

ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY: REVISITING THE PARADIGM SHIFT AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

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Abstract

Environmental philosophy reflects on the natural environment and the place of man. The crucial questions are human relation to environmental challenges such as environmental degradation, climate change, etc. There are catalogues of environmental disciplines from numerous faculties of human research such as environmental philosophy and ethics, environmental epidemiology, environmental microbiology, geography, environmental management, economics, and more. The multifaceted character leading to environmental crisis questions the extent of these human inquiries and their contributions. The problem is that, human activities and negligence to the adverse effects some of these activities has on the environment is costing us our most habitable planet. Environmental philosophy involves the reflection of nature which transcends the question about the 'ought' and 'is' of the natural world. Using an expository analytical method, we shall elucidate, and clarify environmental ideas and problems, charting the course for environmental activities and principles to be followed in carrying out experiments on the environment. The aim of this paper is to query the existing order of environmental activities and proffer possible ways in which all in the belly of the earth can be preserved from the crisis of anthropocentrism thereby creating an awareness of the danger ensued from human activities to the environment. Moral obligation and relational responsibility should be extended to also non-human counters. The significance of this paper is in the solutions it proffers to resolve the problems of environmental degradation and preservation, because environmental degradation does not affect only the environment but also humans.

Keywords: Environment, Climate, Humans, Degradation, Ethics.

Introduction

Environmental philosophy emerged as a branch of philosophy in the 1970s. It was an attempt to connect humanity's sense of alienation from nature. The trending debate around the 1970s and 80s was that of whether nature has intrinsic value in itself and is independent of human values or its value is merely instrumental with ecocentrism or deep ecology approaches emerging on the one hand versus consequentialist or pragmatist anthropocentric on the other. The aspect of philosophy that is very concerned with environmental and human values is environmental ethics. It asks crucial questions about human-environmental relations such as what do we mean when we talk about nature, what is the value of the environment, that is non-human environment to us, or in itself, what response should we give nature and 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, and what is our hermeneutics and environmental theology? Before recent times, ethics or ethical values seemed to have eluded the environment and some Biomes that makes up the Eco-system and centred mostly around human beings, perhaps, if it were centred on the entire eco-system we would see how the functioning of every life and everything in our ecosystem are in sync. The ethics of anthropocentric hegemony fuelled the vehicle of industrialization in the mid-20th century in a somewhat blind manner and this has landed us where we are, a place where we are struggling for safety and preservation of life because of the outcome of our activities. According to Callicot (2008), guidance may have been sought from an understanding of the macro cosmos, ethics was confined to the microcosmos of human affairs. The actual physical world of plants, animals, and ecosystems was relentlessly exploited.

Our environment is seen to be made up of biotic and abiotic elements that are living and non-living organisms/things. The range of things we see whether they occurred naturally or because of human activities (man-made), constitutes what form our environment, which means that natural elements such as water, land, air, plants areas, mountains, animals, humans, and the universe itself are constituents of our environment just as transportation, technology and communication, buildings etc. are part of the environment. We also see that the environment of a place/region largely determines the climate condition of such a place, if not immediately, then eventually. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the climate is defined not only as “the prevailing set of conditions” but also as “the prevailing influence or environmental conditions characterizing a group or period”. This means that if environmental features change or are altered, it invariably affects the climate condition of such an environment. But why is the climate so important? It is because the climate can literally determine where life can habit, it affects our food sources, and it determines what we wear, and so on. Seeing how important the environment is, we can also see why it should be preserved from abuse and misuse. It is therefore the duty of philosophy to open our eyes and minds to see the problems with the present state of things, this perhaps will enable us to come to terms with the reality of our environmental problems and find ways to solve them.

Philosophical Concerns for the Environment

Environmental philosophy is a branch of Philosophy that is primarily concerned with the natural environment and the human environment. For Mathews, Environmental Philosophy examines our relationships as humans with our natural environment: it reviews our philosophical understandings of nature and our conception of nature's value and entitlements, (Matthews, 2014). According to Matthews (2014), part of environmental philosophy is, therefore, exploring what we know and justifiably believe about the environment. But we have to be careful not to stop there. Environmental philosophy requires us to develop wisdom about the environment. Environmental philosophy focuses on a holistic picture of the environment, deconstructing the dualistic mechanistic conception of the world and to give an ecological organic world view. This philosophy can influence our attitude towards the environment in positive ways where we are able to interact with the environment without degrading the natural resources. Our

planet earth is ill, the deplorable environment is of great concern since we depend on the natural environment for our livelihood but also for existence. Human activities have disrupted the ecological systems and natural cycles leading to deforestation, flooding, eroding soils, deteriorating rangelands, and the disappearing species each of which severs the web of life. As noted by Kii;

This growing cosmic disharmony is evident in rivers running dry, destructive storms, the thinning of the ozone layer, melting glaciers, dying coral reefs etc. the so-called greenhouse gases continue to accumulate in the atmosphere, contributing to the global warming that has evidently changed our weather patterns, increased the ultraviolet radiation that reaches the earth surface and damaging both human health and ecosystems. The implication of all this is that the earth is wounded, under unsupportable stress, leading to an increasing discordance on the earth, thus rendering our planet less habitable, more dangerous, and less bountiful.

Environmental philosophy is the attempt to outline the fundamental assumptions, basic principles, and normative ideas that characterize and shape a society's conception of itself in relation to its fellow life and the natural life-supporting environment. This includes the interpretation and evaluation of the kinds of practices and ways of life that may be licensed, cultivated, or encouraged by that society's general conception of itself in relation to its environment. For Norman (2003), one of the central tenets of the environmental philosophy outlined here is that humanity's relation to nature is shaped in varying degrees by the general conception of nature and human nature that is shared among its members. It should be noted that the sole aim of environmental philosophy is to reawaken some unexamined ideologies, values, and assumptions about why humans treat the environment the way they do and then to give an intelligent human response to the issues surrounding the environment, by so doing calling humanity to her moral responsibility for the damages the advance in technology and science is causing to the natural systems, leading to the environmental crisis. Two issues amongst many are of utmost concern to environmental philosophers, they are, environmental degradation and climate change.

Environmental Degradation and Climate Change: Ecological Paradigm Shift

Environmental degradation can be referred to as the devaluation and destruction of forces and components of the environment. Environmental degradation is the deterioration of elements such as air and soil, the destruction of ecosystems, habitat destruction, the extinction of wildlife, and pollution,. These destructions also include large-scale clearing of forces by cutting down tree and burning of biomass (deforestation), desertification, drought, soil erosion, water pollution etc. are activities of human which portrays the absence of value for the ecosystem. For Schramm, environmental degradation is a product of five interrelated causes:

- (1) too many people, (2) some of whom are consuming too much, (3) using powerful technologies that frequently damage nature's

ecosystems, (4) supported by economic and political systems that permit and even encourage degradation and (5) informed by anthropocentric attitudes toward nature (Schramm et.al, 2003).

Climate can be described as the average course or condition of the weather at a place usually over a long period of years as exhibited by temperature, wind velocity, and precipitation,. Climate change on the other hand refers to a change or shift in the average climate condition of a region over a span of period. Climate change can also be referred to as the long-term alteration of temperature and typical weather patterns in a place. A long-term shift in global or regional climate patterns,. Climate change is believed to include global warming and is caused by human activities through the emissions of greenhouse gasses. Greenhouse gasses that are being emitted are increasing dangerously and certain natural phenomena such as trees etc. which are meant to ameliorate the effects of these greenhouse gasses (which include carbon dioxide, methane, etc.) are being tempered with, misused, and abused alongside other natural and environmental biomass. The result of these is that the glass (greenhouse) which protects our planet from the ultra-violet rays of the sun has now cracked and caused the shifts we see in our climate conditions around the world. Some of the effects include altering ecosystems and natural habitats, rising sea levels, frequent and more intense extreme weather conditions, etc..

When we engage the tool of philosophy (which is to questioning) on the issues of environmental degradation and climate change in order to ascertain the what, why, and how of the problems, we find out that it is a result of certain 'careless' human activities. For several decades and centuries, issues of values, good, bad, right, and wrong have been limited within the horoscope of the human space, ignoring the presence and importance of other biomass in our ecosystems, therefore our attitude and activities toward this other biomass is the reason for the destruction of both our environment and our very selves. Thus, the ethics of value has had to be redirected from anthropocentrism to more holistic ethics of values for the entire eco. This new paradigm is expressed in environmental ethics or what some call 'anti-anthropocentrism', which is seeking the value for and the protection and preservation of our environmental forces. In a bid for survival in situations of lack and scarcity, people resort to various safe and unsafe means of surviving, therefore, poverty is not left out as it has contributed to the further destruction of the environment. Environmental deterioration has exacerbated the paucity of resources and forced people to adopt survival strategies that are harmful to the environment. .

Philosophy has the potential to salvage and rehabilitate the environment, and the biodiversity through an imperative critical appraisal. Environmental and development policymakers who ignore indigenous environmental philosophy can never achieve the success they desire, (Kelbessa, 2022). Since the environmental movement began four decades ago, there have been many different opinions as to what roles humans should play in protecting and preserving the environment, whether it is important (ethical viewpoint), and also the environment's impact on animals, economics, and creation of

change. Many people assume that the environment is in no danger and that we do not need to worry about recycling, protecting animal rights, and preserving the environment for future generations. We seem to overlook the fact that, humans are just another living being on the planet and have an equal part in the ecosystem as other living things. Therefore, life on earth should be treated as a single living system that includes interdependent living beings with their own rights. On the other hand, the destruction of the scenery, water pollution, air pollution, and similar environmental problems due to the increase in technology is not only affecting human beings (increase in health problems like asthma), but are also affecting the other living things and changing the natural environment we live in. However, if science and technology can create these problems, they should also have a solution to them. For the past few years, humans were blamed for their domination and greed toward nature.

Ecology as a discipline in the expanded sense of a combined socio-economic and biological science, examines how human misuse of 'nature' is causing pollution to the environment (biotic and abiotic), thereby threatening the base of life upon the human species itself depends on. Our concern for the environment and natural resources also raises the question of our obligations toward future generations. From a social contract view of ethics or for the ethical egoist, the answer would seem to be that we owe nothing to them because we can gain nothing from them. Most other ethical theories, however, do give weight to the interests of our coming generations. The Utilitarian would think that the potential existence of future generations should not constitute the reason for us to give less consideration to their interest than we give to our own. A healthy environment is essential to the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants who depend on it for the air they breathe, the water they drink as well as the food they eat. Unhealthy environments and lack of the natural resources essential for health such as food, fresh and uncontaminated water and air also contribute much to ill health and consequently deaths. Plants and animals of the natural ecosystem can be of health hazard depending on how we control them. By adequately protecting our environment, we set our lives against diseases and environmental degradation and alienate suffering and untimely deaths. These natural resources put us in our proper place, and failure to appreciate this value is not only an aesthetic failure but one of due humility and reverence, a moral disability.

Ethical Implication of Environmental Degradation

Surely our actions and activities have future consequences for the continuation of life on earth. The issue of justice and fairness which are central to ethical discourse comes into play if we must answer the questions and issues before us. Apparently, human actions and activities towards the environment over the centuries have turned out to be neither just nor fair. "Changes in weather patterns have increased storm activity along the coast, affecting human coastal communities...Ultraviolet radiation from the thinning Ozone layer will interfere with vegetation" . These human-induced events (i.e., Deforestation, overexploitation, invasive species, overharvesting etc.) stand in the way of achieving social justice and the concept of being just or fair generally. Social justice involves the distribution of resources, wealth, privileges, and opportunities (i.e. food, water and

shelter) amongst individuals and societies in a fair way, but with the fast and multiple depletion of these resources, achieving fairness or justice would be nothing but mirages as there will be nothing to distribute eventually and the clamour for what is left will result to a situation of “might is right” a situation that is being fought and sought to be replaced with fairness and justice. Man's unjust behaviour towards the environment has now turned out to also be man's unjust behaviour to humanity as well. The importance of distribution of resources in social justice, especially as it concerns the environment is t, it will reduce if not eliminate the role poverty plays in harming the environment. Despite the increasing damage being done to our environment because of our activities, we are taking very little to no responsibility for our actions, yet we are 'moral agents'. The effects of environmental degradation on our climate has brought to our knowledge the issue of 'intergenerational justice'. The Anthropocentric man's ideology has contributed a great deal in bringing us to this point where our climate is no longer safe for us, if we do not take responsibility for our actions which is the first step towards correcting it, total disaster is inevitable. The issue of intergenerational justice concerns what we owe our future generation in terms of global climate conditions and the continuity of all life forms.

Thus, the various flaring effects of environmental degradation on our climate is a call to our moral responsibility, a call for justice and fairness, especially in the areas of social and intergenerational justice which concerns themselves with the extent to which our behaviour and activities affect resource and relates among different generations. Fortunately, there are several feasible ways to correct the damage being done and save the future.

The Way Forward

Environmental philosophers have seen a need to improve on our present ethical codes in order to take into account our behaviour towards the environment. This has developed into a branch of ethics called environmental ethics. Although some philosophers believe that the present ethical codes are adequate to include non-humans simply by extension, some have seen the need to create a completely new ethical and metaphysical descriptions that were human-centred or anthropocentric. To avoid anthropocentrism philosophers have developed an ethics termed 'biocentric ethics'. Biocentric ethics refers to any theory that views life as possessing intrinsic value, . Aldo Leopold (1949) argues that a thing is right where it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise. The moral theory of Aldo Leopold is an invitation for a revisit on our interrelationships with nature in which humans have the responsibility and the stewardship towards care. Although practical solutions are being found to some environmental problems nothing can be done really effectively without a coherent theory to underpin practical decision-making, . However, one way to promote any idea is through education, creating literacy on the subject matter. It is fundamental now that environmental education is taught from the Nursery to the Secondary sections of every school and by government mandate a compulsory subject and in the Tertiary institutions, environmental philosophy is made a compulsory course for all faculties in all tertiary institutions. By introducing environmental education to our school curriculum across all

levels, we will be establishing the sustainability of every solution that will be proffered towards environmental preservation because posterity will always be informed.

Given that environmental issues have become a global issue, several earth submits have been held to address environmental issues and this study encourages us to adopt their recommendations where necessary. Rio+20 is one of the earth summits organized by the United Nations with the aim of identifying and recommending problems and solutions to humanity's pressing challenges and obstacles to development and a better life. Since 1992, the summit has paid more attention to the environment as a sure way to sustainable development, after all, without it we cannot even be.

The purpose of the Rio+2012 issues briefs is to provide a channel for policymakers & other interested stakeholders to discuss and review issues relevant to the objective and themes of the conference, including a **green economy** in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradications.

The goal is to ensure that while we are 'developing we are not also 'dying', that is our methods and models of development must be all-embracing like that of the 'green economy' which includes renewable energy, green buildings, sustainable transport, water management, waste management. The implementation of a green economy guarantees the survival and continuity of biodiversity. The green economy is defined as an economy that aims at making issues of reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities and that aims for sustainable development without degrading the environment. (Wikipedia, 2021). A study of ecological and environmental issues reveals that national as well as international survival of our world depends on our involvement in the very survival of human species and the natural endowments by which man, through its proper management improves his standard of living and makes this global village a better place to live in.

Conclusion

The environmental degradation only surmises what the future holds for us if the measures suggested in this paper others on environmental preservation are not considered seriously. Being aware of and embracing the facts of the matter is the first step towards making any difference, there is a need therefore, to first of all to be conscious and be reawaken from our collective ecological slumber and rise to the occasion of preserving our environment. For this reason, our previous ways of carefreeness towards the environment and our activities that degrades it should be dealt with. There is no gainsaying that our earth is ill. The responsibility for resolving the ecological injustice is in the hands of humans, unless corrective actions are taken, we may be losing our common home. There is, therefore, a need for relational and moral obligation towards the earth. The ecology will outlive man, so there is a need for a healthy relationship and attitude towards the environment. There is a need to rekindle interest in environmental preservation and conservation.

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