

Ecosophical Altruism – A Paradigm for Environmental Conservation

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Abstract

Ecosophy is a paradigm of ecological reasoning and perception and the way for environmental conservation. It is a philosophical framework that leads to practical action in daily life. The descriptive study of ecology about man and nature does not consider any value-priority of the environmental condition. Ecosophy or Eco philosophy is a systematic study of the unity of man and nature from the ethical perspective.

Altruism is an ethical doctrine that considers the welfare of others. Altruism is an ethical principle that concerns the happiness of other human beings. Altruism is the opposite view of egoism. Egoism is an ethical doctrine that concerns the interest of the individual only. Selfless altruism is performed purely by withdrawing from selfish interests in activity. It considers only the welfare of other human beings.

Environmental ethics is concerned with the ethical relationship between human beings and the environment. Ecological harmony and environmental conservation are not developed merely from ecological wisdom but from an ethical consideration of nature. The mere awareness about the conservation of the environment does not lead to an activity of conservation but it necessitates an ethical obligation from the perspective of environmental ethics.

Ecosophical altruism expands its area of application from man to plant and animal species and also extends the well-being of inorganic elements such as soil, water, rivers, mountains, seas, and so on. Ecosophical altruism concerns the well-being of not only man but also plants, animals, and the a biotic environment.

Keywords:- Ecosophy, Eco-philosophy, Altruism, Egoism, Ecosophical altruism, Selfless-altruism, Land ethics, Environmental ethics

Introduction

Ecosophy or Eco philosophy is a systematic study of ecological harmony. The term was first introduced by the French post-structuralist philosopher Felix Guattari and Norwegian philosopher of Deep Ecology, Arne Naess. Guattari sees the term ecosophy as a necessity of social liberation. It is a paradigm of social revolution, to cultivate their concepts within the ecological framework, which understood the discourse of social and environmental realms. Guattari redefines the traditional view of environmentalism as a complex and mysterious relationship between humans and their natural environment. It is a dualistic conceptual contradiction of the separation of human (Cultural) and environmental (Natural) systems. He visualizes ecosophy as a new field of discipline and studies monistic and pluralistic aspects of man and nature. In his view, ecosophy is a study of complex phenomena, in which human subjectivity, social relations, and environment are interconnected.

Ecosophy is a paradigm of ecological reasoning and perceptions. It is a philosophical framework that leads to practical action with political interference and

the actions of daily life. It results in less concern about the impact on the environment and greater sustainability of development. The French philosopher Felix Guattari stated that Ecosophy is making a framework that is working contrary to a capitalist lifestyle. The concept of environmental outlook is clearly expressed in the works of Naess's *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, and Guattari's French version of *The Three Ecologies*. These ecosophical works are very relevant in today's socio-political conditions.

The concept of ecosophy appeared in a new form in the work of Aldo Leopold's *Land Ethics*.¹ He developed his ideas of eco-philosophy in the concept of Land Ethics. He explained that the utility of the Land is equal to all living beings including the plant and animal kingdom as a whole. The owner of the Land, man, is unjustifiably dominating Nature and Land utility. It is an indication of man's exploitation of nature. He proposes an ethical extension from man to land. Naturally, ethics deals with human conduct and behaviour but it is expanded to the biosphere (Land). Leopold asserts that man should accept that all other living beings have an equal right to use their habitat like man. He states that there is an ethical justice to the use of Land for all living beings and nonliving things on the planet. His ecological outlook stresses the extension of ethical concern to all other non-human living beings and non-living things. His emphasis on the altruistic interpretation of ecosophy is significant about the utility of Land. The concept of Land ethics demands equal rights for man and other living organisms to live on the land. The concept of altruism is an essential element in the conservation of nature. Environmental conservation needs an ethical obligation of every individual to preserve the environment with a broad vision.

Guattari expresses the need for Ecosophy and the possible ways for the existence of future generations in his work *Three Ecologies*. The need for the protection of the environment is a very urgent assignment for the Government and people today. He claims that ecosophical awareness starts at three levels and political support is essential for the practice of ecosophy. Firstly, from the individual level, secondly from the social level, and thirdly from the environmental level. The most important hurdle of environmental conservation is the vision of the development of Integrated World Capitalism, which is based on economic development and technology. But capitalism seeks the solution to environmental issues through technology and mechanisms. Guattari realized that it is the contradictory ideas of the capitalist government's solution to environmental conservation. He was aware of the importance of individual ethics and spiritual enlightenment. The expansion of the human mind from anthropocentric humanism to ecocentric environmentalism needs an altruistic vision toward the environment.

The holistic vision of nature and practice of conservation involve a deep understanding of the environment and lives. The ecological conservation and protection of the environment need individualized altruistic ethical understanding. Eco-philosophy can create an individualized ethical obligation in the mind of man. Individualized ecosophical understanding and activism emerged out of a large and long process of experience from living conditions. The mechanized mode of the capitalist economy proposes a lot of fantasy for the future and faces the problem of how to overcome the threats caused by technology and developments. Eco-philosophy suggests different projects and proposals for remedial measures for the conservation of the environment from the precarious condition of the biosphere.

Eco-philosophy is a philosophical worldview inspired by our living conditions in the biosphere. Both Naess and Guattari believed that ecosophy is not an abstract system of thought, it is a proclamation of radical change because of nature and a challenge to the established anthropocentric worldview. It also surpasses the dichotomy of culture and nature. The ecosophical perspective marginalizes property and gives importance to species and life. It is a shift from anthropocentric ideas to an ecocentric lifestyle of actions, and propagation of deep ecological principles. Ecosophy imposes self-discipline, determination, and group union. Simon Levesque says “I will then contextualize the emergence of ecosophy, axiology, and semiotics”.²

The approaches of both Naess and Guattari on ecosophy imply the same concept of environmental conservation but are expressed differently. Ecology is the study of the relationship between organisms and their habitat. Ecosophy includes the perspective of ecology but also emphasizes the prescriptive approach of philosophy, i.e., ‘what ought to be’ the nature and prospects of ecosophy. Ecology consists of the organism and the whole complex physical factors, what we call the environment or the habitat in a wider sense. The existence of an organism cannot be separated from its physical environment. Ecological existence is also considered in the organic unity of the environment. The objects presuppose semiosis like an organism presupposes an environment to exist. An individual cannot be separated from his surroundings. The organic concepts of semiosis began in recent ecological studies, falsifying the axiom of the isolated existence of an object or a word. An American philosopher and semiotician John Deely says “The organism is itself a physical part of the physical surrounding; it acts on the things around it, and the things around it act upon it. Those of these interactions which fall within the range of the sense powers become the sensible Umwelt or world objectively sensed by and for that organism but if the inner welt upon which the umwelt – only a physical environment not just independent of mind but unknown by any finite mind at all”.³ The important concept of organic unity is advocated here, the necessary union between the organisms and their supporting environment is very essential. Any organisms do not exist objectively independently of the environmental elements.

The expression of emotions and affections are physical correlates of value and the relation is expressed through them. However, the ecological perspective states the experience of the environment is a significant factor in the evaluation. All the experiences are treated as evaluative experiences. Ecosophy is holistically broadening the scope of humanism and the origin of the value of the sign system in ecolinguistics. Naturalized ethics is practiced with great care and allows a better understanding of axiological activity. The values can be studied properly within the natural order. Nature is a unitary system in which the organisms and biotic and non-biotic environmental elements are equally important and interdependent and negate any superiority or domination of one species. Eco-philosophy is a harmonious unity of ecological egalitarianism, which is opposed to anthropocentrism. The domination of human beings over other creatures is a significant factor in sign formation and its usage. The sign system originated from nature but got alienated and assimilated into the culture and developed through constructed social interactions. Reestablishment of man-nature unity and man should preserve the environment from the perspective of eco-philosophy. At first sight, the sign system of language is isolated from nature but it is deeply rooted in nature and the environment with a deep analytical inquiry about the etymology of the sign system or words.

Environmental ethics

The unity of man and nature is re-established by an ethical indebtedness towards nature. Ethical responsibility is essential for the conservation of the environment. Ecological harmony and environmental conservation are not developed merely from ecological wisdom but from an ethical consideration of nature. The awareness about the conservation of the environment does not lead to an activity of conservation but it necessitates an ethical obligation from the perspective of environmental ethics. Environmental ethics is concerned with a balanced relationship between man and the environment. Environmental ethics reveals that human beings are not only part of society but also a part of the environment which includes plants, animals, and other living beings. Environmental ethics deals with the relationship between man and the environment with its non-human contents.

Environmental ethics is concerned with the ethical relationship between human beings and the environment. Environmental ethics faces conflicts and controversies from the different ethical perspectives regarding the environment. In the traditional view, man has the power to dominate nature and he is a special creature of God, and plants, animals and other abiotic elements are to serve his needs. The anthropocentric perspective of ethics makes human beings the supreme creature of the world. All living and non-living beings exist for human existence. The perspective of anthropocentric ethics is a dangerous approach that challenges human existence and paves the way to the extinction of other species on Earth. Environmental ethics gives a vision of ecocentrism in contrast with anthropocentrism and realizes the nature-centered value system that conserves all living and non-living things regardless of the utility of man. Human beings have an ethical responsibility to preserve all biological life on Earth as a whole.

For economic development, the exploitation activities of man destroy the ecosystem and the natural environment threatening the survival of man and other living organisms. The dangerous conditions and the existence of the future of mankind help to rethink the concept of sustainable development and the prevention of the depletion of natural resources. This condition is the real source of the emergence of environmental ethics and its different perspectives. Environmental ethics finds that pollution and climatic changes are due to injustice (unethical activities) towards nature and tries to prevent the exploitation of nature. Environmental ethics redefine the fundamental relationship between human beings and the environment. It is found that there is an ethical obligation from the individual man is essential for the conservation of the environment and natural resources. For the conservation of the environment, Aldo Leopold introduced the concept of '*Land Ethics*'. He argues that man must transform the role of the conqueror of nature into a member of the ecosystem in his work *A Sand County Almanac-And Sketches Here and There*⁴ was very influential and played an important role in the formation of eco-centric environmentalism. It may be considered the first systematic presentation of environmental ethics.

Ecosophy

Ecosophy is a compound word consisting of the terms '*eco*' which means 'household' and '*Sophia*' means 'wisdom'. Eco-philosophy means 'love and wisdom about the household- (Earth)'. It is the true love and wisdom of nature. It also means a 'love of environmental wisdom'. Earth is the household; it is our habitat; every

individual being is close to each other like a member of a family. So, ecosophy is a philosophical worldview that influences all the conditions of life in the biosphere. It will enable the individual to participate in activities of conservation to serve and save nature. We always face a dilemma with conflicting interests, but we can resolve the conflict by developing environmental wisdom and by working more ecologically or as an environmentally responsible person and changing our lifestyle to ecocentric.

The ecological study focuses on the relationship between man and nature descriptively. The descriptive study of ecology about man and nature does not consider any value-priority of the environmental condition. Eco philosophy is a joint venture of ecology and philosophy; ecological issues are studied from an eco-ethical perspective. The practice of eco-philosophy must consider the value-priority and urgency of the issues regarding the environment. Eco-philosophy is concerned with ecological wisdom. Ecosophy deals with knowledge about ecological and ethical facts about man and the environment. An integral understanding of ecology, ethics, and the environment falls under the sphere of eco-philosophy.

Altruism

Altruism is an ethical doctrine that considers the welfare of others. Altruism is an ethical principle that concerns the happiness of other human beings. Altruism is also called selflessness of action which is the opposite of selfishness. Altruism is the opposite view of egoism. Egoism is an ethical doctrine that concerns the interest of the individual only. Egoism considers the welfare of the individual self; it focuses on the self-interest of the man. Egoism claims one's welfare and performing that action maximizes self-interest. A French Sociologist Auguste Comte says "the elimination of selfish desire and egocentrism as well as leading a life devoted to the wellbeing of others"⁵. Altruism implies that we act to promote someone's welfare. The social man's first urge is to cooperate rather than compete. It reveals that man has the inner potential of cooperation and consideration for the welfare of others. A trait helping others is a spontaneous impulse of man and it is a genuine consideration for the welfare of others. The habit of helping others and cooperation promotes the survival of the human species. An American social Psychologist Daniel Batson says "Altruism is a motivational state with the ultimate goal of another's welfare"⁶

Altruistic behaviour always may not be based on altruistic motivation. Someone may expect a benefit from others for the altruistic activity. The altruistic activity also considers the well-being of the doer (self), there may be an expectation of the reward. Someone may wish to praise to do altruistic behaviour or may want to avoid blame. Someone may work altruistically to reduce the feeling of discomfort when witnessing others' miseries. Altruistic activities may be executed with a benevolent attitude, but they may end in mistrust or blame. Such kinds of altruistic activities are known as selfish altruism, they are also basically rooted in selfishness. Altruism is opposed to egoism; self-interested altruism is not altruism but is egoism. Self-interested altruism may be considered a moderate view of the transition of mental state from egoism to altruism.

Selfless altruism is performed purely by withdrawing from selfish interests. It considers only the welfare of human beings. True love is a motivation for altruistic activities. The skeptics suppose there is a selfish motivation behind every altruistic action. No one can resist the true call of love; true love is intrinsically good. A critical

mind tends to the scientific investigation but is termed as cynicism. When we see everything from the perspective of human kindness, it no longer needs proof of objectivity. Selfless altruism that one lives for others' welfare. It is a radical form of altruism, when even self-destruction may be acceptable for the needs of others. It does not demand anything in return, there is no expectation from others for help. Selfless altruism demands risking the destruction of the self and self-sacrifice. Ethical altruism is a moral theory of obligation to serve others, where one sacrifices his/her self-interest and need for the welfare of others.

Ecosophical Altruism

Altruistic activities aim for the pleasure, benefit, welfare, or good of other people. Altruistic action is intentional or voluntary and aims to increase the well-being of other persons without any expectation in return. Altruism does not involve any feelings of loyalty and does not consider any relationship. Altruism is an activity of helping others without expectation. Altruism is the working postulate of ecosophy. Ecosophical altruism expands its area of application from man to plant and animal species and also extends the well-being of inorganic elements such as soil, water, rivers, mountains, seas, and so on. Ecosophical altruism concerns the well-being of not only man but also plants, animals, and the abiotic environment.

Ecosophical altruism expands the ethical sphere from man to plants, animals, and the environment. The application of altruistic activity extends from man to nature. Man, intentionally performs altruistic activity as a manifestation of a will to serve others whereas nature is an unconscious activity to preserve the ecosystem. The concept of altruism extends the realm to the well-being of animals, plants, and the environment. Man exploited natural resources for progress and economic development. The excessive exploitation of natural resources has made the existence and survival of man and living beings difficult. We think about the conservation of biotic and abiotic environments for future existence. Ethical altruism transformed into Ecosophical altruism is a shift from the well-being of human beings to the well-being of the environment with a voluntary activity of man to conserve nature. Ecosophical altruism is defined as the concern with the well-being of man, other living organisms, and the environment. An altruistic attitude is a motivation factor present in the subconscious mind of man in the process of environmental conservation. Altruism is a working principle of both environmentalism and ecophilosophy for environmental conservation. Ecosophical altruism gives reinforcement to the process of the conservation of nature, and it generates an obligation toward nature. Ecophilosophy aims to enhance eco-friendly attitudes and activities to maintain the harmony between man and nature. The principle of ecosophical altruism is very helpful to the conservation of nature and it is a global phenomenon for the conservation of the environment.

The prime objective of ecosophical altruism is to establish the global responsibility to maintain environmental justice and environmental sustainability. Its main focus is the conservation of the biosphere, especially the conservation of wilderness and rainforests. The conservation activities are promoted by environmental organizations and propagated for the existence and survival of future generations. Ecosophical altruism is an eco-ethical principle that enables the individual man to develop an attitude to the protection of the soil, water, air, etc. is an obligatory duty of the present generation to preserve the future generations. Ecosophy and

environmental ethics have a significant role in the conservation of natural resources. Environmental ethics proposes that the conservation of the environment is a moral duty of an individual. It is an altruistic approach to the organic worldview. Ecosophical altruism is an essential feature of environmental ethics that implies a global responsibility to consider the well-being of future generations. Man can conserve the environment through ecosophical altruism. Ecosophical altruism considers the good of all living beings and non-living things and tries to reestablish harmony in nature.

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