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An argument from a contemporary Moral Problem

The contemporary argument selected for this argumentative essay for a moral problem is ‘environmental ethics’. Environmental ethics is the study of concerns and ethical questions raised by the relationship of human with the non-human environment. Ethical considerations and reflections related to human relations with that of the environment were also found in ancient Greece and other civilizations. Quite a number of philosophers and scholars of normative disciplines of philosophy have published their work in this regard including John Muir, Jeremy Bentham and ‘*A Sand County Almanac*’ which an influential work of Aldo Leopold. There is growing concern about environmental virtue ethics in western philosophy until recently. Prior to that, there is not enough talk about environmental ethics in western philosophy. The impact of western religions and philosophies are possible reasons for this where human beings are considered superior to nature and it was believed that there is no relation of human beings and environment. The key idea around which the paper revolves is the argumentative analysis to understand and conclude the challenges faced by the culture of the United States of America regarding environmental goodness and harmony.

Values in environmental ethics

There are many human and inhuman values related to human interaction with that of the environment. The first value id the idea of anthropocentrism which is used to refer to the attitudes and world views regarding moral significance and status of the issue. The value system based on anthropocentrism is based on the notion that only human beings are valuable and important under environmental discourse more than other any other entity. This suggests the importance of sustainable use of human resources. On the other hand, anti-anthropocentric or non-anthropocentric views include, biocentrism, similar framings and ecocentrism (Lewis-Jones 1). The other human value that is associated with environmental ethics is environmental sustainability and justice. This is defined as a meaningful involvement and a fair treatment of all people regardless of national origin, color, race or income with respect to implementation, development and enforcement of environmental regulations, laws and policies. This is defined according to the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

There are several non-human values that are very important to discuss and are associated with anti-anthropocentric concepts. These values suggest the importance of non-human entities which are present in the environment and ecosystem and are directly affected by any change or manipulation in the environment. These values include concepts of value-pluralist or hybrid view, ethical biocentrism, holistic ethics of species or biocentrism, wildness value and ethics and sentient animals (Palmer et al. 426). All these aspects of ethics are related to inculcating environmental concerns and issues of animals, plants and other habitants of ecosystem and environment. There are growing concerns regarding ecosystem disturbance and depletion of natural resources which give rise to an the ever-increasing demand for environment preservation and the use of sustainable resources to determine wellbeing, safety and sustainability of environmental inhabitants and resources.

Ethical Debate

It is important to analyze and understand the significance of environmental ethics with respect to normative disciplines of philosophies. We will review this aspect by understanding the stance of major ethical theories and principles in this regard. The main ethical theories which are essential to discuss are consequentialism, virtue ethics and rights and deontological views. Consequentialism is related to bringing about best of the consequences of our actions, practices or rules irrespective of the moral or ethical considerations. About animal ethics, consequentialism argues either we should maximize satisfied preferences or should maximize happiness. Consequentialism possesses very diverse and variable ideas about what are the factors which constitute more good for the environment while looking forward to aiming at producing the best outcomes. So the general proposals in favor of environmental ethics are often in line with the idea of consequentialism as they aim at maximizing species flourishing or ecosystem health. The idea of deontological ethics revolves around what we owe to each other rather than the creation of worst or better states of the world(Alexander and Moore). Deontological ethics give a perspective of not disturbing the ecosystem for attaining short term goals in contrast to consequentialism. For example, consequentialism may suggest that it is required to minimize sufferings of the wild animals but ultimately it may require us to adopt ways to manage ecosystem by altering their structure including feeding them food is deficient or reducing the number of carnivorous that are pain-inflicting. Environmental ethics can be understood by analyzing it with respect to virtue ethics. In this approach, practices, policies and actions are justified or evaluated in terms of whether they achieve or express virtue, as opposed to whether they conform to duty or promote consequences which are appropriate. As an example when different forms of animal agriculture are evaluated, this approach accounts for which virtues are more operative. The examples of these virtues can be ecological sensitivity, efficiency or compassion and also determines what methods and forms of animal agriculture best suit.

There are many other theories which are important to discuss in this regard as “ Deep ecology” and “shallow ecology”. Deep ecology is the result of discussion of three scholars of normative discipline of science named Nils Faarlund, Sigmund Kvaløy and  Næss. They visited the mountains of Himalayas and expressed a great passion for the mountains and were deeply impressed by the Sherpa community. They are native and by occupation, they are mainly guides, who guide and assist tourists during their expeditions. Næss was inspired by their concepts regarding considering the mountains sacred hence not consuming the natural and environmental resources for their needs. The ‘shallow ecology movement’ on the other hand is characterized by the fight against resource depletion and increasing pollution. The central purpose and theme of this movement are its concerns related to affluence and health of masses in the developed countries. The deep ecology movement endorses the view that there is value in all living things in our ecosystem independent of their significance or usefulness. This approach is also known as biospheric egalitarianism (Naess 95).

Challenges

There are some serious hurdles and obstacles in the development of environmental ethics in the majority of the world population. The main hurdle in attaining environmental goodness is the conception of a materialistic good life. Restricting our research to the United States alone we find that capitalist consumer culture has developed a certain vision of happiness which is mainly based on material comfort, entertainment through consumption of goods and acquisition and a conquest of pleasure. Fulfilment of these desires demand a huge amount of money and in a consumer-oriented culture, wealth is the benchmark of value. A rational control is necessary to develop a sense of environmental goodness and its erosion under the appetite and desire of materialistic pleasures is a big hurdle in developing that sense.

The second challenge or hurdle in the development of an environmental ethics system is the individualism of Western/European culture. Individualism is a fruit of capitalist consumerism and promotes the logic of self-interest. A person motivated and influenced by such sociological and financial tendencies will advocate a very holistic and more humble view of human being’s relationship with the environment. These tendencies have developed a highly litigious society by virtue anthropocentric attitudes and individualistic behaviors where common benefit and the common good is not as important as individual rights (Brennan and Lo). The concept of deep ecology presented by Næss as discussed above rejects the idea of atomistic individualism. He argues that such concepts and separations do not only lead to human selfishness towards nature but also towards other humans. In contrast to individualism, he proposed an opposite scheme known as ‘total-field image’. According to this rational proposal, all the organism including human and others are best recognized as knots in the net of the biosphere. A living being’s identity is constituted essentially by its interaction and relation with other beings in the environment.  If human beings learn to conceptualize themselves and all the other inhabitants of the ecosystem in relational terms, then they will tend to take care of the world and nature batter.

One more challenge that is faced while promoting awareness about environmental ethics is the lack of appreciation of nature’s aesthetic aspects as far as Americans are concerned. Environmental harmony and goodness cannot be achieved if there is no love and deep appreciation of nature. These feelings are generally developed while spending a considerable amount of time in environmentally enriched, beautiful and natural settings. One reason for this lack of appreciation and love for nature is an increased population of masses shifting to urban areas or suburban sprawls that are not that much remarkable typically from an aesthetic point of view. Capitalism is also one issue as pointed out briefly above as it encourages hierarchical thinking to achieve material success and produce maximum profits. It encourages competition, independence and aggressiveness to achieve a competitive advantage and dominate the opposition. These competitive and aggressive tendencies empowered by capitalist culture is a big obstacle to environmental harmony and goodness (Jane 16).

Suggestions/Solutions

            The suggestions to provide possible solutions which can be adopted and incorporated into the realm of ethics to solve environmental issues can be determined in two ways. First is the idea of promoting philosophical insight and spreading awareness about environmental ethics and second to take practical steps in order to ensure a safe and sustainable environmental framework for human beings and other inhabitants of the environment. We will analyze the Dickson’s argument in regards to can environmental ethics solve environmental issues? He writes “Since the environmentally sound option will typically cost more than the nonenvironmental option, the pressure will frequently translate into pressure to choose the non-environmental option … choosing the cheaper, non-environmental option is likely to do more to secure her job and to increase her chances of advancement (Kassiola 500)” . It suggests that our behaviour in this modern society to the natural environment is the reflection of our modern values. The change in our values may become a source of solving environmental issues. Also, science alone may not serve to solve all the related environmental problems because its emergence involves more and more empirical consequences and causations.

            Apart from talking about ethical considerations and the debate of significance of environmental ethics to solve environmental issues, it is also required to take practical measures. These measures include spreading awareness about the significance of other entities of the ecosystem. The use of science and technology is vital and very important in dealing with environmental problems by offering new techniques and processes which are environmentally friendly and ensure safety for the ecosystem. The practical solutions which may be effective to save the environment apart from endorsing environmental ethics are social responsibilities including non-pollution, waste management, stopping deforestation, growing more and more trees, recycling, applying stoppage to the escape of pollution and other harmful chemicals into the sea and chemicals not air and managing adequate water consumption.

Conclusion

The detailed analysis of normative discipline of philosophy and ethical philosophies suggests that environmental ethics is a very important branch of knowledge that can be used to solve a number of environmental issues. There are many challenges in developing an ethical framework for environmental problems and respective solutions in the world in general and in the United States in particular. The main hurdles are capitalistic consumer economy and mindset if individualism. It is needed to develop a sense of mutual harmony and integrity with the environment to make an anti-anthropocentric the environment in which all the participants of the environment and ecosystem including all the species and organisms are respected and regarded as essential part irrespective of their potential benefit to the mankind. Due to emerging environmental problems, it is the  need of time to effectively inculcate new environmental issue and ethics to ensure a safe place for humans and other species in the ecosystem. Apart from that, it is the duty of the masses to become more responsible for the environmental perspective and try to adopt techniques and solutions to promote more and more sustainable processes to meet their needs.

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