Ethics, Environment, and the Questions of Anthropological Cultures and Challenges

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Abstract: Assessing the trends of development that are indispensably associated with man's sense of rationality and intelligibility, it has been greatly observed and philosophically situated that man cannot be distanced from the environment. The environment houses the individual as a person, of which it is demanded of man, with the application of the ethical contents of intelligibility and rationality, to protect and promote the environment, in order for him to be protected by the same environment healthily, and remain holistically human. The thrust of this paper is to revisit the ethical nexus between man and his environment, and to show that man has a lot of responsibilities towards the environment, considering the anthropological culture and challenges associated with contemporary humanities. The paper concludes that man and environment are intrinsically linked and indispensable necessitated, and so, man needs to be ethically responsible to the safety of the environment, and then the environment will ever be useful and meaningful to man.

Key Words: Cultures, Environment, Ethics, Rationality.

Introduction

The concerns for man started with the curiosity of man's effort to understand his environment and defining the place of man's survival in it. The ability of humans to manipulate the landscape and recognize the consequences of doing so puts us in a peculiar position. As a specie, we are assigned the duty to provide and proliferate things like food, medicine and shelter for our sustenance. However, the history of man's struggle to have dominion over all creation can be found in the creation story of man's existence in Genesis of Biblical literature. It states that; "...be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28). We can deduce from the above that nature cannot dominate man because man has been empowered from creation. But, along history, especially in our contemporary times, it has been observed, more than ever before, that man has been very destructive to the environment that houses him, through actions as a result of mismanaged freedom in creativities, ambitions and innovations.

As such, contemporarily, John Paul II puts it that; what is "equally worrying is the ecological question which accompanies the problem of consumerism and which is closely connected to it" (John Paul II, 1991, no. 37). It is a culture which man has designed for his self-enslavement to his desires, warping the tails of his unchecked interests, for the sake of development. He states further that "In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day" (John Paul II1991, no, 37). In our day, it demands that man should desire that which will keep him and his environment, allowing the nature to take its course, in all events of ecological order. He goes further to assert that;

> Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift

of the things that are. Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him (John Paul II 1991, no. 37).

Albeit, it is understood that man cannot but be concerned about his environment. Our goal hence is to achieve stability for ourselves and our kin. Hence, we also have an obligation to maintain the environment as we depend on the resources and services it provides. The questions then become: what is our role in nature? What rights have we to manipulate the land, to factory farm and animals and pollute the waterways? What rights have we to reduce our numbers and merely subsist? In answering these questions, we must rely on our knowledge of the earth, history, evolution and our influence on the natural environment.

The fate of human civilization remains closely linked to changes in the environment. Civilization grows along human mental contents. Such civilization may be in form of: technological innovation and employment; social exclusion; inequitable distribution and consumption of energy and other services; social breakdown, increased violence and a rise on new forms of social aggression; drug trafficking, growing drug use by young people; loss of identity; and lost in media and digital (see, Francis, 2015, nos. 20-40). Man-made threats to the Earth's natural environment include pollution, deforestation, and disasters such as oil spills and bush-burning. Humans have contributed to the extinction of many plants and animals. However, it is expedient to checkmate man's activities and outline probable solution to the environmental problems that emanated from man's mitigated use of nature.

Taking for instance, Socrates on his part uttered the dictum that "the unexamined life is not worth living". He stated this in relation to his understanding and attitude towards death and his commitment to fulfill his goal of investigating and understanding the statement of the Pythia (Brickhouse, 1994). Socrates believed that philosophy – the love of wisdom – was the most important pursuit above all else. For some, he exemplifies more than anyone else in history the pursuit of wisdom through questioning and logical argument, by examining and by thinking. His examination of life in this way spilled out into the lives of others, such that they began their own 'examination' of life, but he knew they would all die one day, as saying that a life without philosophy – an unexamined life – was not worth living (Spivey. 2011).

It is expedient to checkmate man's activities and outline probable solution to the environmental problem that emanated from man's mitigated use of nature. Socrates drew men's attention to themselves and insisting on self-knowledge (Omoregbe1990). He states that men ought to examine themselves in an unexamined life. His effort is to make human influence on his environment positive in such a way that their effect on nature will be liberal. Thus, in a bid to examine one's life and activities towards men, living and non-living, will lead us to examine the 'Golden Rule' that states: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"; this rule is telling us in essence that we should give to nature what we want nature to give back to us. Philosophically, it involves a person perceiving his/her neighbor also as "I" or "self" (Wattles, 1996).

Methodologically, this paper is analytically explanatory, towards proposing the nexus between the humanities and their prescriptive ethics to checkmate their own actions towards the sustainability of the environment. However, this essay will further discuss the different approaches to environmental ethics and make remarks on the effects yielded on the environment as a result of human's selfishness. It will further discuss the fundamentals of how the human nature relationship should flow in order to prevent possible exploitation. All these issues will help to explain the anthropological culture and challenges as regards to the ethical principles necessary for environmental sustainability.

Conceptualization of Ethics

Ethics is the branch of philosophy which deals with the morality of human conduct; hence, it is also known as moral philosophy. The first great moral philosopher in Western philosophy was Socrates. Beginning with Socrates, ethics became an important part of Western philosophy (Omoregbe, 1990). Ethics or "moral philosophy" studies what is good and bad conduct, right and wrong values, and good and evil. Thus;

> Ethics is a moral principle that controls or influences a person's behavior; a system of moral principles or rules of behavior. Its primary investigations include how to live a good life and identifying standards of morality. It also includes meta-investigations about whether a best way to live or related standards exists. (Ordu and Okoroafor, 2014)

Ethical beliefs shape the way we live – what we do, what we make and the world we create through our choices. Ethical questions explore what Aristotle called "a life well lived" (Omoregbe, 1990). Ethics is not just an exercise for philosophers or intellectuals. It is at the core of everyday life; we ask ethical questions whenever we think about how we should act. Being ethical is a part of what defines us as human beings. We are rational, thinking, choosing creatures. We all have the capacity to make conscious or unconscious choices if we wanted to – although we often act out of habit.

However, knowing the nature and some ethical questions raised, it is expedient to critically analyze what the nature of ethics is all about. Ethics is two things. Firstly, ethics refers to well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribed what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues. Ethics, for example, refers to those standards that impose the reasonable obligations to refrain from rape, stealing, murder, assault, slander, and fraud. Ethical standards also include those that enjoin virtues of honesty compassion and loyalty.

More straightforwardly, ethical standards include standards relating to right, to freedom from injury and the right to privacy. Such standards are adequate standards of ethics because they are supported by consistent and well-founded reasons. Secondly, ethics refers to the study and development of one's ethical standards. As mentioned above, feelings, laws and social norms can deviate from what is ethical. So it is necessary to constantly examine one's standards to ensure that they are reasonable and well-founded. Ethics also means, then, the continuous effort of studying our moral conduct, and striving to ensure that we and the institutions we help to shape live up to standards that are reasonable and solidly-based.

The Environment and its Ethics: Some Human's Responsible Actions

Our natural environment encompasses all living and non-living things occurring naturally on earth or some region thereof. It is an environment that encompasses the interaction of all living species. Environment means "that which environs us", and to be "environed" is to be encircled or surrounded. It is important to understand the fact that environments are not the same. It varies from place to place and from time to time. Our culture largely determines the kind of environment we inhabit. What then is our obligation towards the environment? Do we have environmental obligations for the sake of human beings living in the world today, for humans living in the future, or for the sake of entities within the environment itself, irrespective of any human benefits?

Simply put, different answers have been given to these fundamental questions by different philosophers who led to the emergence of environmental ethics. For this, Francis advances the philosophy of common good in making the environment as our common home, by saying that; "when we speak of the "environment", what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it" (Francis 2015, no. 139). Living in the environment presupposes that man makes it his home, an indispensable comfortability for his integral development. Recognising the fact that "nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and

thus in constant interaction with it" (Francis 2015, no. 139). It takes the concern of truly part of something to making its sustainability a philosophy that must be a part of ethical growth and development.

Thereby, man has to speak to his conscience in examining what he does in order not destroy nature. Such applications of the contents of his conscience for the sustainability of the environment are what is ethical to the former. Hence ethics is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the natural environment and human's place within it (Belshaw, 2001). It asks crucial questions about human environmental relations such as "what do we mean when we talk about nature?" "What is the value of the natural, that is, non-human environment to us, or in it-self?" "How should we respond to environmental challenges such as environmental degradation, pollution and climate change?" "How best can we understand the relationship between the natural world and human technology and development" and "what is our place in the natural world?" Environmental ethics is the answer to these questions. What then is environmental ethics? For this, Pope Francis recognises that;

> Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest. Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded (Francis 2015, no. 13).

So importantly, environmental ethics is defined as the moral relationship between human and the natural environment (Buzzle 2011). It is an area of environmental philosophy that faces a lot of conflict due to the various subdivisions in terms of ethical perceptions. For traditional and religious views, some people believe that they were given dominion over nature's plants and animals to serve their needs. Thus, environmental ethics pose a challenge to traditional anthropocentrism. In the first place, it questioned the assumed moral superiority of human beings to members of other species on earth. In the second place, it investigates the possibility of rational argument for assigning intrinsic value to the natural environment and its non-human contents (Norton 1991). The idea of human centered nature or anthropocentrism explicitly states that humans are the sole bearer of intrinsic value and all other living things are there to sustain humanity's existence (Mackinnon 2007).

Man exists along the indispensable existence of other realities as living beings. It is on this religious and social conviction that T. T. Bello recognises the indispensable placement of humanity in advancing the creation holistically, when he says that; "man has found himself in an environment that convinces him that he is not in charge of creation. There are millions of plants, animals and natural phenomena such as beautiful stars and vegetables, refreshing rains, impeccable sun and all the fascinating order in the universe. It seems probable that man has to create the creator to explain these things" (Bello 2008, 46). However, ethical decisions related to environment can be very absurd. In order to make the decision that would benefit human and do no or reparable harm to nature, people must weigh the possible consequences and determine which one ought to take precedence (Mackinnon 2007). For example, extracting oil to produce energy is harmful to the ecosphere yet beneficial to humans for various applications like producing fuels and pesticides aside from economical gain. Setting forth the possible damages, it is conspicuous that choosing to use oil excessively as an energy resource, is not an environmental friendly action; therefore, striving to find an alternative energy resource is more of a deep ecology mentality. After researches and efforts for a solution, scientists in this field were able to recycle restaurant waste vegetable oil to produce bio diesel to power automobiles (Mackinnon 2007). Applying the recycling process, we reduce natural resources consumption and therefore regard the inherent value of nature.

Arguably put, man's relation with nature almost involves technology. Man cannot think about environment without thinking about technology. However, to understand the human/nature relationship, we must look at how people, technology and nature interact. Man stood apart

from nature in this new world. They redefined natural resources as commodities and unleashed their technology against nature to retrieve those commodities for the market place. The advance of machines is so relentless in the culture of modernity that technology itself is seen as deterministic (Martin, 2010). For this, Francis asserts that;

> Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources. There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm. Otherwise, even the best ecological initiatives can find themselves caught up in the same globalized logic. To seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system (Francis 2015, no. 111).

However, the main relationship here is about the relationship between technology and the environment. Through our very use of language, we endow technology with an independent agency so powerful that it now seems stronger even than its adversary, nature, and we seem at loss to be able to control it. Thus, working laboriously on the natural world exert an enormous control over the ultimate affairs of human life, and no wonder today we hear of several natural disaster such as earthquake, hurricane, wildfire, tsunami or volcanic and tornado. All these environmental crises that the world is facing today are as a result of human's greediness in massive alteration in nature's balance (Mackinnon 2007).

The Environment and the Questions of Anthropological Culture and Challenges

The way and manner in which man utilizes natural resources is the basic foundation of the problem we encounter in our environment. How do we now judge man's action in putting out natural fires, cutting feral animals or destroying some individual members of overpopulated indigenous species necessary for the protection of the integrity of a certain ecosystem? Are these actions morally right and acceptable? Can we now say that farmers are morally right in non-industrial countries to practice slash and burn techniques to clear areas for agriculture? Consider a mining company which has performed open pit mining in some previously unspoiled area. Does the company have a moral obligation to restore the landforms and surface ecology? And what is the value of a humanly restored environment compared with the originally natural environment? Man, in most cases can be said to be morally wrong in polluting and destroying animal and their environment in order to satisfy himself or probably meet his immediate needs. Man cannot but utilize his environment because sustenance is inevitable. However, man should not forget the fact that nature and animal have certain values in their own right which must be respected and protected by man.

So reasonably, the question of value placed on non-human components and its natural environment are the problems or issues raised in environmental ethics. Also the distinction between instrumental value and intrinsic value (in the sense of "non-instrumental value") has been of considerable importance. The former is the value of things as means to further some other ends whereas the latter is the value of things as ends in themselves regardless of whether they are also useful as means to other ends. The intrinsically valuable is that which is good as an end in itself; we can see example in plant e.g., some kind of fruits in which birds live on as a means of survival, and some wild plants that serve as source of medicine or as an aesthetic object for man and man has intrinsic value i.e., value in his or her own right independently of his or her prospects for serving the ends of others (O'Neill, 1992).

Put succinctly, the prospects for serving the ends of others are to be directed towards the sustainability of all generations, especially safeguarding the environment for future generations, for the environment does not solely belong to any particular generation. For the need of caring for the earth in order to realise a more responsible living, Ekuigbo and Ekuigbo (2006) expound that;

> There is the need for man to search for solutions to the present environmental predicaments in which he has put himself. Society must not be indifferent to the destructive tendencies of her individual members for such have effect on the society at large. Environmental problems and other health hazards which now threaten the existence of the world could be averted, if only man is a bit careful.

Understandably, human-centeredness or anthropocentric nature on environmental ethics has nevertheless played a part in the extension of moral standing. This extension has not been to the non-human natural world though, but instead to human beings who do not yet exist. The granting of moral standing to future generations has been considered necessary because of the fact that many environmental problems, such as climate change and resource depletion, will affect future humans much more than they affect present ones. Moreover, it is evident that the actions and policies that we as contemporary humans undertake will have a great impact on the well-being of future individuals. In the light of these facts, some philosophers have founded their environmental ethics on obligations to these future generations (Gewirth, 2001) just as we do not have obligations to future people because there is no definite group of individuals to whom such obligations are owed.

Nevertheless, this argument is not based on the simple fact that future people do not exist yet, but on the fact that we do not know who they will be. Derek Parfit has called this the "non-identity problem" (Parfit, 1984). The heart of this problem lies in the fact that the policies adopted by states directly affect the movement, education, employment and so on of their citizens. Thus, such policies affect who meets whom, and who has children with whom. So, one set of policies will lead to one group of future people, while another set will lead to a different group. Since there is no definitive set of future people to receive the benefits or costs of our actions, to whom do we grant moral standing? And of what importance is environmental ethics? How could any future people legitimately complain that they have been wronged by our environmentally destructive policies? In response to the non-identity problem, it has been argued that while we do not know exactly who will exist in the future, we do know that some group of people will exist and that they will have interests. In light of this, perhaps our obligations lie with these interests, rather than the future individual themselves (Desjardins, 2001).

Evaluative Conclusion

In all, the problem man is facing in the aspect of man/nature relationship has a lasting solution in Aristotle idea of the golden mean or 'middle way' which is an ancient concept described in various traditions. The concept was often discussed within ethical contexts and considered as a virtue (see, Robert, 2012). The concept of Aristotle's theory of golden mean is represented in his work called *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle explains the origin, nature and development of virtues which are essential for achieving the ultimate goal, happiness (Greek *eudaimonia*) (Roger, 2000), which must be desired for itself. It must not be confused with carnal or material pleasures, although there are many people who consider this to be real happiness, since they are the most basic form of pleasures. It is a way of life that enables us to live in accordance with our nature, to improve our character, to better deal with the inevitable hardships of life and to strive for the good of the whole, not just of the individual.

The environment is designed in making man to understand the value of authenticity, as a being of reasoning and discretion, managing his freedom with all sense of purposefulness and directedness. Taking Nwakaeze-Ogugua's conception of man in his Teihard De Chardin's theory of evolution, as an introductory example of man to nature, there he asserts that; "man is in the world, from the world, of the world and is himself the world. He is the world of the world and the richest world in the world." Everything in nature is about man, and he is created to advance the courses of the orderliness inherent in nature (Nwakaeze-Ogugua 2007, 97). Understandably then, man is in nature to making nature to its course, and "his presence saved the universe from comatose. He is the only meaning-giving creature in the world. He is the

inner reason in creation" (Nwakaeze-Ogugua 2007, 97). However, "Because he is free being, he stands shoulder high above every creature, is the only being that can lead the cosmic history to its goal - the 'omega point' in the words of Teihard De Chardin" (Nwakaeze-Ogugua 2007, 97). However, man is to understand the importance he has being in sustaining all that are around him. The importance of the golden mean is that it re-affirms the balance needed in life. The people in our contemporary society need to overcome their pride and arrogance and look in nature for guidance because we all depend on it. Staring into the sky and imagining ourselves in heaven will not accomplish anything; it is better instead to accept our role in the world and appreciate the beauty of life, and death which gives meaning to it. The golden mean must be highly recognized because it is beneficial to man and also important to nature.

Therefore, what we need in order to live well, is a proper appreciation of the way in which such goods as friendship, pleasure, virtue, honor 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 reason (Terence, 1999). With these, we have necessary ethical mindset and principles in protecting and promoting the environment, through practical wisdom regarding the use of our reasoning. For practical wisdom, as Aristotle conceives it, cannot be acquired solely by learning general rules. We must also acquire, through practice, those deliberative, emotional and social skills that enable us to put our general understanding of well-being into practice in ways that are suitable to each occasion.

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