

INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

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CHAPTER 4

THE HUMAN PERSON AND THE ENVIRONMENT



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To enjoy the gifts given by nature without destroying its wellbeing in the process
2. To arrive at a holistic understanding of the state of the natural environment in the Philippines
3. To feel empowered, to preserve and to conserve the only planet they have
4. To draw out knowledge on how the natural environment contributes to health, wellbeing, sustainable development and the attainment of inner peace

INTRODUCTION

The earliest philosophers already inquired about the basic stuff that underlies all things in the world. Thales, for instance, arrived at the idea that the origin of all things came from water. He was then followed by a variety of thinkers who also had their versions of the answer. From Anaximander to Anaximenes to Pythagoras and Heraclitus and Parmenides, such Philosophers gave answers to such questions that also made a lot of sense. Yet, one common thing about their answers was that they were all centered on the essence of the world where the human person was living in.

The world is very important to the human person. It is where he/she is born, raised, and lived the life that he chooses to live. Nevertheless, the development of things designed to make life easy for him/her has also created negative impacts on the things that support life, not only the lives of humans but also the lives of other beings that are essential to support life on earth. As the world becomes entrenched with the economic and technological advancements of the present, the natural environment has been put at the receiving end of such developments.

Therefore, to live life to the fullest and ensure that the future generation could also experience the same, it is imperative to take care of the natural environment. When human persons do this, nature will also take good care of them in return. After all, the relationship between humans and the natural environment have been reciprocal since time immemorial.

DISCUSSION

In the last ten years, the Philippines had experienced various catastrophes that were caused by nature. In December 2011, Typhoon *Sendong* made landfall in Mindanao, which brought heavy rains that caused flooding in Cagayan de Oro City and Iligan City, leaving around eight hundred persons dead. Typhoon *Pablo* ravaged Mindanao in December 2012, which left around one thousand five hundred fatalities. In November 2013, Typhoon *Yolanda* hit Leyte and Samar and took the lives of more than five thousand people.

Nature's wrath is indeed very destructive. However, humans can do something to mitigate nature's destructive force. This follows that humans should do their share to preserve the environment so that Mother Nature could protect and sustain them. It cannot be emphasized enough that the natural environment is essential in the human person's quest for survival. In exploring the essence of the human person, it is essential to include how we interact with the natural environment. After all, Mother Nature could greatly influence the quality of human life.

Human beings have always exploited Mother Nature. This kind of attitude is referred to as Anthropocentrism, a belief that only human beings matter (Routley and Routley, 1982). In this belief, everything else matters only because it has some kind of utility or instrumental value for human beings. But while the environment is often seen only in relation to its role in ensuring human kind's long-term survival, human beings are nonetheless expected to give appropriate moral consideration to the environment through acts of respect and care, responsibility, as well as concern for Mother Nature (Mathews, 2010). There is nothing wrong with human persons using the environment provided that they have to take charge of nature and ensure nature's

wellbeing (Passmore, 1974). Thus, people should cut back their efforts towards excessive economic growth, thereby limiting their exploitation of the natural environment (Moga, 1995).

ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND DEEP ECOLOGY

The notion of Anthropocentrism stems from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, which maintains that humans are the chief stewards of God's Creation, while non-human beings have no intrinsic value since they are only valuable depending on their utility to human beings. This concept has a long-standing influence on how human beings treat the natural environment. For years, humans have exploited Mother Nature and left traces of destruction all over the world. Yet, the extent of human beings' abuse of the natural environment has been questioned by various sectors of our society. One of the radical responses to Anthropocentrism is the notion of *Deep Ecology*.

Deep Ecology is a new ecological philosophy (ecosophy) that considers humanity an integral part of nature. The ideology stresses the interdependence of nature, humans, and non-humans, as well as the environment and its natural processes. The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess coined the term 'deep ecology' in 1973 and helped give it a theoretical basis (Naess, 1973). For him, ecological science is concerned only with facts and reasoning and cannot address ethical questions about how human beings can live. He, therefore, stressed that human beings need ecological wisdom. By concentrating on deep knowledge, deep questioning, and deep involvement, Deep Ecology seeks to establish an integrated structure where each gives rise to and supports the other. Naess called this "ecosophy", an evolving yet consistent concept that embodies ecological

wisdom and harmony of being, thinking, and acting in the world (Harding, 2015).

Society needs to find a middle ground between Anthropocentrism and Deep Ecology. In as much as human beings need to use the things found in nature, they also have to put limits on its use to make sure that there is enough left for everybody, both in the present and future generations. For instance, while human beings need lumber and water, they should use only what is needed so that these resources could sustain other humans' needs for a longer period. This means that human beings can enjoy the things endowed by nature, but they must do so in moderation in order to sustain them.

ENLIGHTENED ANTHROPOCENTRISM

Enlightened Anthropocentrism maintains that human beings have a moral duty to set limits in the utilization of nature's good in order to protect the needs of the future generation (Fernandez, 2018). However, because of unrestricted freedom, humans tend to exploit Mother Nature. Consequently, the natural environment is being depleted faster since nature's capacity to regenerate follows its "built-in schedule" designed to be in harmony with the other beings within its system. Thus, humans need to set concrete restrictions in the use of their freedom to continually enjoy the blessings provided by Mother Nature. This enables the present generation to enjoy natural resources and gives future generations the chance to relish the same environmental resources when their time comes (Fernandez, 2019).

Anthropocentrism is governed by four principles that define human beings' relationship with the natural environment. First, human beings must recognize their moral obligations to the present generation of human beings

in relation to their utilization of environmental goods. Second, the present generation must consider the well-being of future generations and be aware that the stability and health of the future generations are directly affected by the decisions that the present generation makes concerning the environment. Third, people must understand and consider the full value of the various ecological services provided by the ecosystem. Finally, people must recognize that nature has an aesthetic value (Fernandez, 2019).

Enlightened Anthropocentrism, therefore, entails moral deliberation and sustainable actions that are grounded on the fundamental human inclination for preservation. Humans' willingness to balance the use of his/her freedom against the natural tendency to fully exercise it and maximize what he/she can get from the environment is based on a deeper sense of moral and practical urgency. As rational beings, humans know that irresponsible actions towards nature could result in negative and long-lasting consequences. Thus, humans should conserve and protect the environment because protecting the environment is also an act of protecting themselves and others (Fernandez, 2019).

THE STATE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES

The biodiversity in the Philippines has been one of the richest in the world. It has been part of the 17 mega-diverse countries which collectively claim two-thirds of all global species. Yet, 70% of Philippine forests had vanished from the 1930s to 1988 (Haribon Foundation, 2016). There are two major causes of Philippine forest loss. They are the conversion of primary forests to secondary forests by both legal and illegal logging, and the removal of secondary forests cover by the expansion of upland agriculture (Fernando, 2005). As a result, farmers have been the most

affected sector because their way of life is dependent on the natural environment. However, the Philippine government has not taken this phenomenon lightly; thus, massive reforestation has been initiated. Though the government has introduced programs aimed to rehabilitate denuded lands, both government and private sectors' efforts are still not enough to abate the rapid deforestation rate of Philippine forests (Kalikasan People's Network, 2011). The decades-long reforestation efforts using fast-growing exotic species have led to the alteration of Philippine rainforests, which has failed to bring back ecosystem functions (Haribon Foundation, 2005). After all, exotic trees cannot replace Philippine native trees because they are not suited to the Philippine climate (Ranada, 2014).

Moreover, our marine ecosystem has likewise suffered from a similar fate. Illegal fishing methods, such as the use of dynamites and poisons, the indiscriminate throwing of trash in the sea have all significantly damaged the wellbeing of many marine ecosystems in the Philippines. Aside from this, the emergence of state-of-the-art fishing vessels with sonar technology and mechanized nets that reach the seabed have depleted a significant part of Philippine fisheries due to the destruction of corals (Fernandez & Villaluz, 2018).

Furthermore, the marine ecosystem is not only destroyed by undesirable fishing activities. They are also destroyed by other human activities that are carried out to make life easier for them. For instance, reclamation projects augment land areas in certain localities. These projects also destroy marine ecosystems. In a study on the effects of a reclamation site in Baybay City, Leyte, it is found out that the process of constructing the reclamation area has greatly damaged the surrounding fishing areas of the community affected. The residue of the filling materials and the noise it has created in the process of construction have caused the fishes to go further into the seas. The seawater has turned

brown while those enclosed within the reclamation site have stagnated, causing skin diseases for many residents in the area (Fernandez, 2019).

A more effective way of making people understand the effects of the destruction of the ecosystem is to enable them to see what is really happening in the ground (Fernandez & Villaluz, 2017). It is crucial to educate people, especially the youth, that the natural environment is an integral aspect of sustaining their needs and preventing natural disasters from happening in the future. It is each person's moral responsibility to take good care of the environment so that they could also benefit from the things that nature gives to them.

Moreover, Filipinos need to take care of their forests since Philippine forests have already been grossly exploited for decades. Failure to do so would be detrimental to the country since said overexploitation has been going on at a much faster pace. We have to do our share in protecting and conserving what is left of their country's natural environment. It is of utmost importance that people have to know that care for the natural environment contributes to health, wellbeing, and sustainable development (Fernandez & Bande, 2018).

RAINFORESTATION: A WAY OF CARING FOR THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Since the natural environment has been grossly exploited for years, it is high time for humans to care for it. There is a need to care for nature since experience has proven that nature's wrath is fatal when unleashed. Hence, to address this problem, people have strived to find ways to care for the natural environment. One of the innovations that have been conceptualized and implemented to address the gross

environmental exploitation is the technology called Rainforestation.

Rainforestation is the answer to the problem of rehabilitating denuded lands (Fernandez & Bande, 2019). The Visayas State University introduced Rainforestation in the early 1990s as a technology designed to use unproductive lands by planting native tree species that were not widely used in the Philippine government's reforestation program (Milan & Ceniza, 2009). This technology found its way to Visayas State University in 1990. The Philippine-German Applied Tropical Ecology Project started to look into possibilities of rehabilitating formerly forested areas to reclaim the ecological functions of the degraded areas needed for poverty alleviation through sustainable rural development. This program was designed to promote biodiversity rehabilitation, conservation of remaining primary forests and natural resources, and the development of a closed canopy and high diversity forest farming system called Rainforestation. The program's directives were formulated so that Rainforestation could replace the widespread slash-and-burn practices and protect and enhance biodiversity by using indigenous trees only. In 1994, the hypothesis was formulated that a farming system in the humid tropics would increasingly be more sustainable the closer it was in the species composition to the original local rainforest (Goltenbot, 2005). With this, the ecological functions of a given ecosystem were re-established, while subsistence farmers were provided with a stable and long-term income.

Since the 1990s, groups and individual adopters have successfully benefitted from the results of Rainforestation. For instance, four individuals from the Visayas have taken the initiative of adopting Rainforestation for a variety of motives. Mr. Manuel Posas, from Barangay Marcos, Baybay City, Leyte had not hesitated to plant his less than a hectare

grassland with native trees following the framework of Rainforestation in the early 1990s. He worked to take care of it, and as years passed, the once grassland has presently become a vibrant forest with Philippine native trees in it. The former grassland was dry and arid at the beginning. After fifteen years, a water source emerged from the site, which made water available for him and his relatives all year round. Not only that, but Mr. Posas also planted fruit trees such as Lanzones, Durian, Rambutan, Langka together with his native trees when he started way back then. Hence at present, Mr. Posas does not only have water; he has also earned extra income from the sales of the surplus harvest of his fruit trees (Fernandez & Bande, 2019).

Aside from individual adopters, there were also group adopters of Rainforestation technology. One of them was the Nakahiusang Katawhan sa Esperanza (NAKASE) in Pilar, Camotes Island, Cebu. The organization was formed in 1996 and had then engaged themselves in raising native tree seedlings for reforestation purposes. Their active involvement in Rainforestation innovation took off in 2008 when the group was commissioned by Mayor Eufracio "Dodong" Maratas to initially reforest the watershed areas in the island to address the dwindling water supply, especially during the dry season. The organization was again commissioned by the Philippines' Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to raise native tree seedlings for the department's National Greening Program (NGP), which enabled them to earn from their environmental activities. NAKASE was also able to reforest more than three hundred hectares of land by the year 2014 (Fernandez and Fernandez, 2020). Mayor Maratas' vision of mainstreaming upland and lowland collaboration to involve many constituencies, including women and children, had worked well for him. It had instilled in their consciousness the significance of environmental conservation to one's life.

Lastly, Rainforestation, as an environmental conservation innovation, also protects human beings from infectious diseases brought about by wild animals (Fernandez & Bande, 2020). With deforestation, wild animals lost their homes and dispersed to areas where people are living. There, they came in contact with domesticated animals, which also had close contact with humans. Since the virus from wild animals was passed on to domesticated animals, it mutated and became contagious to humans. However, if forests are kept intact, there would be fewer chances for wild animals to disperse to communities; thus, there will be fewer chances for infectious diseases to be transmitted.

Rainforestation has been designed to reforest denuded lands and bring back lost ecosystems, but it has also served to contain wild animals with the potential to contain viruses in their bodies (Fernandez & Bande, 2020). This only shows that human beings have to do their part to care for the environment and forests to sustain the basic ecosystem services that the environment provides.

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN BEINGS' ATTAINMENT OF PEACE

The wellbeing of the natural environment is crucial to human beings' attainment of peace. It is evident that when Mother Nature unleashes her fury, many people are affected in a variety of negative ways. For example, when there is heavy rain for hours, many places will be flooded, which makes people's lives difficult, especially the poor.

To live peacefully, people should also leave Mother Nature in peace so that there will be peaceful co-existence between them. Take the peasants, for example. As people belonging to society's lower stratum, they have strived to live peaceful lives in their relationship with the natural

environment since their lives are intertwined with it. They regard their lives as part of nature; hence, they have endeavored to be in harmony with it rather than to have mastery over it. For them, the natural environment is not an object to be utilized without any sense of purpose. Nature has human-like characteristics and can also reciprocate the kind of treatment they have towards it. The natural environment follows the law of reciprocity whereby any good deed done to it is justly and equally compensated (Fernandez, 2019).

Since these farmers take good care of the natural environment, nature has also given them abundant yields and harvests. This is a manifestation of justice. According to Gabriel Marcel, justice always has something to do with the humanity of laws and the totality of man's existential relationship and the natural environment (Fieser & Dowden, n.d.). Not only that, since these farmers live in a close-knit farming community, they also value their relationship with their neighbors and their fellowmen. By having good interpersonal relationships with other community members, they enjoy a sense of inner peace that enables them to live happy and quiet lives (Fernandez, 2019).

THE HUMAN PERSON AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

One sad reality of the effects of the natural environment's behavior on humankind is that the most affected are those who have almost nothing to do with the abusive practices towards Mother Nature. With strong cyclones hitting many Global South countries, it is unjust that some people suffer from the consequences of the economic activities of rich and highly industrialized countries. This is where climate justice becomes relevant and important. According to Simon Caney (2020), there is overwhelming evidence that human activities are changing

the climate system. The emission of greenhouse gases results in increased temperatures, rising sea levels, and severe weather events (such as storm surges).

These climatic changes raise several issues of justice, such as a) how to assess the impacts of climate change, b) what climate responsibilities current generations have to future generations, c) how political actors ought to take into account the risks and uncertainties involved in climate projections, and d) who takes responsibility in addressing climate change (Caney, 2020).

It cannot be emphasized enough that human beings need to think deeply and decide to do something that can mitigate climate change. As rational beings, human beings should do the things that can bring welfare to their fellow human beings with regard to climate justice. In particular, people who have a say in government and corporate policies should be concerned about climate justice since it affects a significant number of the world's population. As moral agents, it is their responsibility to decide what is right even if their behavior and decisions are influenced by the culture of global corporations (Gallinero, et al., 2018).

CONCLUSION

The human person is not an entity that could not live and survive on its own. He/she needs supporting mechanisms to enable him/her to live and enjoy life to the fullest. One of these important life-supporting mechanisms is the natural environment. The services that Mother Nature gives to humankind are free and irreplaceable. Yet, human persons have just taken Mother Nature for granted for quite some time now. Nevertheless, there is always the good side of human beings. Though they may have contributed to the destruction of the natural environment, they also have the

power to preserve, conserve, and restore Nature to its pristine state.

Insofar as human persons are rational beings and can distinguish good from evil, they could always channel such powers to save the natural environment. After all, it is not too late to save what is left of the natural environment. With the harmonious co-existence of the human persons with the natural environment, the path of attaining personal inner peace, health, wellbeing, and sustainable development would no longer be impossible to attain.

ASSESSMENT

1. As a student, how could you express acts towards the natural environment manifesting enlightened Anthropocentrism?
2. Is the philosophy of “deep ecology” still possible to practice given this pluralistic and materialistic society?
3. What is your take on Rainforestation as a conservation innovation designed to express human beings’ care for Mother Nature? Expound your answer.
4. In your understanding, in what ways can the natural environment disrupt the experience of peace among people? Explain your answer.
5. Explain how you understand the notion of climate justice.