

Towards a Global Environmental Ethics - A Review Discussion



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Abstract : Environmental ethics is “a reasoned account of how people should live their lives”, it indicates a precious code in the individuals and societies. Environmental ethics ought to be developed in each person, to command him/her as a force from within to make decisions and take action on the different aspects of the environment, which are not harmful to the local, national and international community. We cannot conserve / preserve our environment by making laws by force. According to Khgshoo. (1987) “*this universe is the creation of the supreme powers and is universe is the creation of the supreme powers and is meant for the benefit of all.*” Individual species must therefore, learn to enjoy its benefits by regarding themselves as part of the system in close relationship with other species. Review of literature supports that the environmental ethics is governed by the environmental theology which is related to views expressing God’s relationship to the environment and the divine expectations of human behaviour with regard to the environment.

Keywords : Environmental ethics. Environmental theology, Environmental values, Environmentalism Deoview. Worldviews.

Introduction :

Of all the political, economic and social revolutions of the last century, none has so fundamentally changed human values and behaviour as the environmental revolution. Persuasive evidence indicates that humankind inhabits a planet with an ecological overshoot, *i.e.*, humankind is using ecological resources faster than they can be restored. In addition, human society is releasing pollutants and wastes more rapidly than natural systems can assimilate them. Ideally, the pollutants and wastes should be assimilated and transformed to a degree that they benefit other species. If overshoot persists, it could well result in a global environmental collapse that, in turn, would result in an economic collapse. To prevent such a disaster, human society must replace unsustainable practices with

sustainable practices. This article focuses on ecological restoration, which increases natural capital (*i.e.*, natural resources) and the ecosystem services it provides. Societal change with ecological restoration should reduce the overshoot and make sustainable use of the planet possible (Cairns, Jr., 2005).

Environmentalism after the Second World War, has spawned a mass movement with millions of followers, generated new bodies of law, hatched new political parties, followers, generated new bodies of law, hatched new political parties, encouraged a rethinking of economic and social priorities and became a central issue in international relations. Above all, it has changed the way we look at the world and compelled many of us to change the way we live. For the first time, humanity has awakened to some of the basic truths that

nature is finite and that the mismanagement of the environment ultimately threatens our own existence.

Environmental Concerns :

Misuse of environment has a history almost as long as that of civilization. Man's desire for ultimate joy and comfort has led him to exploit nature's "free goods" to the extent of reducing its natural capacity for self stabilization. As a consequence of this outright disregard towards the environment, the man's relations with natural environment is being disturbed. The rapidly deteriorating environmental conditions are causing major concern to all the nations of the world. United Nations Conference on Human Environment held in Stockholm was an expression of this concern. It highlighted the gravity of the problem and focussed the attention of the world on the overwhelming need of setting right the current unfortunate trends. Tipping point situations occur when the forces that create stability are overcome by the forces that create instability, and the ship, vehicle, system, or global ecosystem tips into disequilibrium. The five great biotic extinctions provide persuasive evidence that global tipping points have been reached in the past. The sixth biotic extinction now underway is unique because of the dominant effects of anthropogenic activities. The quest for sustainable use of the planet requires that reaching tipping points be eliminated or, at the very least, minimized. The best way to determine the stress needed to induce a tipping point is to cross a major ecological threshold. The experimental sciences can help estimate the nature and location of thresholds, but ethical behaviour and reducing unsustainable practices is the best way to achieve sustainability by taking

precautionary measure to reduce the probability of reaching a tipping point (Cairns, Jr. 2004).

It should be clearly understood that the causes of environmental deterioration in the developing countries are different from those of the developed countries. In the latter, the environmental deterioration is the by-product of a socially retarded civilization. It has been caused by misdirected affluence and excessive and uncontrolled industrialization and urbanization. Knowledge of science and technology has been used not in enlarging general human happiness, but in recklessly destroying nature and in making everyday life more mechanical and artificial. On the other hand, in the developing countries. It is the crude and clumsy machine of poverty-that causes the gravest environmental hazard. Mrs. Indira Gandhi in her speech in the Stockholm conference, rightly-posed the question, "*how can we speak to those who live in villages and slums about keeping the ocean, river and air clean when their own lives are contaminated at the source*". The environment cannot improve in conditions of poverty. In view of the basic difference in the nature of the environmental problems of developing and developed countries, it will be grave and tragic error to adopt the same approach that is being advocated in the west.

The approach to healthy environment should include comprehensive study of the existing methods of production, distribution and consumption and also of the alternative methods that could be evolved. However, it must be understood that technological innovation alone cannot solve the problem, they must be accompanied by reorientation

of values, attitudes and motivations, both at the national and international level. It should be recognized that at the root of the technological problems, there are not only issues relating to choices of technologies but also issues that arises out of the two fundamental gaps of the current times— the gap between man and the nature and the gap between rich and poor.

Implications of Science and Technology :

By dominating one's environment, man has attempted to create healthy surroundings in which human's skills, intellect and spirits can be developed to their highest potential. This has propelled growth and consumption of goods and energy on an exponential basis, which threatens the equilibrium of nature. The process, by which man has tried to survive by protecting himself from nature's threats has brought him to a crossroad at which, he is the dominator as well as the destroyer. He must now introspect whether he can survive physically and spiritually in a ravaged natural environment or even without nature at all. The time has come when man's behaviour must be modified to defend and protect nature. In the last four decades, there has been a phenomenal interest and public realisation that a solution to environmental crises must be addressed. Although in the past, concern for the manifestation of nature was conveyed by ruler, thinkers, reformers and revolutionaries in the form of love, compassion and aesthetic appeal. It is only in the recent times that scientist have helped in focusing attention on the importance of maintaining the balance of nature for the very survival of life.

Founded on the technological knowledge which in growing by leaps and bounds in this direction, a whole new trend of thinking has arisen whereby, mankind does not consider the optimum use of natural resources reflected in a high per capita income as the sole criterion for a better life. On the contrary, now the striving is for a better quality of life. based on clean air, water and well protected soils, forests and wildlife in the field of trade and commerce, there is a radical reorientation of the aims wherein, society will strive toward understanding nature and living in harmony with her.

Quality of life and Environmental Ethics :

Quality of life may be described as the standards of living, mode of living, life style, physical/material aspects of life, socio economic conditions of people, spiritual and cultural dimensions of life, social welfare etc. Understanding the concept, 'quality of life' help an individual to live a wholesome life by keeping physically fit, mentally balanced and emotionally stable. The education of the quality of life not only helps, generate and establish a concrete growth to see and perceive better life, but also leaves greater scope for everybody to express its attachment and affection towards environment and thereby developed a deep sense of satisfaction, pleasure or happiness through which one procures joy in life.

Ethics is a set of principles dealing with morals. Ethics command us not to endanger the health of an individual and communities, but to serve as a proud and honest person in the sendee of humanity (Ghaznawi, 1990). It is believed that ethical behaviour is based on belief-value system. There are certain

rules of conduct related to environment. It means the actions, taken in creating and preserving better environment for better living of people should form ethics of the environment

Environmental Ethics :

Eco-ethics is the essential foundation for sustainable use of the planet. Such a foundation must consist of a series of value judgments to which humanity is committed. Eco-Ethics International Union (EEIU) and its declaration is a tentative attempt to provide some illustrative examples (Cairns, Jr 2002).

Wenz Petter S. (2001) defines environmental ethics as, “*a reasoned account of how people should live their lives*”. It inculcates a precious code in the individuals and societies, Environmental ethics ought to be developed in each person, to command him/ her as a force from within to make decisions and take action on the different aspects of the environment which are not harmful to the local, national and international community. Environmental ethics has to sharpen the judgement of a person not to jeopardize the health and security of other fellow beings for the sake of material and political gains. For example. the use of certain drugs and pesticides due to their harmful effects on their target groups gets banned in certain countries, but the manufacturer find outside markets where no legislation could prevent them from selling their material, as if it were harmful in one place and not in other. Other example could be the disposal of dangerous nuclear waste. These are concrete examples where legislation act to limit and beyond that in the individual or group decisions that control the

situation - these decisions ought to be guided by environmental ethics.

Shrader-Frechette (1991) in his paper entitled *Ethics and the Environment*, offers evidence that while we are competent in science and technology, we are tragically incompetent in ethics, and politics and then perhaps the worst environmental pollution is mind pollution. One measure of degree to which our minds have been polluted is the extent to which the environmental debate is dominated to extreme positions that neither contribute to human nor to environmental well-being. If one wishes to be good, one must first be wise. Environmental ethics is a subpart of the prime reality attribute of a worldview (Coughlin, 1994)

Sustainability is a utopian vision that requires living harmoniously with nature, which will exact harsh penalties on species that exceed Earth's carrying capacity and violate nature's laws. To make this vision a reality, humankind needs a global ethical consensus on sustainable use of the planet—sustainability ethics. Sustainability ethics has the goal of developing a sustainable, mutualistic relationship between humankind and the interdependent web of life that serves as Earth's ecological life support system. The quest for sustainable use of the planet is a value judgment that has more than one component. Arguably, the most important is increased attention to and compassion for posterity's quality of life, in short, leaving a habitable planet for future generations. This requires leaving natural capital and the ecosystem services it provides undiminished at the least and increased at best. Although material possessions can be left to direct descendants, protecting the planet's ecological life

support system must not only be for all of humankind’s descendants but those of the 30+ million other species with which we share the planet. This is difficult because the recipients are distant (as individuals) both temporally and spatially. Therefore, this quest will not be realized until an agreement emerges on the values and attitudes necessary to make sustainability a reality. Science can then develop the standards and criteria necessary to reach this goal. In view of present unsustainable practices, a basic ethical consensus is necessary to develop sustainable practices (Cairns, Jr., 2003a)

Predictive ecotoxicology emphasizes the probable environmental outcome of exposure to toxics, rather than the mere appraisal of existing damage, and in so doing raises some complex but interesting ethical issues. Awareness of endocrine-disrupting chemicals is blurring the line between humankind and other life forms in toxicity testing by providing evidence that both humans and wildlife suffer adverse reproductive and developmental effect. There is a wide variety of chemicals that have been reported as potential endocrine disruptors. Finally, with the increasing loss of wildlife habitat, protecting the quality and ultimate fate of the remaining habitat from the effects of toxic substances becomes increasingly important to the moral quest for sustainable use of the planet (Cairns, Jr, 2003a).

Environmental Theology :

Introspection into the evidences available in literature suggests that, environmental ethics is governed by personal environmental theology, which is related to the views expressing God’s

relationship to the environment and the divine expectations of human behaviour with regards to the environment. Under the environmental theology umbrella two major themes emerge, faith based ethics and faith-based worldviews. Environmental theology is highly conceptual. Authors on this subject generally rely that environmental theology is descriptive of a religious view of God’s relationship with nature or the demands of the belief system on human conduct regarding nature.

Archival literature concerning environmental theology confirms three basic views of God’s spatial relationship to nature. This spatial relationship may be referred to as deoview (Jacobus, 2004). One is creator God, able to exist externally to the physical world. The second deoview is the internal (in nature) existence of deity. God does not exist in the third basic view

Table 1 : Environmental Theology Dichotomy

Deoview	Environmental View
External God	Environmental was created
Internal God	Environmental is divine
No God	Environment is emergent

Environmental views corresponding with basic deoviews would be (a) environment is created, (b) the environment is divine, and (c) environment is emergent. God-environment belief systems may be dichotomously classified as: (a) external created or God exist external and the environment is God’s creation, (b) internal-divine or environment is God. and (c) non-existence emergent or God does exist and the environment came into existence from an unknown condition

Trends from referred literature suggest that motivation for an environmental ethics is consistent with the basic concept of God's relationship with nature. It may be inferred that ethical behaviour is based on belief-value system. Human beings will have to develop environmental ethics that demands to practice efficient use of the environment and exclusive rule over all life forms, not for consumption, but for survival in the twenty first century.

The philosophy of sufficiency/is deeply rooted in the human past. Materialism was denounced by all sages from Buddha to Mohaminad. and every world religion is rife with warning against the evils of excess The religious founders said with one voice that if made material wealth our paramount aim, this would lead to disaster. Propagating lower consumption as an ethical norm ultimately requires that we review the non-consuming philosophy that lies dormant in our culture—our collective memory, wisdom, and ways - and use it to mold a non culture of permanence.

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