

PHIA – Sem -4 – Hons - Some key doctrines on environmental ethics- Saswati Ray
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Some key doctrines on Environmental Ethics

1. **Anthropocentrism** : This doctrine gives the only importance to human beings. Human beings are considered here as an end and non-human natural entities in this environment are considered as the means for human ends . Thus the moral obligations only is to be given on human beings .

Anthropocentrism locates independent value solely or predominantly in human interests , as opposed to non- human interests. According to this doctrine , only human beings have intrinsic value and all other natural beings and things have only instrumental value – non-human nature is valued primarily for its satisfaction of human preferences .

2. **Biocentrism** : It is a life-centred outlook that rejects the view that humanity alone matters in ethics and accepts the moral standing of all living creature. The common and crucial tenets of biocentrism are
 1. All living creatures have a good of their own and accordingly have moral standing i.e., they warrant moral attention or consideration for their own sake.
 2. Their flourishing or attaining their good is intrinsically valuable.

Paul Taylor advocates a life – centred ethic of respect for nature , in which not only is human superiority denied, but each living thing is also held to be equally worthy of respect , irrespective of differences of interests , and to have the same moral significance. Accordingly, Bio-spherical Egalitarianism (all organisms in nature are deserving of equal consideration ...all living things have equal intrinsic value and /or inherent worth) here establishes. It concentrates wholly on living beings thus we should not give any moral value to non-living entities –like ecological process ,ecosystems etc.

3. **Deep and Shallow Ecology** : The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess wrote a brief but influential article distinguishing between ‘shallow’ and ‘deep’ strands in the ecological movement.

Shallow ecological thinkers are anxious to avoid pollution to our water supply so that we could safe water to drink, they sought to preserve wilderness so that people could continue to enjoy walking through it etc.

But deep ecologists , on the other hand, wanted to preserve the integrity of the biosphere for its own sake, irrespective of the possible benefits to humans that might flow from so doing.

But those who advocate the shallow position do not find intrinsic value in non- human life forms. Nor do they find the consumptive economic system problematic . Humans ought to exploit nature , though prudently .High standards of living are not objectionable , and can be raised even further by concentrating on investment in science and technology. Shallow ecology is human – centred , regarding nature merely as a resource to be used for the benefit of humans.

Deep ecology encourages us to develop an nature – centred outlook in which nature is seen as part of one’s self and as intrinsically valuable.

Principles of Deep Ecology : In a paper published in 1984, Arne Naess and George Sessions, an American philosopher involved in the deep ecology movement , set out principles for a deep ecological ethic beginning with the following:

1. The well being and flourishing of human and non – human life on earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non – human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs .
4. The flourishing of non –human life requires a smaller human population.
5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must ,therefore, be changed . These policies affect basic economic, technological and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change will be mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between bigness and greatness.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.

Although these principles refer only to life , in the same paper Naess and Sessions say that deep ecology uses the term ‘biosphere’ in a more comprehensive way , to refer also to non-living things such as rivers , landscapes and ecosystems.

4. **Land Ethics :** We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us .When we see land as a community to which we belong , we may begin to use it with love and respect. Leopold’s Land ethic rests on an understanding that human beings exist within an integrated community of life that also includes other animals , plants, rocks, soils and waters. As Leopold put it : the land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters , plants, animals or collectively : the land . According to Leopold , land ethic changes the role of human beings from the conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it . It implies respect for his fellow members , and also respect for the community as such .

Leopold’s land ethic is encapsulated in the following statement – A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity ,stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise. Leopold contrasts violent conquest of the land and invasive farming techniques with ‘biotic respect’ and the economic commodification of nature with a larger concern for the total ecological and aesthetic value of land .

Leopold’s land ethic emphasizes the moral significance of the whole , of the community of all life rather than the moral significance and rights of individual sensate beings within the whole and this

creates a human ecological duty to seek to preserve the integrity and balance of the biotic community or to restore it where human activity has undermined it .

5. **Ecological Feminism:** Ecological feminism i.e., eco-feminism is the confluence of feminist and environmentalist strains of thought . its main claim is that 'nature' is a feminist issue. Its main focus is on 'women-nature connections'. Something is a feminist issue when understanding it helps one understand something about the social and economic status of women. Sexism ,racism, classism etc. are also feminist issues because understanding them helps one understand the subordination of women . Likewise , deforestation , desertification ,water pollution etc. are feminist issues because understanding them helps one understand both the subordination of women and nature .

Language that feminizes nature in a patriarchal culture , in which women are viewed as subordinate and inferior ,reinforces and authorizes the domination of nature. Mother nature (not father nature) is raped ,mastered, controlled, conquered and mined .Her secrets (not his) are penetrated and her womb (men do not have one) is put into the service of the man of science (not woman of science , or simply scientist) . Fertile soil is tilled and land that lies fallow is useless or barren like a woman unable to conceive a child. In these cases, the exploitation of nature and animals is justified by feminizing (not masculinizing) them, the exploitation of women is justified by naturalizing or animalizing (not humanizing) them.

The basic realization of eco- feminism is that the oppression of women and natural world is built into the very mode of perceiving both. Central to eco-feminist theory is that dualisms are embedded in the western worldview , values and actions. These hierarchical dualisms are concepts about the world , human relations and the place of humans within the scheme of things. Dualistic conceptual structures are those –such as , women –men, feminine –masculine, earth – heaven ,nature – culture , reproduction –production ,body –mind , emotion –reason , intuition –thought , private –public , passive –active , natural –supernatural , slave –master etc. The first half of each dualism is subordinate to the second . These dualisms are ideologically grouped together such that women are connected to feminine ,earth ,nature ,reproduction ,body ,emotion ,intuition ,private and slave and the same grouping of the second halves applies to men . These ideas are taken as truth and are structured within the social and economic order .They point to a logic of domination embedded in western worldviews .

Eco-feminists show how this worldview sanctions an understanding that men have innate power over both women and nature and that the twin dominations of women and nature are justified and appear as natural . Eco-feminists argue that the domination of women by men reflects and reinforces the domination of the environment by society and that the two are understood to be linked . Eco-feminists posit that the same masculinist habits of thinking and behavior that devalue ,oppress and exploit women also do so to nature. Thus the liberation of women and of nature from male domination and abuse are causally interconnected . Eco-feminists insists that within the intellectual traditions of the past few thousand years and at least of western cultures , anthropocentrism (human centredness) has functioned historically as androcentrism (male –

centredness) ; failure to see this results in a gender blindness that is harmful to the framing of an environmental ethics or philosophy .

Thus eco-feminism challenges male –gender bias wherever and whenever it occurs . It offers a corrective lens to oppressive male gender bias by self – consciously attempting to develop environmental analyses and positions that are not male gender biased . Eco-feminists argue that it is the androcentric worldview that deserves the primary blame for the environmental crisis .An eco-feminist approach seeks to correct an alleged ‘male bias’ in environmental ethical theory – a selection of concepts and methodology that ignores ,discounts or denigrates womens’ issues , concerns and experience .