for protecting the mother earth.

Key words: Ethics; Environmental consciousness; Ecological niche

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this paper is to construct a moral scenario to understand our environment in which we are sustaining. The purpose of this paper is defined as follows:

1. To describe and distinguish environmental science from environmental ethics
2. Interrelation between man to his environment and what is environmental consciousness
3. To explain the importance of environmental ethics as doing applied ethics and it also the illustration of critique of modernism.

INTRODUCTION

Before going to explain the environmental ethical issues there is a need to clear the concept of ethics. Because there is difference between environmental science and environmental ethics where former is the science which studies “what is” having its own methodology and principles and latter studies “what ought to be” possessing its reasonable methodology of normative science. Ethics is derived from the Greek word “Ethos” which means customs, character, usages or habits. It is also called moral philosophy derived from the Latin word “Mores” also means customs, behaviour and character. Ethics is the science of highest Good. Environmental ethics focuses on rights, values, duties, principles and discussions on intuitionists and hedonist’s arguments. There is an ethical relationship those between humans, those between humans and nature and between non-human life forms in nature. It’s crucial questions are about human environment such as “what do we mean when we talk

about nature?” what is the value of nature?” how we should respond to environmental challenges such as environmental degradation, pollution and climate change?” “How can we best understand the relationship between the natural world and human technology and development?” “What are our duties and virtues towards environment?” and “what is our place in natural world?”. Environmental ethics is theory and practice appropriate concern for, values in, and duties regarding the natural world. Environmental ethics is even more inclusive, whales slaughtered, wolves extirpated, whooping cranes and their habitats disrupted, ancient forests cut, earth threatened by global warming- these are ethical questions intrinsically, owing to values destroyed in nature, as well as also instrumentally, owing to human resources jeopardized. Humans need to include nature in their ethics; humans need to include themselves in nature. People are both the subject and object of ethics. Humans deliberately and extensively rebuild the spontaneous natural environment and make the rural and urban environments in which they reside. We care about the quality of life in these hybrids of nature and culture. Ethics arises to protect various goods within our cultures.¹

Environmental ethics

If we understand human-nature relationship then we can easily understand environmental moral issues. Environmental ethics is the ethical arguments about sentient beings –both wild and non-wild animals as well as the ethics for non-sentient nature such as “land ethics”. Environmental ethics usually includes such topics as wildlife management, concerns over deforestation, global warming, loss of bio-diversity, overpopulation, and in some cases, the treatment of farm and laboratory animals (i.e. non-wild animals). Human are often depicted as the victims of environmental degradation. Many environmental moral philosophers believe that certain sectors of the human pollution especially minorities and women suffer, along with nature, at the hands of traditionally powerful and privileged classes of people. I argue that there is tendency, especially among some Christian environmentalists, to invoke a model of nature as a harmonious, interconnected, and interdependent community. This “ecological model” as it is often called, resonates more with pre-Darwinian, non- Darwinian, and romantic views of nature than it does with evolutionary accounts. The ecological model, which pervades much of eco-theology, is offered as alternative to “mechanistic or Newtonian or Cartesian” perspectives that regard nature and animals as mere matter and therefore dualistic, objectifying, and instrumental patterns of thought and behaviour. As a corrective to mechanistic views the ecological model champions the radical rationality and interdependence of all life. Inter-relation in turn implies an ethic of mutuality, care, liberation, and even love for all other beings, human and non- human alike. Eco-theologians discussed here differ in the degree of emphasis they place on each of these ethics (love, liberation, value etc.), but on the whole they assent to the ecological model. Many environmentalists argue that nature presents us with a model and this model has normative import for all our relationship. The concept of nature’s interdependence –both in terms of genealogical evolutionary interdependence and interdependence in terms of eco-systematic interconnections and interactions – is central to this model. Among Christian environmentalists the ecological ethics that corresponds to this model is understood to be consistent in important ways with Christianity’s ethics of love and care for the neighbour – particularly the neighbour who is suffering, oppressed, and in needs, as our natural neighbours appear to be. Eco-theologians thus claim that they have grounded their ethics in religious teaching as well as scientific knowledge about the natural environment.²the great figure and proponent of environmental ethics is “Aldo Leopold’s (A Sandy Country Almanac) who influenced deep ecological movements both at the levels of theory and of inspiration. Leopold further calls for a recognition of the obligations which are owed to all members of the bio-tec community (what he calls ‘the land ethic’ and to the biosphere as an organic whole.

Aldo Leopold holds that ‘a thing is right when it tends to promote the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotech community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise. This means that we have many obligations to environment for the conservation of biotic community.’³

Contribution of philosophers towards environmental ethics

The environment has become a significant issue, of timely and timeless, relevant and perennial interest. Philosophers and religious scholars have thought about the nature for centuries, in ancient Greece, Italy, India or China. These philosophers have made a great contribution in studying and protection of environment. In western countries, following the enlightenment and the scientific causal forces, Values arose only with the interests and preferences of humans, for whom nature was natural resources. The main philosophy of Milesian/Ionic school of Greek philosophy revolves around the fundamental stuff “nature has to be studied according to natural stuff”. For four centuries, western philosophy and theology were both dominantly human-centred, anthropocentric. People were all that counted in ethics. the middle of the last century had been predicted as the environmental turn in philosophy. Philosophers had to wake up after earth day was established in 1970 by U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson. Twenty million people participated in that first earth day; today, over half a billion participate in over 170 countries. Environmental issue, according to Paul Hawken is the “ the largest movement in the world” considering the number and force of environmental organizations around the world (Hawken, 2007).⁴

Need for Environmental ethics

Global warming is the environmental threat of first magnitude that still stares us in the face. Global warming means that earth is warming, that humans primarily are causing that warming through greenhouse gas emissions and deforestation, and that this warming threatens the well being of billions of people today and in the future.⁵ Pollution is the harmful effect to humans and other life forms. It is about any form of matter or energy that has been introduced into the environment. Contamination of air, water, soil by toxic chemicals of industrial origin is perhaps the most familiar example. Anthropogenic pollution had little environmental significance before the development of cities. From very earlier times, however, the concentration in cities of fires for cooking, heating and industry undoubtedly polluted the air locally, and metal smelting introduced toxic chemicals into soil, air and water. More harmful, however, were human and animal wastes that contaminated soil and water and transmitted infectious diseases. In the developed nations during the twentieth century, and especially during the economic expansion following World War II, heavy industry, coal fired power generation, chemical agriculture, above-ground nuclear weapons testing, and petroleum-powered transportation systems became significant sources of pollution. Smog blanketed industrialized cities in Europe and U.S. in December of 1952 the so called Great smog killed thousands in London. The Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio, was so polluted that in 1969 it caught fire. It was of course an oil slick on the water, not the water that burned. Modern life is almost everywhere becoming more urban, and cities almost everywhere are becoming crowded with fossil fuel burning vehicles. Thus one might suspect that the worst health effects of modern life come from air pollution. Global statistics, however, reveal a different picture: the chief health threats of modern life come from eating too much of wrong foods and not getting enough exercise.

Climate change is another devastating problem for human life. Human’s emissions of green house gases are changing the words weather patterns and climate by increasing the global average temperature-a phenomenon

known as anthropogenic global climate change. Climate change is caused by the build up of green house gases in the atmosphere. Like a blanket, these gases trap heat radiated from the earth's surface. The heat comes originally comes from the sun. Without green house gases it would escape in to space. But as green house concentrations increase, the atmosphere traps more heat and it in turn heats the land and oceans. The temperature mostly increases at higher oceans and it also increases ocean acidity, arctic and Antarctic ice and of glaciers worldwide, rising sea levels, intensified heat waves and droughts, and increases in extreme weather events. The consequences for humanity already dangerous are likely to become much worse. According to the IPCC (2007:65), "climate change over the next century is likely to adversely affect hundreds of millions of people through increased coastal flooding, reductions in water supplies, increased malnutrition and increased health impacts". These adverse effects include forced migration, sickness, injury and death. Climate change is also hazards to human beings in the form of flooding, drought, wildfire, insects, ocean acidification and other global change drivers (e.g. land use change, pollution, fragmentation of natural systems, overexploitation of resources). The higher the temperature, the worse the problem "As global average temperature increases exceeds about 3.5 c, model projections suggest significant extinctions (40 to 70% of species assessed) around the globe" (IPCC: 54). Climate change will bring more rainfall to some regions, less to others. In many areas global warming is temporarily increasing the flow of rivers by increasing melt rates of glaciers. But as the glaciers disappear over decades or centuries, water flow will ultimately diminish. Inadequate need of water supply, including hunger and thirst, high rates of disease and death, loss of productivity and economical crises, and degraded ecosystems are palpable in global warming.

METHODOLOGY

Most of the research work is done on the basis of primary data. Although secondary data work has also been performed in the current work.

The future of environmental ethics

Given the increasing concern for the environment and the impact that our actions have upon it, it is clear that the field of environmental ethics is here to stay. However, it is less clear in what way the discipline will move forward. I think that there is an evidence for at least three future developments. First of all, environmental ethics needs to be and will be informed by changes in the political efforts to highlight environmental problems. Environmental ethics concerns formulating our moral obligations regarding the environment. While this enterprise can be, and often is, quite abstract, it is also meant to engage with the real world. After all, ethicists are making claims about how they think the world ought to be. Given this, the effectiveness of states and governments in 'getting there' will affect the types of ethics that emerge. For example, the Kyoto Protocol might be regarded as the first real global attempt to deal with the problem of climate change. However, without the participation of so many large polluters, with the agreed reductions in greenhouse gas emissions so small, and with many countries looking like they may well miss their targets, many commentators already regard it as a failure. Ethicists need to respond not just by castigating those they blame for the failure. Rather they must propose alternative and better means of resolving the problems we face. For example, is it more important to outline a scheme of obligations for individuals rather than states, and go for a bottom-up solution to these problems. It is quite possible then, that we will see business ethics address many of the same issues that environmental ethics has been tackling. However, I do not think that environmental ethics has the potential to inform only business ethics. Rather, and this is my second point, it will undoubtedly feed into and merge with

more mainstream ethical thinking. After all, the environment is not something one can remove oneself from. In light of this, once it is recognized that we have environmental obligations, all areas of ethics are affected, including: just war theory, domestic distributive justice, global distributive justice, human rights theory and many others. Take global distributive justice as an example: if one considers how climate change will affect people throughout the world so differently – affecting individuals' homes, sanitation, resistance from disease, ability to earn a living and so on - it is clear that consideration of the environment is essential to such questions of justice. Part of the job of the environmental ethicist will thus be to give such disciplines the benefit of his or her expertise. Finally, environmental ethics will of course be informed by our scientific understanding of the environment. Whether it be changes in our understanding of how ecosystems work, or changes in the evidence concerning the environmental crisis, it is clear that such change will inform and influence those thinkers writing on our environmental obligations.

CONCLUSION

Environmental ethics is the area of Applied Ethics, which aims at making the implications of ethical theories in the concrete situations like relationships between nations in the contemporary world, application of ethical theories for actions in environmental ethics, bio-medical ethics, impact on human-nature relationship and in the field of human existence. Applied ethics studies current applied issues or specific problems with the use or application of moral ideas investigated in normative ethics which are datable like environmental ethics. Applied ethics sometimes coincide with the political or social questions i.e. “does cutting of forests for constructing our homes is moral or immoral.

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