



Environmental Ethics and Education- A Necessity to Inculcate Environment Oriented Cognizance

Neha Taneja¹, Kaushal Gupta²

Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Sciences, ABES Institute of Technology, NH-24,
Vijay Nagar, Ghaziabad (U.P.) ^{1,2}

Abstract: Humanitarian disaster is increasingly disturbing the human life. The environmental crisis that hits the global world has threatened the future of the human race and that demands the mitigation of the problems through local action at the individual level. It necessitates the review of the environmental education with respect to its goal as well as its pedagogical approaches. The need of the hour is to move beyond emphasis on mere sensitization towards environmental issues for developing practical capacities among the individuals, to analyze the ethical aspects of the environmental issues and take decisions for actions. Thus, the present paper deals with what environmental ethics mean and also attempts to provide the need for environmental ethics education and its inculcation towards creating environment oriented cognizance.

Key words: Ethics, Environmental Education, Environmental Ethics, Anthropocentrism, Biocentrism, Egocentrism

I. INTRODUCTION

Environmental ethics—the study of ethical questions raised by human relations with the nonhuman environment—emerged as an important subfield of philosophy during the 1970s. Environmental ethics considers the ethical relationship between people and the natural world and the kind of decisions people have to make about the environment. Environmental Ethics has given a new dimension to the conservation of natural resources and it is one of the major concerns of mankind. It is the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of the environment and its non-human contents. It is the examination and discussion of people's obligations towards the environment. It brings about the fact that all the life forms on Earth have a right to live. To achieve the participation of the individuals & community, environmental ethics must be provided to the entire community through environmental education.

II. MEANING OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

If someone had been attempting to foresee the future of philosophy at the middle of the twentieth century, one of the most surprising developments would have been the rise of environmental philosophy. Environmental ethics
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remained unknown until the mid-1970s. Environmental ethics is the discipline in philosophy that studies about the conceptual foundations of environmental values as well as more concrete issues surrounding societal attitudes, actions, and policies to protect and sustain biodiversity and ecological systems. Environmental ethics simply tries to answer the questions of how humans should relate to their environment, how we should use the Earth's resources and how we should treat other species, both plant and animal. Environmental ethics applies ethics to the environment, analogously ethics applied to business, medicine, engineering, law and technology. Environmental quality is necessary for quality of human life. Humans dramatically rebuild their environments; still, their lives, filled with artifacts, are lived in a natural ecology where resources—soil, air, water, photosynthesis and climate—are matters of life and death. Culture and nature have entwined destinies, similar to (and related to) the way minds are inseparable from bodies. So ethics needs to be applied to the environment.

III. CONCEPT OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Environmental ethics, by this account, is founded on what we can call a human right to nature. The World



Commission on Environment and Development claims: All human beings have the fundamental right to an environment adequate for their health and well-being'. This includes the basic natural givens: air, soil, water, functioning, ecosystems, hydrologic cycles and so on. These could previously be taken for granted. But now the right must be made explicit and defended. The four most critical issues that humans currently face are peace, population, development and environment. All are interrelated. Human desires for maximum development drive population increases, escalate exploitation of the environment and fuel the forces of war. Those who exploit persons will typically exploit nature as readily—animals, plants, species, ecosystems and the Earth itself. Suppose that putting out natural fires, culling feral animals or destroying some individual members of overpopulated indigenous species is necessary for the protection of the integrity of a certain ecosystem. Will these actions be morally permissible or even required? Is it morally acceptable for farmers in non-industrial countries to practice slash and burn techniques to clear areas for agriculture? It is often said to be morally wrong for human beings to pollute and destroy parts of the natural environment and to consume a huge proportion of the planet's natural resources. If that is wrong, is it simply because a sustainable environment is essential to (present and future) human well-being? Or is such behaviour also wrong because the natural environment and/or its various contents have certain values in their own right so that these values ought to be respected and protected in any case? These are among the questions investigated by environmental ethics. Some of them are specific questions faced by individuals in particular circumstances, while others are more global questions faced by groups and communities. All these questions are concerned with values of the natural environment and its non human components.

IV. PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Environmental ethics focuses on the moral foundation of environmental responsibility and how far this responsibility extends. There are three primary theories of moral responsibility regarding the environment which are depicted in Figure 1. Although each can support environmental responsibility but their approaches are

1) **Anthropocentrism (human-centered):** This view holds that all environmental responsibility is derived from human interests.

- Assumes that only humans have intrinsic value and moral standing.
- The rest of the natural world has *instrumental value* (use to humans).
- Anthropocentrism considers interests of human as the highest standards to judge everything, advocates human conquest of nature, propose that the human have the right to freely treat the natural for personal interests, and thinks the progress of human civilization is established based on natural yield.

1) **Biocentrism (life-centered):** This view holds that all life forms have an inherent right to exist. The biocentric world view considers humans to be no more than a particular species of animals, without greater intrinsic value than any of the other species of organisms that occur on Earth.

Biocentrism considers that plants and all living have the right to subsistence and inherent value of their own, and should be given equal respect.

2) **Ecocentrism (ecosystem-centered):** This view maintains that the environment deserves direct moral consideration, not consideration derived from human or animal interests. It advocates not only life entity, but also air, water body, land, rocks, natural landscape, and the whole nature have intrinsic value and right.

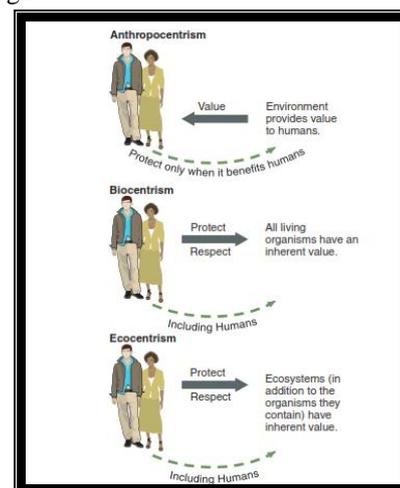


Figure 1- Three philosophical approaches of environmental ethics

It is rightly being said that, “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise....We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”



V. NECESSITY OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS EDUCATION

Ethics belongs to the realm of values. Environmental ethics includes "principles and values that a man as an individual and as a member of the society should follow so as to conserve, preserve and manage the environment". Thus, ethics has direct relationship with human behaviour mediated through the value system developed by an individual. However whereas environmental values deal with such questions as what is environmentally good? And what is bad? Environmental ethics relates to, doing what is good and not doing what is bad. Environmental ethics deals with the ethical relationship between human and the environment of which he is a part. Thus, environmental ethics aims to explicate how one should behave or what rules and moral obligations one should have while interacting with his environment. These moral obligations reflect the set of standards for making decision, choice and actions. These values can be achieved only through education. Consequently, the educational institutions have to take a lead role in developing right type of future society where in each member is socially as well as environmentally responsible and are competent for Environment Oriented Action. This further demands incorporation of the values and ethics in the overall framework of environmental education. Subsequently the responsibility lays on educational institutions and teacher educators competent in environmental ethics to mould the students. So, there is every need to concentrate on environmental ethics and its inclusion in course curriculum, so that each and every student could avail the opportunity of understanding and imbibing the values of morals that is ethical aspects of environmental issues irrespective of their specializations.

VI. CONCLUSION

The man-nature relationship has arrived at the verge of collapse and if serious steps are not taken immediately, the future remains indecisive and uncertain. The grim situation demands immediate action, on part of everyone, individually or in a group. Consequently, the educational institutions have to take a lead role in developing right type of future society where in each member is socially as and are competent for Environment Oriented Action. This further demands incorporation of the values and ethics in the overall framework of environmental education at the educational level well as environmentally responsible. The teachers need to develop appropriate 'pedagogical content knowledge' with respect to teaching of environmental

ethics and enhancing the competencies of individuals for Environment Oriented Action.

VII. FUTURE PROSPECTS

Finally, the inclusion of environmental ethics within the framework of the environmental education is still in its nascent stage and needs innovative curricular approaches and their evaluation. The result can be achieved through further deliberations and substantiation of the various dimensions of "Environment Oriented Action". The approach suggested in this paper is brief and introductory in nature and it needs further treatment and refinement. However, it provides an initial step towards a more progressive and promising line of action to make environmental ethics education more effective and outcome oriented.

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