

Environmental Ethics from a Non-anthropocentric Point of View

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this paper is a synoptic review on a non-anthropocentric value theory for environmental ethics. A conventional anthropocentric value theory confers intrinsic value on human beings and regards all other forms of life, as being only instrumentally valuable, i.e., valuable only to the extent that they are means and instruments which may serve human beings. This paper also discusses the tragic outcomes of our lifestyle on environment. Results of our disposable society, where it is not a common practice to have material goods fixed, but rather replaced. The tendency of city dwellers to acquire more and more stuff, material commodities, majority of which ends up as waste, trash and refuse. The literature of environmental ethic is utilized to analyze the current scenario of waste imperialism. It provides Comparative thoughts by a handful of philosophers and dispute on our moral obligations.

Keywords: *Anthropocentric value, waste imperialism*

1. INTRODUCTION

Every living being on this planet is a parasite for the environment it lives on. We are also the parasites of a more deadly nature. We alter the eco-systems we live on beyond repair. Our aim is to know nature, environment from the view point of using it to make our lives comfortable. There is a basic flaw in this approach. It gets us on a trade mill where we cannot set down. It seems the only way is to go faster and faster. One wise man said that nature will give us anything we want but simultaneously it will give us things that will render our initial want from it meaningless. It's about the world that is obsessed with stuff, a system in crisis. We are thrashing the planet.

It's strange that a five rupee snack packet, whose contents gets consumed in minutes, stays on for several years to damage the environment and eventually our lives. Plastic, as we know it now, is a potential threat to the environment. But the fact is plastic was originally used for its potential to safeguard the environment. Ironically, earliest plastics were invented as to substitute the dwindling supply of natural materials like ivory or tortoise shell. At the time, when John Wesley Hyatt invented celluloid, the first industrial plastic, he made a pledge that his company would no longer

use natural materials and would save tortoise and elephant. Plastics also made possible green technology like solar panels and lighter cars. To comfort ourselves by pointing fingers at the producers as the sole cause for the problems to exist and carry on with our lives is not a solution.

With this dangerous idea, our problem won't go away by only trying to keep the unwanted stuff away from our homes. The truth is on earth there exists no place which is away. It is not right to point fingers at modern corporations as harbingers of death of our planet. City dwellers live flatulently inside clean, concrete jungles, thanks to the rampant consumerism virus inflicted by ambitious marketers. As quoted by Howard Zinn, "We don't have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change, small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world". The earth is 4.6 Billion years ago scaling to 46 years, we have been 4 hours and our industrial revolution began just 1 min ago. In that time we have destroyed more than 50 percent of the world's forests. And it's safe to say that this is not sustainable.

It's pretty amazing that our society has reached a point where the effort necessary to extract oil from the ground, ship it to a refinery, turn it into plastic, shape it appropriately, truck it to a store, buy it and bring it home is considered to be less effort than what it takes to just wash the spoon when you are done it. Nothing is inherently trash, what counts as trash depends on who's counting, and what we throw away defines us as much as what we keep. We live in a disposable society, where it is not commonplace to have material goods fixed, but rather replaced. As time progresses we learn of more tragic outcomes of our lifestyles. One thing we need to keep in mind is that ethics do not develop simultaneously, the environment damage can first be slowed, then stopped and eventually reversed and mended.

2. NON-ANTHROPOCENTRISM

Environmental ethics is not just an applied ethics, it constitutes, rather, nothing less than an inchoate paradigm shift in regular philosophy. An anthropocentric value theory (or axiology), confers intrinsic value on human beings and regards all other things including other forms of life, as being only instrumentally valuable, i.e., valuable only to the extent that they are means or instruments which may serve human beings. A non-anthropocentric value theory on the other hand, would confer intrinsic value on some non-human beings. For this one need only consider the effects of their environmental actions, the pollution people create, the resources they consume, etc., on other people. As the ethical theory is conventionally anthropocentric, the environmental ethics is thus reduced more or less to cost-benefit analysis. It should attempt to provide theoretical grounds for the moral standing or moral considerability of non-human natural entities, natural communities, or nature as a whole.

Humans are a part of an ecosystem and as such we must strive to bond with it. The continued loss of natural habitat disconnects us from the world and decreases our consciousness about nature. Human beings are the guardians of this world and all of its raw beauty, therefore, we must protect it at all costs. Understanding those environmental issues are subjects of disagreement arising from different perspectives and values, the controversy of economic gain with ecological conservation is not easily settled. The main issue emerging from the arguments over Utilitarianism (that is, theories like Peter Singer's and John Passmore's) is whether animals and the environment have the kind of value that would prohibit using them as mere means for human ends (or as "anthropocentric resources," as environmental ethicists prefer to say). Even if it is agreed, the issue is whether the resulting ethic will be adequate to prohibit environmental abuse, and to guarantee long-term sustainability and biodiversity. The deontological theories (such as Tom Regan's and Paul Taylor's) fail to include the non-living components of the environment, except as instrumental resources or as tradeable intrinsic goods. The theory doesn't provide a way to resolve real conflicts among individual entities supposedly having equal inherent value.

3. WASTE IMPERIALISM

This convenient lifestyle coupled with our massive desire for material goods has created immense devastation to the Earth. As time progresses we learn of more tragic outcomes of our lifestyles. Our modern industrial society provides us with great physical and psychological comfort. "That's the whole meaning of life ... trying to find a place for your stuff" — George Carlin. The well-known American comedian, George Carlin, had in a 1986 sketch about "The Stuff" showed us how our tendency to acquire more and more stuff, material commodities, generates great anxieties about how and where to store them. Even your house is not a home, but "a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get more stuff." What Carlin did not tell us, at least in this sketch, is that much of the stuff does not find a place, it ends up as garbage: as waste, trash and refuse. Garbage is capitalism's dark underbelly, its pathological alter ego. That is why we keep refusing to believe that it exists.

It is not accidental that dumping grounds, and waste treatment plants are customarily located in places where the most vulnerable and marginalized sections of the population live, whether in the developed or developing countries. Simply throwing trash into the recycle bin hardly does anything to reduce the production of garbage; on the contrary it might silence us into a false sense of complacency as Heather Rogers, the author of *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage* argues. This is because household waste constitutes a minuscule percentage of the total waste produced, the vast majority of which is constituted by waste from industrial processes. As she shows, the mantra of recycling and green capitalism has been adopted by corporations and big business because it is the least threatening of the options to profit margins, no wonder, the rate of

production of goods and, consequently, trash has only increased. Adding to this, in this “greenwashing,” the responsibility of cleaning up the environment is displaced from corporations to people themselves in their own individual, personal capacities.

4. SUSTAINABILITY ETHICS

Sustainability is a moral response to an incredible gift. Humans cannot give back to Earth what it has given. When we burn fossil fuels, we cannot make up the millions of years of history it took to create them. When we pollute the skies and obscure the sunrise, we cannot simply wipe the atmosphere clean. Our relationship with our planet is one of unbalanced exploitation, in which we take while the planet gives. It is inherently an unjust relationship. Some may argue that this was the way it was intended to be; that the Earth exists for our subjugation. The problem is that this attitude hurts both the conquered and the conquerors. Global warming has led to terribly destructive storms. Pollution harms the lungs of many animals, including humans. Depletion of resources leaves subsequent generations in doubt of their future. We need a more ethical way to carry out our relationship with the Earth, for the planet's sake and for our own. Instead of greed, let us consider the possibility of approaching the Earth with an attitude of gratefulness.

All humans are given the gift of life, and the moral imperative to address this gift falls on all of us. Regardless of age, wealth, or upbringing, we all experience the raw power of the Earth's beauty. We all rely on the Earth to survive and thrive. Despite our differences, we are residents of the same planet, and that connection powerfully intertwines us all. All of our destinies are dependent on the future of the Earth. This endows every action towards the environment with profound ethical significance. An action that affects the planet must also affect the human race in some capacity.

What makes sustainability difficult is seeing that this care must extend to people we will never meet. As mortal beings, our perspective is sadly short-sighted, but the truth is that the Earth's timeline varies hugely from our own. Consider a tree planted from seed. It may take years to reach maturity, and those who enjoy its benefits are often not the same as those who chose to plant it in the first place. There is no instant satisfaction, but there is long-term contentment, and the simple joy of giving a gift that endures beyond our immediate influence. Even in an increasingly urban world, there are still plenty of examples of the simple goodness of nature existing due to the care of the people who came before us. Whether they purposefully chose to do well, or merely chose to avoid doing harm, our ancestors helped determine the way we experience nature today. This was not always for our benefit. As seen in rising levels of pollution, increasing global temperatures, and widespread devastation of natural species, the planet has been wounded as well. On the other hand, there are also numerous examples of natural parks preserved in their raw beauty, brave efforts to prevent extinction, and technological innovations that have saved the planet while improving our

quality of life as well. We can choose to look at this mixed legacy as an excuse to continue patterns of recklessness and self-indulgence, or we can view it as a challenge to do better and preserve the feeling of care and gratefulness that have continued to exist in the midst of environmental injustice.

Sustainable practices are designed to help ourselves and the world while keeping the future in mind. They are a way to express our gratitude for the gift of life made possible by the environment, passed down thanks to the care and restraint of past generations. Sustainability means the granting the Earth the ability to endure, and with a sustainable mindset, we can ensure that respect for the planet and respect for humanity will continue long after we have departed.

5. THE LINKS BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND SCIENCES

Science, technology and engineering have brought great benefits to the world, and have made huge wealth and material comfort for us. Yet upon closer analysis, many people have observed that these forces have had ambivalent effects. Tremendous benefits made possible by scientists and the scientific method have not been without negative impacts on the Earth, and in some cases, for the poor. The automobile has brought us convenience in transport, yet we have paved over much fertile farmland to make roads. Fossil fuels, such as oil and gas, have made possible all manner of industry and devices, yet the carbon dioxide emissions from their burning play a significant role in disrupting our atmosphere and climate. Nuclear technologies can promote health, for example, through radiation treatments for cancer. Yet these same when used for war could bring about indescribably horrific suffering. Nuclear energy produces no greenhouse gasses, which is good, but its waste products are radioactive (acutely dangerous) for 10, 000 years or more. The wealthy nations of the world have generated great economic benefits through technology, but at times these technologies have extracted goods from poorer countries, and further frustrated their economic growth.

6. CONCLUSION

Environmental ethics apply ethical thinking to the natural world and the relationship between humans and the earth.

- In the most general sense, environmental ethics invites us to keep in mind three key propositions:
- The Earth and its entities have moral status, in other words, are worthy of our ethical concern;
- The Earth and its entities have intrinsic value, meaning that they have moral value merely because they exist, not only because they meet human needs;
- Drawing from the idea of an ecosystem, human beings should consider whole ecosystem that include other forms of life and the environment.

There are different trends, voices, and diverse opinions within the field of environmental ethics. This paper provides the essential knowledge for being able to develop one's own moral vision for living in relationship to the Earth, and for inviting others to consider the Earth as morally significant.

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