

From Environmental Ethics to Sustainability Ethics

Od etyki środowiskowej do etyki zrównoważonego rozwoju

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Abstract

Contemporary environmental ethics is confronted with a dual dilemma, namely the tension between theoretical and practical considerations. In response, scholars have pursued a variety of avenues, with the practice-oriented approach emerging as the dominant trend. The practice of environmental ethics can be analyzed according to two paradigms: the *applied ethics paradigm* and the *practical ethics paradigm*. Both paradigms suggest the possibility of a certain kind of sustainability ethics, namely the development of traditional environmental ethics into a public, applied sustainability ethics. In other words, the advancement of traditional environmental ethics, which is theoretically superior, into a form of public and applied sustainability ethics may prove an effective means of addressing the current challenges facing environmental ethics.

Key words: environmental ethics, practice-oriented approach, applied ethics paradigm, practical ethics paradigm, sustainability ethics

Streszczenie

Współczesna etyka środowiskowa staje przed podwójnym dylematem: rozchwianiem między rozważaniami teoretycznymi i praktycznymi. W odpowiedzi naukowcy podążali różnymi ścieżkami, a podejście zorientowane na praktykę wyłoniło się jako dominujący trend. Praktykę etyki środowiskowej można analizować według dwóch paradygmatów: paradygmatu etyki stosowanej i paradygmatu etyki praktycznej. Oba paradygmaty sugerują możliwość pewnego rodzaju etyki zrównoważonego rozwoju, a mianowicie rozwoju tradycyjnej etyki środowiskowej w publiczną, stosowaną etykę zrównoważonego rozwoju. Innymi słowy, rozwój tradycyjnej etyki środowiskowej, która jest teoretycznie lepsza, w formę publicznej i stosowanej etyki zrównoważonego rozwoju może okazać się skutecznym sposobem rozwiązania obecnych wyzwań stojących przed etyką środowiskową.

Słowa kluczowe: etyka środowiskowa, podejście zorientowane na praktykę, paradygmat etyki stosowanej, paradygmat etyki praktycznej, etyka zrównoważonego rozwoju

1. Introduction

As evidenced in the literature, the world is currently facing a range of unprecedented ecological and environmental challenges (Lenton, 2019; Rockström et al., 2023; Steffen et al., 2018). It has become crucial for individuals and organizations to consider the underlying causes and mechanisms of ecological and environmental issues, and to identify solutions to address them. Scholars from a range of disciplines, with varying perspectives and methodologies, have sought to identify solutions to ecological and environmental crises at the conceptual and institutional levels (UNEP Global Environment Outlook, 2019). This has paved the way for the humanities and social sciences to research ecological and environmental issues. These studies are focused on some areas, including environmental

history, ecological anthropology, environmental economics, environmental law, environmental philosophy, environmental politics, environmental sociology, environmental psychology, and other disciplines (Corner et al., 2014; Fabinyi et al., 2014; Niles; Lubel, 2012; Paul, 2017; Swim et al., 2011). Of these, environmental philosophy has played a particularly important role in conceptual innovation and methodological guidance for the study of global ecological and environmental issues. Promoting the progress of environmental philosophy has always been an important part of global sustainable development research.

From the earliest periods of human civilization, the relationship between humans and the natural world has been a topic of philosophical reflection. The concept of environmental philosophy can be traced back to classical civilizations in the East and West. However, over the centuries, the central issue of philosophy has remained focused on the nature of human beings and the issue of knowledge. It was only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that philosophy began to devote greater attention to nature, which led to the emergence of a range of environmental concepts. However, the formal discipline of environmental philosophy benefited from the advent of Western professional environmental ethics in the 1960s and 1970s, which provided a foundation for its development (Blackstone; William, 1974; Naess, 1973; Passmore, 1974; Rolston, 1975; Singer, 1975; Sylvan, 1973; White, 1967). The increasing ecological and environmental challenges facing developed Western nations ultimately led to the emergence of environmental ethics as a systematic academic discipline. At present, the study of environmental philosophy is a vast and multifaceted field, yet environmental ethics remains the dominant and prevailing area of focus. It is not uncommon for the terms *environmental ethics* and *environmental philosophy* to be used interchangeably, even though they are conceptualized and situated within different disciplinary boundaries. Despite its relatively recent emergence, environmental ethics has become a well-established field of study. The existence of numerous schools of thought and the proliferation of environmental ethics programs at various institutions and universities have contributed to its growing prominence. This relatively young discipline has sometimes become so fashionable that people frequently discuss environmental issues in a way that incorporates environmental ethics to a greater or lesser extent.

It is worth questioning whether environmental ethics or environmental philosophy has a significant impact on policymakers, stakeholders, and the general public. Does environmental ethics genuinely facilitate the enhancement or resolution of environmental issues? From a practical standpoint, the aforementioned questions can be answered in the negative. The role of environmental ethics and environmental philosophy in public policy and environmental management decisions is, at best, minimal. It could be argued that it is unjust to assess the impact of environmental ethics or environmental philosophy using this criterion, given that philosophy is typically regarded as a realm that exists beyond the concerns of everyday life. It is important to recall, however, that the impetus behind the flourishing of environmental ethics in the 1960s was to provide a philosophical response and an ethical basis for environmental problems and environmental protection. If we have retained an awareness of the original purpose of environmental ethics, it follows that we have a right to expect environmental ethics to respond to and provide assistance for actual environmental problems. From this perspective, this paper aims to shed light on the contemporary dilemma of environmental ethics and to propose a way forward from the perspective of the practical turn. This study will, to some extent, bridge the gap between environmental theory and practice, and help us to rethink the value of environmental ethics and environmental philosophy.

2. The Dual Dilemma of Environmental Ethics

The fundamental theme of environmental ethics is the ethical basis for environmental protection and related inquiries. These include the scope of moral obligations, the rationale behind the obligation to preserve ecosystem balance and integrity, the ethical foundation for respecting animal and plant life, and the moral responsibility towards non-living entities (e.g. rivers, soil). Environmental ethics is predicated upon an ongoing discourse surrounding these questions. From its inception to its current state of development, environmental ethicists have sought to extend the scope of moral consideration from humans to animals and plants to the natural world as a whole. They have proposed a range of philosophical justifications for the intrinsic value of nature and have given rise to a variety of theories and doctrines, including enlightened anthropocentrism, animal liberation/rights doctrine, biocentrism, and ecocentrism (Attfield, 1983; Callicott, 1989; Norton, 1988; Hargrove, 1989; Regan, 1982; Rolston, 1986; Sagoff, 1988; Singer, 1975; Taylor, 1986). In this sense, the evolution of environmental ethics can be understood as a form of ethical *expansionism*. This approach aims to move beyond anthropocentrism, exploring the development of non-anthropocentric theoretical frameworks. However, environmental ethics is *anti-expansionism* in comparison to other applied ethics, such as medical ethics and engineering ethics. Rather than extending traditional ethical frameworks, such as consequentialism, deontology, or virtue ethics, to address specific environmental issues, it seeks to establish novel environmental ethics based on the recognition of moral obligations towards non-human entities. Instead, it attempts to establish a novel theoretical framework for environmental ethics through the recognition of the moral obligations of non-human entities. This approach is often referred to as *non-anthropocentrism*, and in many instances, it has become the dominant ideology within environmental ethics over the past three to four decades.

The history of environmental ethics and philosophy is characterized by a recurring confrontation between opposing perspectives, including those of anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism, individualism and holism, and instrumental value and intrinsic value (Sorgen, 2020). Ecocentrism has emerged as the dominant discourse within this ongoing discourse. However, the prolonged theoretical debates have gradually led to a loss of interest in the academic community, which has made it increasingly challenging for environmental ethics to gain recognition and attention within the entire philosophical discipline. Moreover, the abstract theoretical discourse has become detached from the reality of environmental practice, thereby limiting its capacity to exert influence on related non-philosophical fields (e.g. sustainable development, natural resource conservation, environmental policy, and public science). In other words, this approach has resulted in environmental ethics becoming misguided. It has failed to eliminate the remnants of anthropocentrism and has not provided a practical solution to ecological and environmental issues (Heath, 2022). It has gradually lost its original practical relevance within the context of abstract theoretical discourse and controversy.

While environmental ethics offers a compelling account of the intrinsic value of nature and underscores the significance of integrating nature's intrinsic value considerations into ecological decision-making, it does not present a comprehensive range of viable options or strategies beyond preservationist or anti-interventionist principles. The reliable yet unfeasible approach of maintaining the natural environment in its original state is not a viable solution in the current context. This would entail limiting people's access to and enjoyment of resources and services, which would in turn make tasks such as poverty eradication and social development more challenging. This would effectively revert to the *development versus conservation* dilemma (Miller, 2011; Minter, 2012). In other words, traditional environmental ethics is conspicuous by its absence in all areas of environmental practice, except to provide a moral basis for environmental protection. As Donald A. Brown (2009) observes, the writings of environmental ethicists are rarely consulted by policymakers or considered in the context of everyday decision-making on environmental issues. Similarly, Susan Buck (1997) concludes that discussions of environmental philosophy and environmental ethics exert minimal influence on the day-to-day decisions of government administrations regarding environmental matters. Those engaged in public administration tend to adhere to the tenets outlined in the Constitution, even when their sentiments align with the principles espoused by Walden Lake.

Moreover, the application of non-anthropocentrism as an ethical foundation for ecological conservation is devoid of a realistic foundation because the majority of individuals adhere to an uncritical anthropocentric perspective. Furthermore, the promotion of the moral status of natural entities and an understanding of the interconnectedness of natural systems is unlikely to resonate with the general public. For those who are more likely to observe the external environment through the medium of a billboard than to engage with the natural world directly, the intrinsic value of nature is in any case unlikely to be presented through mystical experiences and beliefs in the way that Holmes Rolston proposes. Furthermore, the existence of contrasting perspectives within the field of environmental ethics renders the provision of direct ethical support a challenging endeavor. For instance, a biocentrist may propose the hunting of non-endangered animals that feed on an endangered plant as a means of safeguarding the plant's continued existence. However, an animal rights theorist may challenge this approach, arguing that the rights of animals cannot be subordinated to the protection of plants that lack intrinsic value. Those with an ecocentric perspective may advocate the sacrifice of certain species to ensure the overall balance of an ecological habitat. However, both animal rights theorists and biocentrists may reject this option.

Indeed, from the inception of environmental ethics as a prominent field of study, it was inevitable that the discipline would encompass both theoretical and practical dimensions. On the one hand, it must provide profound philosophical insights into the environment and the relationship between human beings and the environment, so as not to become submerged in philosophical disciplines renowned for their seriousness, criticality, and transcendence. On the other hand, it must address practical issues such as environmental protection and ecological crises, so as not to become detached from the realities of environmental practice and to become a mere superficial packaging of the relevant non-philosophical fields. However, as Hourdequin Marion (2012, p.11) has observed, the current situation of environmental ethics appears to be in a state of quandary: *Environmental philosophy thus seems caught in the middle: too applied to conform to the taste of traditional theoretical philosophers and too abstract to connect with policy and practical environmental issues.*

The ongoing deterioration of the global environment and the growing global awareness of environmental protection have also prompted an increasing number of scholars to recognize the challenges inherent in environmental ethics research. This has led to a shift towards a broader philosophical approach to understanding the issues surrounding environmental protection. Consequently, from the 1990s onwards, new theoretical concerns, new philosophical foundations, and new realities have introduced environmental philosophy into a new stage, with communication and integration becoming the distinctive features of contemporary environmental philosophy research (Sahotra, 2005). For instance, the concepts of environmental justice, feminism, pragmatism, postmodernism, phenomenology, and virtue ethics are being employed by environmental ethicists and philosophers as a means of deepening and broadening their theoretical understanding. Scholars are attempting to resolve the dilemma of environmental ethics from a variety of perspectives.

3. From Applied Ethics to Practical Ethics

Among the numerous endeavors to reconcile environmental theory and practice, the *practice turn* represents a prominent avenue of inquiry. The fundamental idea of this approach is to transform environmental ethics, which is theoretically superior, into a publicly accessible, applied environmental philosophy that offers guidance for practical environmental decision-making. In examining the practical turn in environmental philosophy, scholars have adopted varying approaches to the study of practice. Some scholars posit that environmental ethics should be transformed into applied ethics, akin to medical ethics, to aid environmental scientists, ecologists, and conservation biologists in navigating the ethical challenges that emerge in the course of scientific inquiry. One proponent of this view is Ben Minteer (2008). Some scholars posit that applied ethics is an inadequate approach and should be developed into practical ethics that engages with specific issues in the fields of environmental science and conservation biology. This perspective is espoused by scholars such as Ricardo Rozzi (2007). Others advocate for the integration of environmental ethics with environmental public policy, which can facilitate more effective environmental decision-making at both the political and policy levels. This position has been taken by scholars such as Bryan Norton (2003), Robert Frodeman (2008), and Irwin Ruth (2007). By combining these disparate approaches, we can categorize the practical claims of environmental ethics into two distinct paradigms: the *applied ethics paradigm* and the *practical ethics paradigm*.

3.1. The Applied Ethics Paradigm

A comparison of the role of environmental ethics and biological and medical ethics in guiding real-world problems reveals that while traditional environmental ethics (e.g., the doctrines of Paul Taylor, Holmes Rolston, and J. Baird Callicott) provide ethical justification for the protection of nonhuman species, ecosystems, and so on, they provide more of an internal, unresolved philosophical controversy or a series of difficult-to-prove environmental concepts that provide little or no behavioral guidance for real-world problems. Their focus is on wilderness and wildlife, with less attention paid to the practical decision-making challenges encountered in environmental protection and management, which are highly relevant to people. However, for environmental scientists, ecologists, and conservation biologists, the ethical challenges they face in environmental protection and restoration are comparable to those faced by medical practitioners (Bialetti; de Mori, 2020). These include the difficult task of accounting for the conflicting values of different human populations, biomes, and ecosystems when establishing a nature reserve, or balancing biodiversity conservation with ecosystem services when designing a conservation program (Costanza, 2017; Minteer; Collins, 2005). The traditional theories of environmental ethics provide an understanding of the moral obligations and responsibilities that humans have towards the natural world. Nevertheless, they do not provide guidance on how to make the most appropriate decisions in diverse and complex situations.

In light of the aforementioned considerations, several scholars, including Ben Minteer and J.P. Collins (2005), have put forth the proposition that environmental ethics should be transformed into a distinct branch of applied ethics, akin to those that encompass life and medical ethics. This proposed transformation would entail a heightened emphasis on the significance and primacy of case studies, with a particular focus on the contentious, strongly normative, and policy-legal and daily life-related environmental ethics issues that arise in the context of ecological and environmental research and conservation practices. This paper simply refers to this strategy as the applied ethics paradigm, proposing that it can serve as an effective approach for engaging with issues of practice in environmental ethics. Applied ethics is a mode of philosophical inquiry that applies universal, abstract general principles to concrete problems and situations based on the principle of regression to solve a real problem (Steinbock, 2013). Under this paradigm, the primary practical objective of contemporary environmental ethics is the transformation of abstract environmental ethics into applied environmental ethics. Robert Frodeman (2007) also endorses this approach, proposing that the *policy turn* espoused by Ben Minteer and J.P. Collins, among others, can facilitate a shift in the role of the ethicist. Rather than merely offering exegesis and interpretation to other ethicists, Frodeman suggests that the *policy turn* could enable ethicists to actively engage in research and projects. Additionally, Ricardo Rozzi and colleagues (2012) have outlined a framework of field experiments in environmental ethics and philosophy, which has been implemented in the United States. This framework actively explores the practical applications of environmental ethics in real-world scenarios.

3.2. The Practical Ethics Paradigm

The practical ethics paradigm renders the legitimacy of any principles developed and established independently of the decision-making process highly questionable. These theories and principles can only be used as a tool for understanding and solving problems, particularly in response to disputes over particular policies and programs. Consequently, it is practically meaningless to talk about them in isolation from specific problematic contexts. Similarly, environmental ethics theories are meaningful only insofar as they can assist in the comprehension of specific environmental management and decision-making issues. In contrast to the applied ethics paradigm, the practical ethics paradigm has a broader focus on real-world environmental problems (Sullivan, 2024). It goes beyond the ethical and decision-making dilemmas faced by environmental scientists, ecologists, and conservation

biologists and beyond case studies. It emphasizes the other dimensions of environmental issues, such as the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of environmental problems (Fraser, 2012). The field of environmental ethics is particularly concerned with the formation of consensus on public controversies over environmental issues. This is done to promote policies and measures that are conducive to the improvement and protection of the environment in the context of a democratized and pluralistic society (Sarkar; Behura, 2018). In other words, the aim is to construct a broad philosophy of environmental practice, rather than to improve the practical application of environmental ethics.

Norton (2003) posits that the objective of environmental ethics and environmental philosophy should be to facilitate the resolution of tangible controversies. He underscores the necessity of directing greater attention to the pertinent facts in contentious cases and of becoming more proactive in identifying the shared moral and philosophical tenets that underpin opposing viewpoints. This shift, from applied to practical philosophy, would move environmental ethics away from an exclusive focus on abstract theoretical debates and toward the resolution of pressing and significant public controversies. He even proposes that environmental ethics and environmental philosophers should leave philosophy departments to work in institutions related to environmental public policy, natural resource management, ecological planning, and conservation. They should also participate in specific areas such as environmental policy and environmental protection programs, to support and assist in the resolution of specific environmental issues.

Norton's views have had a significant impact on the attitudes of numerous scholars, and the incorporation of public policy, political, and economic considerations into environmental ethics is becoming increasingly prevalent among a growing number of scholars. Paul Thompson (2000, p.25-50), for instance, emphasizes that it is the responsibility of environmental ethicists to act as a conduit between the scientific community and individuals and communities and to assist people in identifying strategies for aligning their values with the ever-changing context. Consequently, he eschews rational decision-making models in favor of more pragmatic situational models. These synthesize the conditions under which social institutions make decisions about values and the interests and needs of particular groups in a given time and space. By applying this pragmatic situational modeling to the study of specific issues such as agricultural and food ethics (Thompson, 2001), he has made an outstanding contribution to the practical application of environmental ethics.

Andrew Light (2002) also endorses this alteration in methodology. He is firmly opposed to the non-anthropocentric approach to environmental ethics put forth by Rolston, Callicott, and others. The primary objective of this form of environmental ethics is to acknowledge the intrinsic value and moral status of nature, without delving into the contentious aspects of environmental issues. Light argues that this endeavor to construct a novel theory of value to substantiate the moral standing of nature has, in fact, misguided environmental ethics. Furthermore, he asserts that it not only fails to resolve the philosophical controversies that pervade environmental ethics but also falls short of fulfilling the promise of philosophical responses to environmental issues. For instance, it is unconcerned with popular concerns about the urban environment and places undue emphasis on wildlife and wilderness. Light provides the example of the Amazon rainforest to illustrate that the strategies of traditional environmental ethics are, in fact, counterproductive in influencing environmental policy. For this reason, he has repeatedly emphasized the adoption of a two-pronged approach, namely the continuation of meta-ethical and other debates, while in some cases rejecting them in favor of a focus on environmental policy. In contrast, Light assigns greater significance to the second aspect. He asserts that comprehensive and responsible environmental ethics must encompass an emphasis on public involvement and the attainment of environmental policy. Consequently, he has repeatedly advocated for the advancement of environmental ethics as a *public philosophy* (Light, 2002), extending its reach beyond the academic community to encompass the broader community of environmentalists and the general public with a stake in environmental matters.

4. The Possibility of Sustainability Ethics

The two types of practical paths essentially posit the possibility of some form of public, applied environmental ethics. The concept of sustainability is an effective means of responding to the discursive divisions and practical claims that arise in the field of environmental ethics. While many environmental ethicists and philosophers do not explicitly discuss sustainability, the notion of sustainability, particularly the notion of environmental sustainability, is pervasive in their discourses on environmental issues. It can be argued that sustainability is the unifying concept that bridges the divide between different environmental philosophers. This includes traditional anthropocentrists, who advocate for the status of human beings; animal rights/emancipationists, who defend the status of animals; biocentrists, who respect life and nature; and eco-wholists, who are concerned with the stability and coordination of ecosystems. Despite their differing environmental ethical claims, there is a consensus that environmental sustainability is a key objective of environmental policy and environmental protection. Indeed, the majority of environmental ethical and philosophical theories prioritize the protection and stewardship of the environment, alongside the realization of environmental sustainability. Consequently, this paper proposes that the two paths of the practical turn in environmental ethics can be integrated into sustainability ethics.

In the context of sustainability ethics, the objective of the practical turn in environmental ethics is to facilitate the tangible protection of the environment, particularly in the realms of environmental management and decision-making. An investigation into sustainability ethics, both within the applied ethics paradigm and in the pursuit of a more expansive public discourse, as exemplified by the practical ethics paradigm, could prove an efficacious means of navigating the current predicament of environmental ethics.

In a manner analogous to the applied ethics paradigm, sustainability ethics can and should, in a manner analogous to medical or engineering ethics, provide the necessary guidance and principles for practitioners to navigate decision-making dilemmas. It is evident that this is not a straightforward application of environmental ethics theories; rather, it necessitates a comprehensive understanding and nuanced grasp of environmental ethics. Furthermore, the conventional environmental ethics theory comprises a multitude of contradictory and divergent concepts, resulting in a paucity of consistent and universal conclusions except the *non-anthropocentric* position. This renders it challenging for us to apply these theories directly to practical problem-solving. Consequently, it becomes imperative to explore ways of rendering the intricate theories of environmental ethics more efficacious in practical problem-solving.

The most efficacious method for resolving complex issues is the *bottom-up* mode of problem-solving (Ouyang et al., 2020; Ramiel, 2022). To achieve consensus among the various theories of environmental ethics at the practical level, it is necessary to examine specific problematic situations. In these situations, it is possible to identify areas of consensus among the different ethical theories (Rozmarynowska, 2015). Once these areas of consensus have been identified, the knowledge and principles of consensus should be applied to the interpretation and explanation of a specific environmental issue to resolve disputes and facilitate the achievement of common policy and practice objectives. This is the reason why a significant number of scholars place considerable emphasis on case studies. In this context, the applied ethics paradigm offers, in effect, an incremental program of addressing the most pressing issues first and sequentially addressing subsequent issues. In contrast to moral philosophy, it does not offer a comprehensive, overarching understanding of environmental ethical issues. It does not attempt to establish foundational, universal, or metaphysical principles. Instead, it assesses the practical viability and effectiveness of specific theories in real-world environmental decision-making. Its strategy is to reconcile disparate existing positions to reach a consensus at the practical level. It understands the relevant ethical principles with the help of the relevant factual background of a particular problematic situation and elucidates the factual background of a particular problematic situation based on the relevant ethical principles. As a result, its approach is characterized by an evident *problem consciousness* and *problem orientation*. To achieve broad consensus and provide a reference for thinking about and dealing with the social and political dimensions of environmental issues, it is necessary to employ tools such as *public participation* and *consultative democracy* (Bua, 2017; Dickinson et al., 2012; Finardi et al., 2012; Shirk et al., 2012).

The practical ethics paradigm represents a further development of the applied ethics paradigm. It does so by challenging the reformist tendencies of the latter. In particular, it demands that environmental ethics not only confront reality but also that it is itself in reality. To achieve this objective of practical engagement, numerous scholars have concentrated their efforts on the field of environmental public policy. In the context of environmental public policy, a variety of environmental theories and concepts are integrated into a democratic and consultative discursive platform. The objective is to facilitate communication and dialogue between different positions, with a focus on problem-solving and policy attainment. In this process, recourse must be had to the mechanism of consultative democracy, which can achieve political participation through free and equal inter-subjective dialogue, discussion, deliberation, compromise, communication, and deliberation. In the absence of a public discourse platform, experts in different fields, the general public, and other stakeholders may only speak their own words and are unable to communicate effectively. This is a phenomenon that Norton observed (He described it as *towering*) during his tenure at the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (Norton, 2005, p.1-44). This kind of separation results in the isolation of the process of obtaining information and the process of choosing policies. This increases the potential for misunderstandings, hinders the flow of important information, and creates blind spots. Despite the common goal of ecological protection, the lack of a common vocabulary, concepts, methods, and techniques results in isolation, misunderstanding, and miscommunication.

Thus, as in the applied ethics paradigm, ideas such as public participation and consultative democracy are given great importance in the practical ethics paradigm. This also means that the core of the ethics of sustainability we seek is consensus at the level of practice, which is process-oriented rather than outcome-oriented, and which requires that all parties involved are guaranteed a voice in ethical disputes and that ethics of sustainability therefore promotes the study of problem-switching, the framing of possible future scenarios, and the development of a new ethical vocabulary that facilitates the participation of all groups involved (Callicott; Frodeman, 2009, p.769-772). In other words, in the paradigm of practical ethics, the first thing that is sought is procedural justice, and the second is the consequential justice that procedural justice may entail. It is only when the reasonable and effective expression of the opinions of all parties is guaranteed in the process of controversial discussion that we can carry out a successful transformation of the problem and construction of the program.

Both the applied ethics paradigm and the practical ethics paradigm, which considers the broader social, economic, and political dimensions, demonstrate the significance of addressing problematic situations and developing effective problem-solving strategies. In comparison to the theoretical superiority of traditional environmental ethics, it is recommended that public and practical sustainable ethics be advocated. This approach emphasizes consensus at the level of problem-solving and applies the theories and principles of environmental ethics and philosophy not as a *top-down* process, but as a *bottom-up* one, which is intertwined with practice. This approach allows for the creation, modification, and progress of these principles and norms, which are developed in conjunction with practice. At present, there is a plethora of environmental theories, yet a paucity of practical guidance. The principal advantage of a problem-solving-oriented approach to sustainable ethics is its ability to provide individuals with strategies and methods for action.

From environmental ethics to sustainability ethics, it is evident that the core of the paradigm lies in the *bottom-up* and *problem-solving* approaches, whether it is the reformist paradigm of applied ethics or the practical ethics paradigm that emphasizes public discourse. This could potentially facilitate a breakthrough in bridging the gap between environmental philosophy and environmental practice. In any case, the practical demands of environmental ethics should not be limited to emotions and the desire to change people's worldview; rather, they should seek a broader discourse of sustainable development. The optimal approach to environmental protection is to situate it within the overarching framework of sustainable development. This entails establishing sustainability as the unifying value system that bridges the domains of environmental protection and socio-economic development. By doing so, we can maximize the synergies of all stakeholders and facilitate the realization of the vision of *Harmony with Nature* by the year 2050.

5. Conclusions

This paper begins with an examination of the history of the development of environmental ethics. It then proceeds to analyze the dilemma of environmental ethics, which is that it is either too application-oriented to satisfy the requirements of traditional theoretical philosophers or too abstract to be linked to environmental policy and environmental practice issues. In their efforts to integrate environmental theory and practice, scholars have embraced the *practice turn*, which represents one of the dominant approaches in this field. They have sought to transcend the inward-looking and isolated academic trajectory of traditional environmental ethics from a variety of perspectives. Among the numerous studies that espouse a *practice turn*, two principal paradigms can be identified for analysis. The first is the applied ethics paradigm, which advocates the development of environmental ethics as a distinct branch of applied ethics, oriented toward ecological and environmental issues. This approach draws parallels with medical ethics and seeks to guide specific decision-making dilemmas about environmental protection and sustainable development. The practical ethics paradigm extends beyond the scope of applied ethics by advocating for a mode of public philosophy that necessitates environmental ethics not only to be oriented towards the challenges of environmental ethical decision-making but also to actively engage in the discourse and resolution of environmental issues. This approach is intended to provide concrete guidance within the broader public discourse on environmental matters and environmental public policy. These two paradigms can be integrated into sustainability ethics because the notion of sustainability can facilitate greater solidarity among environmental theorists with differing perspectives and because sustainability or sustainable development can also gain wider attention and recognition in public discourse. Therefore, transforming the traditional environmental ethics, which is theoretically superior, into a public, applied sustainability ethics that situates ecological and environmental issues within the broader context of sustainable development represents an attractive approach to addressing the dilemma of environmental ethics.

It would be erroneous to assume that the practical turn is the sole means of extricating environmental ethics from its current predicament. Furthermore, it is insufficient to resolve the metaphysical controversy surrounding environmental ethics and environmental philosophy (Bailey, 2021). The maintenance of an appropriate balance between theory and practice in environmental ethics continues to necessitate rigorous and substantial philosophical inquiry. However, practical avenues such as sustainable ethics offer a highly efficacious solution to the challenge of repositioning environmental ethics from the realm of abstract obscurity to a more tangible and relevant position within the sphere of lived experience. The field of environmental ethics has already made significant strides in influencing shifts in environmental attitudes and awareness. However, we mustn't merely praise and venerate nature while advocating for its care and protection. We must engage with and contribute to the discourse surrounding specific environmental issues and the resolution of environmental problems if we are to play our part in the endeavor of environmental protection. In the contemporary world, the task of development remains a significant challenge (Head; Alford, 2015). The crux of the problem is not merely the awareness of the deepening ecological and environmental crises; rather, it is the ability to navigate the relationship between socio-economic development and ecological and environmental protection in a manner that facilitates sustainable development of the economy, society, and environment. In other words, the primary challenge facing environmental ethics and philosophy is how to ensure the sustainability of the ecological environment for ourselves and future generations. By returning

to this fundamental theme, environmental ethics and philosophy can avoid the theoretical and practical dilemmas that have previously hindered progress, and contribute new insights to contemporary debates.

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