

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND ECOLOGICAL CRISIS IN ORDER TO A SUSTAINABILITY PARADIGM

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ABSTRACT: *This paper results of an analysis concerning the conflict of the existing ethical paradigms in the context of the crisis of relations between society and the environment, which at present shows the ecological crisis' panorama. First analyzing, from a logical-deductive perspective, the relations between man and nature under a general framework of the crisis regarding current environmental policies and the challenges to be faced by the nations all over the world, specifically the problem that concerns economic development and the environment. Therefore, we will observe the matters under an ethical-philosophical angle supported on the reflection about the conduct and moral values of modern society in order to overcome the ecological crisis under the paradigm proposed by M. L. Pelizzoli.*

KEYWORD – *Ambiental crisis, Ecology; Ethics, Environment, Sustainability.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, all over the planet, we observe a growing attack to the environment's safety in spite of the ecological balance that it is required, which leads to a catastrophe that might extinct humanity. The indiscriminate exploitation of nature's resources for the extraction of raw materials that are used for consumption is of concern, especially when we associate life quality and well-being with the belonging of products whose production comes from such extractions, which, by the way, cause direct damage to the environment.

The problem takes on emergency proportions due to the negligence of the society, and even as a result of your underestimation about the collapse that the insistence of current patterns of exploitation of nature will lead to, creating social imbalance.

Thereby we are faced with the following problem: how to contain the crisis of environmental collapse if we are stuck to the same model of exploitation for the production of consumer goods? How to maintain consumption without changing the means and forms of production and, still, not destroying the environment?

In view of this, the overcoming proposal to the crisis arises from a philosophical reflection based on "must be" that seeks ethics to find and give a new direction to the environment's issues. Thus, we understand that the threat to the environment, which concerns us, stems from ethical matters that, on the other hand, depend on a change in conduct (NALINI, 2010). This actually means that environmental preservation also depends on understanding the problem, so that it can effectively influence the conduct of individuals in favor of the environment.

Hence, following the paradigm that the human being is an integral part that performs a direct interaction with the environment, changing it, likewise he is aware off the limitation of the resources, this study intends to analyze the panoramas of this situation.

II. RELATION 'ENVIRONMENT VERSUS MAN'

The basis of the relationship between man and the environment consists of a qualified view about the interdependent relationships of the elements that constitute and maintain life. Thus, while humanity has improved the capacity to intervene in nature to suit its increasing and unlimited needs, it also leads to the issues of the use of spaces and of resources.

Then, because of the change in the paths of the ultimate society whose process is called evolutionary and development, a new model of civilization was built, based on the process of industrialization and organization of activities and of work. As well, it was based on large scale production models and mechanization. As consequences, the use of fuels is harmful to the environment, the use of pesticides can cause damage to species; the disordered exploitation of the soil, the population concentration and the motorization of means of transport, among others. Thus, nature has a merely useful value, that is, it only serves to be beneficial for human beings.

In this way, we highlight that the interaction of human beings with nature is based on the relationship of consumption and market, which leads to the intensification of exploratory activity that started with the industrial revolution, and then continued with the globalization process due to a world market was created. As a result, there was a massification of consumption on a large scale.

Furthermore, we emphasize that, based on this new posture of the global society, the matter of the environmental issue always takes into consideration the consumption and market relations, and, obviously, the respective interest groups. This, because the global demand for natural resources originates from the economic formation "production *versus* consumption", whose impact is huge.

Consequently, the economic process of environmental exploitation becomes responsible for most of the destruction of natural resources, that is due to a consumption model that was built by the economic model to impose unlimited demands.

The data are shocking and show that in the last century the world population has quadrupled, and industrial production has increased forty times. In the same vein, we have increased the use of fossil fuels sixteen times, thirty-five times the catch of fish and nine times the consumption of water (EUROPEAN COMMISSION GENERAL DIRECTORATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, 2011).

That's why we need a change in the paradigm of political and economic objectives, in order to avoid the disordered exploitation of environmental resources, unlike the tactile and close risk to the depletion of the planet's natural resources.

In this picture we notice that the challenges to protect the environment and the planet, such as combating global warming, extinction of species and excessive use of natural resources, demand the creation of public sustainability policies, environmental education, political stability etc.

However, the incessant search for raw materials with the objective of promoting large-scale industrial production, such as increased consumption and excessive expenditure of energy, go against the desirable objective of environmental preservation.

Developing countries like Brazil, when trying to reproduce the model created and engrafted by developed countries, make intensive use of their natural reserves, deteriorating their ecosystems under the pretext of promoting their economic and social development.

Historically, the need to preserve the environment has grown since the 1960s of the 20th century, when humanity realized that it was marching towards the depletion of natural resources. Thus, movements were created in favor of the defense of the environment, aiming at the construction of alternatives that conciliate development with the protection of the environment. Therefore, the idea that the environment would be at the service and disposal of man was challenged.

Thus, a paradox was discovered, whose terms would not fail to become more and more precise: the historical moment of the greatest domain is also that of the greatest vulnerability. [...] It is that science itself, which had contributed so much, in the past, to believe the ideology of progress, cultivates, from now on, uncertainty. The first serious warnings regarding the depletion of resources and the degradation of the reproduction processes of life on earth responded to the spread of new scientific theories, again calling into question the epistemological bases of representations of the world guaranteed for centuries. [...] (OST, 1997).

Thus, there is a discussion on how to pursue development in a manner compatible with natural resources in a sustainable manner, with the maintenance of resources being prioritized, in order to avoid depletion, in view of the sovereign production system in favor of development.

For this reason, considering that the analysis of the relations between man and nature shows the complexity and interdisciplinarity of the environmental issue, we can based on the contribution of studies of modern systems theories (GONDOLO, 1997), which, in turn, shows us a new way of reflecting on how science may outlining a new ecological paradigm (BOFF, 1996). So, considering the inevitable interference that one nation exercises over another through actions related to the environment, the occurrence of a systemic risk must be taken into account, due to an increase in the interconnections between the various risks, such as hyper-exploitation of natural capital, which places the environmental issue on the agenda of issues of international relevance (COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, 2009).

Those systemics risks, whether or not manifested in the form of instantaneous transformations or progressive exhaustion, can include potential damage or even collapse the entire system. A scenario, where the collapse in one element will be able to destroy the entire system, is, hopefully and in brief, outlined.

III. FOUNDATIONS FOR OVERCOMING THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS BASED ON SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Despite the analysis of the consequences and causes resulting from the historical damage caused by man to nature due to the unbridled use of natural resources, we found that the consequences caused by the connection between man *x* nature, in the harmful form that occurred, led to the change society's life in general.

Regardless of the developments found, whether in the search for a sustainable development model, or in the construction of environmental knowledge incorporated into the axiological plurality and cultural diversity of knowledge formation, which is associated with the growth of awareness about the need for environmental preservation, we observe that man continues to underestimate the ultimate impacts of its occupation on the planet (LEFF, 2006).

Besides, considering the problem of the relationship between man and nature, let us observe the concepts of an ethical order that determine the relationship between man and his environment in the existence of a new ethical paradigm, namely "environmental ethics".

Speaking of ethics is, therefore, trying to say about a balance or conviviality and a set of actions, but also of fundamentals that permeate or that may come to miss what is inferred from this civilizational model and its corresponding production of subjectivity in times mutation. (PELIZZOLI, 1999).

Let us first highlight taking the environment as a discipline and a field of reflection, and as the concept of environmental ethics is also recent. What stands out is that ethics is an area of independent studies that crosses all sciences in an interdisciplinary way, allowing us to understand the genesis and aim of the observed object.

Concerning the environmental ethics, we observe the current crisis that occurs in relation to a generalized ethical crisis in all instances of power, and the conflict between development and preservation.

On account of this, the environmental crisis also reflects the crisis of the human being in a subjective way, which is due to the respect for the environment being linked to the respect and human balance that the individual has, requiring as a change of the preservation's paradigm a change of the individual in its ethical essence. Thus, there must be a change in the paradigm of well-being, where well-being must be composed of a model in which the environment is harmonized with man, understanding that he is part of the environment and that his existence is conditioned to its existence (HUTCHISON, 2000).

Thereby, we can consider ethics as the result of the need to reexamine values and principles due to environmental problems, which are associated with the need for understanding and also with the sense of change to have a collective reach. Boff advocates the following:

Today, we are experiencing the crisis of the human project: we feel the appalling lack of care everywhere. Its negative resonances are shown by the poor quality of life, the penalization of most of the humanity, the ecological degradation and the exacerbated exploitation of violence. May care arise in all areas, penetrate the human atmosphere and prevail in all relationships! care will save life, do justice to the impoverished and rescue the Earth as the homeland and homeland of all. (BOFF, 2000).

Considering that the currents of ethical theories (utilitarianism, deontology and natural law) do not totally embrace the new model of social culture, there is a need to expand the ethical field. Thus, it will be considered as an assumption and limit the existing weaknesses in the environment. Then, a new discipline emerges in the midst of philosophy, the “environmental ethics”, and its elaboration is associated with three events that marked the beginning of a sharp reflection on the environment, namely: the publication of Rachel Carson’s book in 1962, entitled *Silent spring*; as well as the celebration of Earth Day in 1970; and, finally, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972.

Following, we must break with the anthropocentric paradigm of environmental ethics, understanding that the human being is not its only subject, developing also the concept that man is not the center of nature but part of it, and that it is the same and a system as a whole, integrated and with all its subjects integrated. The concept of sacredness practiced by some cultures should be noted here, in specific.

Environmental rationality breaks with the supremacy of the principle of instrumental rationality, in which no aim justifies means that pervert the desired end (LEFF, 2006).

We also understand that Environmental Ethics is based on the premise of the existence of ecological values, and, without these, it could not be legitimized as a rational conduct. Using the comprehensive notion of nature, as a whole, still linked to the notion of a community aware of the relevance of the balance of the environment as a foundation, that is, the environment as part of the whole and at the same time the foundation of ethics essential part of society. Environmental Ethics admits and recognizes to living beings an intrinsic value of dignity and respect for the goods of nature, taking into account that such values would exist regardless of the need and interest of the human species (CALLICOTT, 1979).

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICAL CHALLENGES

A wide discussion is observed about the mission of environmental ethics, and several authors are dedicated to the analysis of its object and its proposition of solutions to human development, despites of ethical solutions aimed at environmental protection, making proposals for paradigm changes in the relationship of the man with nature.

Environmental Ethics, says Nalini, can be defined as the application of social ethics to questions of behavior in relation to the environment. In fact, for him, the crisis is not an environmental crisis, but a crisis of human values, of ethics in all dimensions, which brings up new thoughts, new conflicts, new possibilities, new solutions and new behaviors against the planet (NALINI, 2010).

Therefore, the first challenge for the new Environmental Ethics is, according to Nalini, the need for an adequate environmental education, which plays a fundamental role in the knowledge process, in the modification of pro-environmental values and conduct and, mainly, in the lengthy process of social awareness, by training for an awareness of the acts performed. In this regard, the author himself recognizes, in the note to the third edition, that “the hope is that children and young people will be the brake on folly and serve as a conscience for their grandparents” (NALINI, 2010).

Regarding what was exposed by Nalini, Boff justifies and highlights the importance of ecological education and changing consumption habits in the ethics of care. Still in this pitch, Junges asserts that:

... Ecological literacy means a change in the cultural paradigm that has governed the relationship between human beings and nature over the past five hundred years. This cultural exchange is only possible through the moral conversion of current consumption and coexistence attitudes. This shows that the bottom line of the ecological problem is Ethics. Ecological literacy needs a new cultural ethos, inspired by a consistent Environmental Ethics. (JUNGES, 2004).

In short, we understand that environmental education must be based on the principle of inseparability between teaching, research and extension, since the real knowledge of the human being before the facets of the environment will predispose the exercise of environmental wealth correctly and appropriately, and enjoy them without any burden.

V. CONCLUSIONS

When analyzing the connection between man and the environment, we must take into account the possible construction of a discourse and ethical practices that support or modify such relationships. This is due to the fact that the environmental crisis develops criticisms of the development model and indicates its limits.

Let us also consider that the current system determines the productive processes and labor relations in the current economy, and needs to be critically evaluated, which goes beyond simple consumerism. We realize the urgent need for a change in environmental awareness that will be enhanced through environmental education.

Thus, the pressing need for an Environmental Ethics model demands, in principle, the structuring of a new paradigm of awareness through environmental education.

Equally important is that Environmental Ethics arises amid a crisis of ethical and moral awareness in the form of development implanted in society that can have irreversible effects. In addition, a new economic development model is proposed, so that it develops conscious practices and that protects the environment in its developmental approach.

Finally, before the challenges faced, the question that persists is no longer about the need or not for a new ethical paradigm, but about its objective and how we can put Environmental Ethics into practice, innovating the means of information and deepening the reflection on the thinking of sustainable practices, which reverse the current degradation scenario. Thereby, if the future depends on the present actions, we are confronting politics, economics and other areas through a dialogue of knowledge, looking for alternatives that promote Life on our planet, indeed.

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