

Human and Nature: Developing Virtues for Environmental Responsive Behaviour

Człowiek i przyroda: wspieranie cnót dla zachowań proekologicznych

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Abstract

The environmental issues such as deforestation, climate change, ozone layer depletion, greenhouse effect and pollution of air, water and soil rises due to unethical activity of human beings and behaviour of humankind. Environmental degradation and the deterioration of human moral values are inter-connected with each other. So, environmental revolution required a transformation in human behaviour. Virtue ethics could be used as an instrument to develop a pro-environmental behaviour. Virtue ethics is primarily concerned with what kind of people we should be, what kind of characters we should have, and how we should act. This directly develops one's moral character as well as pro-environmental character and behaviour, i.e., wisely use the natural resources; develop the habit to preserve the nature. Virtue ethics would be built to bridge the gap between human behaviour and the needs of environment. This paper emphasizes the implications of virtue ethics to bring changes in human character and behaviour to resolve the current environmental problems.

Key words: environmental sustainability, ethical theories, Aristotelian virtue ethics, habitual moral behaviour

Słowa kluczowe: zrównoważoność środowiskowa, koncepcje etyczne, koncepcja cnót Arystotelesa, zwyczajowe zachowania moralne

1. Introduction

Industrial revolution had begun in the eighteenth century in England, which brought growth in industries or factories and it is followed in almost all parts of the world for their economic and social development. This resulted in drastic change in the society which is directly affecting the natural environment (Berg and Hudson, 1992). This could be illuminated through tremendous increasing temperature of the earth because of the emission of carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and other gaseous elements released from the industries, vehicles, rocket propellant, fossil fuel and so on. Moreover, science and technology always try to provide solutions for environmental problems, but their failure demands an analysis of human and environment relationship. Till now it is observed the attitude of human towards the environment causes failure in preserving our nature. *Technological or Scientific 'solutions' have often resulted in as many new problems as they have solved* (Jardins, 2000). The population growth and increasing demand of agriculture to fulfil the requirement of the people with the decrease number of farmers have resulted in intensive pressures for increasing the production of agriculture. As a consequence of long-term use of pesticides, such as DDT, Boric Acid, Diazinon, Malathion, etc have affected the environment negatively. Humans affect the food webs through energy production and agriculture, pollution, habitat destruction, overfishing and hunting. It also affects human beings through the food chain. Therefore,

there is a need to bring change in human behaviour and an ethics which deals with human conduct to make the environment deterioration controlled.

Ethics is a moral principle which defines the right and wrong conduct of human beings. It comprehends difficult notions, applications, and explanations about what is right and wrong, and give explanations why things are considered right and wrong. In general terms, *ethics concerns the moral behaviour of individuals based on an established and expressed standard of the group, which is in and of itself a collection of individual values* (Bishop, 2013). A shift in ethics and values is the result of human beings' inclination to adopt a path leading to sustainability. The concept of ethics primarily deals with the study of right and wrong conduct within a defined environment. It gives prior importance for the character building of an individual and it stress about the moral value of human being (Giddy, 2007). Therefore, the application of ethics always serves to define the limitations and boundaries of human activities and duties. Ethics are the moral principles which guide a person's behaviour. These norms are shaped by social norms, cultural practices, and religious influences. Ethics reflect belief about what is right and wrong, what is good and bad in terms of human behaviour (Bishop, 2013).

However, there are different types of ethical theories like Consequentialist, Deontology and Virtue ethics. Consequentialist theory is based on the outcomes of a certain action (Dougherty, 2013). It upholds that an action is right if their consequence is good otherwise it is a bad action. But sometimes the consequences may not be good but the purpose of an action is good. For example, according to ethics *do not betray friends*. But imagine a situation in which significant and good consequences would result if only I would betray a friend. In such a scenario, the utilitarian decision would be to betray the friend. However, critics would claim that this betrayal violates an important ethical principle. For examples, in recent time people are cutting down trees for the industrialization and economic benefits but it results changes in weather, biodiversity loss and many more environmental issues which impact the human life. This action has both the positive and negative impact for the society and environment. For the industrialization we have economically profitable and get more job opportunities but at the same time it is affecting our environment. Deontology theory is *Duty* based ethics, which shows that we have certain duty or responsibility towards the non-human natural world (Kasher, 1978). But we have to protect the nature and wildlife not for the sake of the usefulness of nature but for its existence as an end-in-itself.

Moreover, in order to solve the environmental problems, there is a need to emphasize on the application of virtue ethics which is mainly concerned with what kind of people we should be, what kind of characters we should have, and how we should act (Engstrom and Whiting, 1998). It perpetuates those human beings are rational and they have some responsibilities towards other and non-human nature (Svoboda, 2015). When a person becomes morally responsible towards the society and its surrounding, then their action would be definitely directed towards the welfare and the care of nature through safeguarding the natural resources and preserving it. Virtue ethics is a normative ethical theory and it focuses on living a good life. It discusses about the character of the human beings such as kindness, generosity and honesty which are obligatory for virtue ethics. These are necessary conditions for constitutive elements of human flourishing and wellbeing. Thus, the present study seeks to understand how virtue ethics contributes in the transformation of human behaviour for the protection of the natural environment.

2. An Ethical Understanding of Nature and Its Problems: A Brief Analysis

Ethical theories give a framework for the ethical analysis and evaluation of behaviour and practices. There are three major ethical theories we have discuss in the paper: that is consequentialist, deontological, and virtue ethics. Consequentialism theory talks about the right and wrong consequence of an action. Whether an action is right or wrong is determined by the consequences (Creed, 1987). This theory is grounded on the consequences of an individual action. If the result of an action is desired then the action will be considered as morally right whereas the undesirable results of an action fall under morally wrong category. This moral philosophy is best captured about the general truth that *the ends justify the means* (Wyka et al., 2002). It means the consequences of an action would define whether that the action is good or bad. There is no moral consideration about whether the person is doing the right or wrong action. The judgment of an action is totally dependent on the consequences of that particular action of a person. *Human beings ought to behave in such a way that will bring about good consequences* (Thiroux, 2004). This theory shows that a person should perform in a way that their consequence must be good or ethically right. Utilitarianism holds that a consequence of an action is ethical if it is accepted by majority number of people. Utilitarian view is concerned about human pleasure, which has only intrinsic value. An action is right if it would produce greatest pleasure for greatest number of people. Hence, maximum utility defines the result of an action. *The greatest good for the greatest number necessarily require measuring, comparing, and quantifying* (Jardins, 2000). The good is taken by utilitarian's to be that which has intrinsic value. Yet intrinsic value may not be the sort of thing that can easily be counted, measured, or compared. In this respect if one relates consequentialism theory into contemporary environmental problems than it has been observed that, by destroying environment for the sake of our own profits we are creating dangerous consequences. Let's take an example to understand this issue by the name of feeding the world now-a-days farmers are using a

lot of chemicals in agriculture. This resulted in losing the fertility power of the agricultural fields. Whenever, debates emerged towards environmental sustainability people must think about the consequence. Because if human beings can know that consequence of destroying environment has a very severe consequence then, they will start restrict them self to perform such activity.

Jeremy Bentham and Peter Singer asserts that for the welfare of all sensitive being, not only the humans but also the non-human being who can express their feelings through pleasure and pain also have to be taken into moral considerations (Joseph, 2006). They do not give importance to the intrinsic value of non-sentient objects as they cannot express their emotions or feelings. According to them, in the environment plant, river, mountain, land are the non-sentient objects which do not have intrinsic value. But for the fulfilment of sentient being they have the instrumental value. Human centric ethics (also known as anthropocentric theory) which stem from the consequentialist theory states that only humans have autonomous moral status. This theory stands those attitudes, values, or practices which give preferences to human interests over the interests of other. Thus, human centric notion ascribes intrinsic value to human beings alone.

Immanuel Kant is the important contributor of deontological ethics, emphasizing on duties or obligations towards the other, where people are anticipated to follow certain moral principles which arise in themselves through reasons which guide us what to do or what not to do. This theory gives prior importance on the duty and rules of an individual. According to deontological theory, every action done by human beings is considered as moral and independent of consequences, which therefore, obliges human beings to be liable for their own actions as opposed to other creatures who act in accordance with their instinct (Sreekumar, 2012). This theory describes two fundamental divisions of duty which are direct and indirect duty: duties to oneself and duties to others (Mulia, Behura, Kar, 2016). According to Kant, when an action is done with a sense of duty and vice-versa, then that particular action is considered as meritorious. Thus, the primary concern of duty lies in the relationship between the actions of a person and the autonomy of his will. An action is considered as morally right if it is done according to the duty. For example, cutting down trees in order to maintain a luxurious lifestyle will prove that we are not performing our duty towards nature. We cannot misuse the natural resources for our economic and social benefits. Thus, as rational human being we have some duties and responsibilities towards the natural environment.

Furthermore, it strongly accepts universal principles such as *we should always speak the truth* as a standard to measure the right and wrong conduct. For example, Kant's categorical imperative suggests that every action which we act should be based on universal principles (Murphey, 2005). This theory shows that one should perform an action which should be grounded on universal acceptance of maxims. Every action which based on universal principles is very hard to perform and without the help of consequentialism and virtue ethics this theory is rigid in their conception as Wankel and Stanusch puts (2011). Here another issue may come that what should be One's duty in a particular situation? In this regard it is very much difficult to apply deontological theory in case of environmental problems. Deontological ethics gives prior importance to value the nature because it is our duty to save the nature. Government implies different types of environmental laws to protect the nature like control of water pollution Act in 1978, prevention of air pollution act in 1981 (*Environmental laws...*, 1978, 1981). But this is not enough to save our nature from disaster. For example, despite the implementation of air pollution acts the degradation of the quality of air in India, especially in the metropolitan cities like Delhi, is in worse condition and has become one of the major causes for severe health hazards and even deaths. Therefore, we may reasonably argue, that virtue ethics provide an ideology which gives focus on the behaviour of human beings rather than the action.

Due to the dominance of human activities over nature, the present time is witnessing various natural disasters such as, ozone depletion, deforestation, landslides, tsunami etc. These disasters show that we have to protect the nature. But the question arises how and in what way the eco-system should be preserved. In this context, firstly, human beings should change their attitude towards nature especially with the purpose to protect the nature. The positive attitude towards the nature encourages human beings to reconsider the policies framed for the purpose of preservation of nature. In this reference, it has been perceived those environmental policies are often directed by certain utilitarian concerns (Szostak, 2005).

The term virtue is considered as the character of human being that helps them in attaining a good life (Mintz, 1996). *Virtue* originated from the Greek word *arête*, which signifies *excellence or distinctive power* (Pakaluk, 2005). Generally, the term *excellence* is broadly connected to the human being's moral excellence in such a way that virtue might be delineated as the manifestation of human excellence. In ethics the word virtue is used in two different meanings. Firstly, virtue is a disposition or character traits which emphasizes to act the right action and universal duties in a specific situation. Secondly, *virtue is also a habit of action corresponding to the quality of character or disposition* (Lillie, 1967). It shows that virtue should be practiced in a right way so that it could be a habit of the particular person. For example, if a person is caring for others and it should become his habit not only to care for human beings but also for nature and society.

Virtue ethics says that an ethics should be given priority for the judgment of an agent rather than the deontologist and utilitarianism, viewed as the judgment of an action or the consequences (Simpson, 1992). For moral

philosophy, the good person is essential, and the person will be considered as good if his character is good and who practices moral virtue in his life. In his book *Nicomachean ethics*, Aristotle says that in reality virtue ethics is not a theory which only we can apply in our life, but it is a practice or exercise. Only way to achieve this is through proper training. It requires a distinct approach which emphasizes human virtues character, in contrast to duties or rules (deontology) or the consequence of actions (Hursthouse, 1999). This implies that virtue ethics is a normative ethical theory and it focuses on living a good life. The concept of the worthwhile life needs to be carefully distinguished from those of the happy life and the dutiful life. This shows that the good life captures the narrative dimension of human well-being. The good life means a happy life which is only possible when we live an ecologically good life. It discusses about the character of the human beings such as kindness, generosity and honesty which are obligatory for virtue ethics. These are necessary conditions for constitutive elements of human flourishing and wellbeing.

In his book *Republic* Plato has described about the four types of virtues like (1) Wisdom, (2) Fortitude or Courage, (3) Temperance and (4) Justice. Plato defines excellence in reason will make a person having full of wisdom at the same time reason will make a person wise. Therefore, Plato states that person having wide range of intellect and wisdom is the ruler of the state. Wisdom is defined as the contemplative, leading, the origin of good judgment government, and hence it is regarded as the distinctive virtue of the ruling classes, who should be the constituent of rational aristocrats. According to Plato courage is the second important virtue as wisdom upholds first position in diving direction to the human beings and then courage is required to escape from the fear of getting hurt (Lillie, 1967). Furthermore, courage is defined as a virtue which put forward to oppose the alluring of pleasure. Temperance is a virtue which fulfils the aspiration or desires of human beings to a proper level and it keeps harmony among all the different groups of the society. *Justice is the highest of the cardinal virtues* (Rogers, 1891) as it incorporates wisdom, courage, and temperance in them. Furthermore, justice could be perceived when the leader regulates in the state wisely; the industrialists do their work in a proper way with energy and likewise. These four virtues are regarded as cardinal virtues. The word *cardinal* derives from the word *cardo*, which signifies *hinge*. Regarding this, the description of cardinal virtue is the virtue which gives us the moral supports in life. Thus, wisdom is the virtue representing rationality, courage or fortitude signifies emotion, *temperance is the obedience of the desires to reason* (Sinha, 1984) and justice is the combination of the functions of the rationality, emotion, and reason in harmony. According to Plato and Aristotle, the objective of human presence should be the pursuance of virtue or excellence. This continuous endeavour for the perfection of character was considered necessarily a human activity by every being for living a better life in the social strata which are defined as happiness (Crossan et al., 2013). It is observed that along with Plato and Aristotle, Epicureans and Stoics are also the Greek philosophers who had developed the virtue ethics. For Epicurus, *virtue* plays the vital role in achieving the greatest pleasure in one's life. The concept of Aristotelian justice seems to be unobserved by Epicurus philosophy but they give importance to prudence and temperance as a virtue. The reason behind it is that Epicurus does not have connection with warriors while Aristotle has the connection. Stoics state that *Good things are those which necessarily benefit whenever they are present, and they are on this account the objects of rational desire; they are in short desirable in themselves. Moreover, according to Epicurus and Stoics, master virtue is paying particular attention to their various treatments of wisdom or particular intelligence* (Russell, 2013). It means that master virtue is that which have specific attention towards the individual management of wisdom and specific intelligence.

Aristotle gives the practical guidance for life in the real world. Regarding Aristotle, *every art and every inquiry, every action and choice, seems to aim at some good and the good has rightly been defined as that at which all things aim* (Thiroux, 2004). Virtue ethics is different form of consequentialism and deontological theories and instead of proposing rules of conduct, it concentrates on being a good person. According to Aristotle, *act as in such a way that a just person would perform* (Flannery, 2013). He explains that virtuous person is not the one who performs just acts, but the one who follows certain rules. He said that moral traits of character is more important than moral acts, therefore such characters should be developed through wisdom or practical intelligence. Practical wisdom provides the ability to see things as they are and to appreciate the particular situations. According to Aristotle, there are certain conditions to be or to feel in particular situations. In contrast, the judgment of an action is primary for ethical theories of Consequentialism and Deontology.

3. Developing Virtues for Environmental Sustainability

The term *environmental* is commonly associated with some type of human impact on natural systems. This context sets it apart from the term *ecological*, which refers to the interconnectedness of elements within a system. An ecological concept of sustainability be developed that is more in line with biological conservation, as stated above in the article *Ecological Sustainability as a Conservation Concept*. Ecological sustainability is *meeting human needs without compromising the health of ecosystems* (Morelli, 2011). This appears incongruent because the word *ecological* is commonly understood to refer to a broader framework than merely human experience. However, the term *environmental* is virtually naturally used to describe human involvement with the

ecosystem. To gain more accuracy, it is reasonable to consider *environmental* as a subset of the broader notion of *ecological*, which refers to the interface of human activities and ecological systems.

The term *sustainable* or *sustainability* underwent a rapid evolution beginning in 1987 with the publication of *Our Common Future*, followed by a more recent decline in coherency to become an often-abused term simply meaning *good* and sometimes used even without a connection to the natural environment or ecological health (Morelli, 2011). It states that, individual professions have endeavoured to construct definitions that make sense in the context of their own areas of competence and contribution, and as a result, meanings for the notion of sustainability have evolved.

The basic understanding of *environmental sustainability* presented in this paper essentially expands our common perception of human activity in order to more clearly connect it with the ecological concept of interdependence, thus delineating the boundaries of this use of *sustainability* to correspond to the overlay of human activity on the functioning of the supporting ecosystem. As a result, environmental sustainability is limited to, and even becomes a subset of, ecological sustainability. Meeting the requirements of the current generation without jeopardising future generations' ability to meet their needs is the most popular definition of sustainable development (Morelli, 2011).

Environmental sustainability can be defined as a state of balance, resilience, and interconnectedness that allows human society to meet its needs while not exceeding the capacity of its supporting ecosystems to regenerate the services required to meet those needs, nor by our actions reducing biological diversity.

As a result, in order to create ecological harmony, Aristotelian Virtue Ethics is essential. Though, Aristotle's virtue ethics emphasizes the importance of practising good deeds that become habitual over time. Our frequent good deeds are necessary for ecological harmony or environmental sustainability. In the next piece, I'll look at how Aristotelian Virtue Ethics might contribute to long-term environmental sustainability.

3.1. Virtues for Environmental Responsive Behaviour

Aristotle talks about the good life for human beings and that can only be possible when one becomes virtuous. Hence for being virtuous Aristotle introduces six types of cardinal virtues. These are courage, prudence, temperance, justice, humanity and truthfulness (Wang & Hackett, 2016). Furthermore, courage is outlined as *the willingness to engage in risk-taking behaviour either when one does not know the consequences or when the consequences might be adverse* (Corsini and Wedding, 2010). This means that courage is inculcated in persons who have unwavering determination to do what is right according to them and not to worry about the dangers of the unpleasant consequences. Prudence is the capability of using wisdom to choose not only what is good but also what is best for the individuals and planet. Temperance is the endorsement of domination to stimulate the production of moral results and also advantages. Justice is a virtue that inspires respect and acceptance of others and provides equal rights and privileges for both human and nature. Humanity motivates human beings to develop a conduct that can be modified in different situations according to different individuals and alleviate the sufferings of others. Lastly, truthfulness is the power to speak honestly and to act ethically despite being judged or disliked.

Moreover, People are born with the perspective to become virtuous and sensible, but they must first go through two stages to achieve these goals: developing proper habits and acquiring practical wisdom. This implies that first a person should develop good character in order to achieve practical wisdom. Therefore, virtue is essential for developing good character in human beings which further improves the intellectual skills. According to Aristotle, the failures of the bad person are caused by psychosomatic forces which arise because of his bad activities and decisions. He doesn't care about acting ethically, because he gets strong pleasure from his bad activities. To prevent such negative inner forces, there is a need to develop proper habit, good manners and emotional thinking from childhood. If these activities are carried out in a proper manner from childhood, then the practice will be transformed into habits which will further help in achieving the ultimate goal of human life. Human beings and natural environment are both interdependent with each other. The study of the ethical affiliation between them is called as environmental ethics which develop an appropriate understanding of human-nature relationship. Further, it decides norms and generates supervision on environmental issues by using these norms. It is therefore argued that virtue ethics is at the core of contemporary environmental ethics.

Environmental virtue ethics reflects the significance of environmentally responsive behaviour needed in life. With habituated virtues human character become ecologically sensitive, then they will seem environmentally responsive behaviour in all environmental interaction and behaviour. Even ecological sensitivity manifests many other virtues which may flourish as environmental responsive behaviours and policies (Ronald Sandler, 2004). For example, it can be demonstrated a virtuous person or ecologically dedicated people always have immense pleasure while performing different works like composting, cleaning green spaces and so on. Natural environment helps one to develop in a moral, spiritual, intellectual, physical way and it too provides health and aesthetic benefits. These natural benefits are more available to some people who are eco-sensitive and responsive towards the experience of nature.

4. Conclusion

Developing Environmental responsive virtues motivate human beings to develop their character to be moral, kind and respectable towards the whole biotic community. In every situation the practice of character building should be implemented as a means of a particular attribute because in present time it is necessary to give attention on environmental problems and to save nature from disaster. Moreover, the environmental issues also demand proper and optimum use of the natural resources to balance the eco-system. That is why we have to use the resources of nature in such a way that it can fulfil the needs of our present generation without comprising the needs of the future generation. Therefore, we need to create awareness about the serious environmental concerns among people and have to unite and work together across the world in order to save the earth. Aristotle follows Socrates and Plato in taking the virtues to be central to a well-lived life. Like Plato, he regards the ethical virtues (justice, courage, temperance and so on) as complex rational, emotional and social skills. What we need, in order to live well with the nature, is a proper appreciation of the way in which such goods as friendship, pleasure, virtue, honour and wealth fit together as a whole. In order to apply that general understanding to particular cases, we must acquire, through proper upbringing and habits, the ability to see, on each occasion, which course of action is best supported by reasons.

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