



The Ecological Problem: An Ethical Approach to Responsibility

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Abstract: This research aims to analyze the dialectical relationship between human technological development and environmental degradation, focusing on the role of ethical awareness as a regulator of human practices toward the ecosystem, where the research relies on a critical analytical approach to explore the historical impacts of human interventions—particularly with the mechanized and technological revolution—which have transformed the environment from a balanced element into an existential threat due to irresponsible practices.

The results show that the absence of a societal culture based on respect for the original conditions of nature promotes unethical behavior, such as the overexploitation of resources and the pollution caused by modern technologies, as the study also confirms that "technological development" is not a justification for granting humans the authority to act outside ethical frameworks.

Keywords: environment; ecology; ecological awareness; technology; the ethical Environmental philosophy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

As of now, nature has become a significant subject for the conscious human being, who is well aware of the worst consequences of his unethical and irresponsible actions toward the environment, which is undoubtedly a revolution against the traditional thought that glorified itself in opposition to the subject, forgetting the fact that the subject is not conditioned by a self that opposes it because that the self requires a sense of responsibility against the subject that it faces; furthermore, neither technology nor biological interactions left any choice, but the immediate right to act to stop such re-programmed violations against the environment. The effect of the term «human is master of nature », which was reinforced by the philosophy of modernity, has lost its validity after these environmental violations; but rather than this, humans have become more obligated through the realization of the condition of the ethics of responsibility, which makes him just a participating element in a shared environment (**human-animal-plant**) and at most only in the right of preservation, but not his mastery over nature; that's why many philosophers have devoted most of their attention to researching the fulfillment of responsibility toward the environment, such as Hans Jonas and Luc Ferry; in this paper, we represent some of their ethical ideas, which are considered the godfather ideas that generate the spirit of responsibility toward the environment; consequently, as an obvious result, plenty of questions may be asked: are ethical concepts sufficient to prevent these environmental violations? How can we cultivate ethical awareness that enhances the spirit of responsibility without ethical standards? And what solutions did Hans Jonas and Luc Ferry propose to achieve such an ethical awareness?

Nature before the appearance of the industrial revolution and modern technologies was a high power over early humans which led them from fear of its phenomena and veneration to the point of worshiping it, this power as a self has an unknown authority, along with the development of industrial and technical advancement and the emergence of the scientific method, human tightened its grip and asserted its

control over the nature and since Francis Bacon announced the control over the nature, this last come to be treated as an external thing to ourselves or separate from our external world and then human excluded all the ethical frameworks which make the nature his surrounding world and original refuge.

“ Francis Bacon known as the father of science transformed the existing directions in his society to a comprehensive program, defending the control of nature for the benefit of humanity and he was able to integrate a new philosophy relying on natural magic as a technique for manipulating the nature”(Zimmerman, 2006, p. 39), this last terrible transformation which is regarded towards the nature and the humankind dominated as a stance of control and dominance has led to the creation of a large gap which can be observed through the studies concerned within the modern era when the self was separated from the subject(**matter** and **spirit**).

This period may always require looking at the self “human” by taking into consideration that it is experiencing a crisis of marginalization and alienation, but the true stance is that even the subject “nature” was not treated in good faith, rather it was treated as an object subject to experimentations and technical modifications in a fashion like that nature was created for human and under his guardianship through the extremism in its components (**animals** and **plants**); thus, a new ethics emerged, attempting to revive the relationship between humans and nature as it was in pre-modern eras; so, in the contemporary period, a lot of efforts have been made to reduce this gap until the total disappearance (matter/spirit)(self/subject) by considering the human as an element of this world(human-animal- plant) but not a custodian over it; consequently, a great revolution of ecology was established against the recklessness inflicted upon the environment.

II. The concept of Ecology:

“Ecology is the science that studies mutual relationships between living organisms and their environment, living, and it takes the ecosystems as valley and sea and forest and desert, and atmospheric layer, and aquatic zone, and the land and the biosphere as its subjects” (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 9).

The instrumental rationality and its positioning have canceled every concept and every meaning for the value, the technological civilization and the mentality of building smart cities do not believe in the culture of green spaces, and as the ecological criticism was based on liberating the environment from the human of a part and enacting provisions that criminalize unethical practices (manufacturing, experimentation, and pollution) of another part; so in this way, the notion of ecology was established, together with studying the bond between human and their environment; moreover, according to Aristotle, the human being is a rational being; therefore, the trait of respecting the other is one of the virtues for which he is naturally endowed; As a result, we must reconsider the environment as the other that stands in contrast to the self and as its complement, and hence hopefully unsurprisingly we see this so overrated attention that has long been given to the ecological field under the so-called term “ecological ethics”.

Contemporary humans have come to fully realize the consequences of the modern era and the impact of technology and its repercussions, as we no longer view humans as the sole beings as existentialism used to emphasize their existence and glorify them; rather, we see them as an element among the other existential entities, as human coexists with other beings that may not share their fundamental nature, **“mind,”** but still possess the same rights “ethics of responsibility.

“ The environmental issue is one of the most important contemporary issues” (Naeima, 2016, p. 87), due to the crisis of consciousness; thus, it requires the concerted efforts of philosophers, scientists, and ethicists first and foremost to report the severe damage and the terrible harm inflicted on the environment as a first step and as a second step transforming this report into a purposeful speech directed to the public because of that such a great message of responsibility cannot be addressed to the ordinary single person.

Big problems like the problem of pollution and the disappearance of an important species of animals are considered more than normal to most humans because they see it only for consumption so it doesn't

matter if it disappears or not and just as long as they still have another source of consumption, they are still careless about the topic, where ethical awareness of the environment requires significant efforts to guide people on how to be cautious and act responsibly, which can be achieved by restricting reckless practices that have led to the extinction of many unique animal and plant species; additionally, the disposal of industrial waste into seas and valleys has resulted in the loss of rare species of fish due to the pollution that has affected their habitat; so, who is responsible for this situation? Don't we need to give an ethical speech?

Ethical speech implies having the spirit of responsibility toward our living environment and the whole habitat, such an implication that adopting the value of responsibility is an ethical duty that every person should adopt to make things more clear, we do not mean by this duty is that the person has to act and deal in an automatic manner towards the environment, but acting consciously since we are rational beings that fulfill their duties in (what **has to be** and **what hasn't to be**), the ethical value can be represented in the appreciation of the other who opposes me, this other may be rational and may not; so, I have to appreciate it even when it is a subject because in any case, it's a self that is an irrational being, as all the practices related to the various aspects of the environment have turned into a real threat to the survival of the human race on Earth due to improper use; So, **What is the real cause behind the pollution, the earthquakes, and the floods?**

Well, these events are some of the billions of the results of humans' greedy actions, the environment is not a rational (rational being) and science cannot have full access and absolute control over nature and the proof of this claim can be summarized on what we're living today of science's inability against earthquakes and some other disasters that leave millions of victims " **Any imbalance as a result of a change in some biotic conditions based on the relationships between the living organisms which live in the environmental medium and affected each other, and the imbalance may occur due to the intervention to human in a direct way to change and adjust the environmental conditions** " (Mehdi, 2016, p. 306).

This is just one cause among many others of the loss of the environmental culture which plays the fundamental role in guiding people to the suitable way of treating their environment and how to interact with it, where the lack of awareness speeches has also led to the destruction of the Earth (ozone hole). Narrowing the scope of the study to specifically include Arab and Islamic societies, we see that we have not yet reached the level which allows us to enter into a good discussion about environmental ethics and we are still completely and far away from the matter of considering the nature as the other which is different from me by taking the mind and the property of rationality into account and an existing that shares its existence with me simultaneously. The solutions proposed for these environmental problems are just ink on paper, and everything that has been implemented is merely signed hanging on the walls (protection of the environment); so, the environmental ethics for us are just a theoretical proposal so far from being into practice and our streets prove the validity of these words, as we are researching what the West is researching, we also treat their crisis and their problems, and we used to propose a list of solutions; So, **Are we living the same crisis together with the West?Dowe not live on the same earth?**

It is a painful fact, the fact that our crisis is much and more bigger than their crisis because we ask questions and propose solutions for the Western crisis but none of us dare to give a realistic philosophical speech about the environment and if we treat nature, we treat it in a legislative religious way. We don't deny the studies of Muslim philosophers (Al Kindi, Avicenna, Ibn Khaldun), they achieved great accomplishments and have done a lot of work in the area of environmental ethics, but the problem is that even the religious character is not adopted by all Muslims; rather, it's adopted by few of them, for example considering the case of the (2021-2022) fires which caused massive damage, a lot of us believed that the reason behind this disaster was the greedy exploitation of trees; but, how was a man able to provide causes, and **who is absent here: the moral conscience or the responsible authority for protecting the environment?**

What about the destruction of rare trees and the disruption of wildlife!! Isn't the time to move on and take the necessary measures? Isn't the time to drive the wheel of control toward environmental protection?

The reality is that the studies done by the philosophers and their hard workings did not fulfill their designated role in the development of the environmental culture but rather it was limited to some research that was shelved as contributions in writing the history of philosophy **"This is what the French philosopher Michel Serres referred to acknowledging that we became weak in front the nature by the judgment of our excessive control over it, even it threatens us in turn to control us, as through it, with it and within it, we share the same destiny"**(Alkhaytar, 2023, p. 9).

Nowadays, we need to solve our problems through this research and we have to establish several awareness associations all together care about the environmental culture because Islamic legislation has not overlooked any single aspect of the environment and that can be touched on in several calls and quranic verses that emphasize respecting nature and preventing harm **" This indicates the authenticity of this thought in Islamic heritage, which Muslim philosophers and scientist have drawn inspiration from Quran and Sunnah where there is more care and environmental attention"**(Al-Khadhraoui, 2020, p. 1813).

Consequently, as a conclusion, we can summarize the words by saying that humans do not own the environment but instead, they share the property of continuation of life on earth with it and that's why a lot of philosophical theories have been founded on the Western field of philosophy which simulate the environmental crisis and call for the rise of the environmental ethical awareness.

III. Approach to the Ethics of Responsibility

The new challenges that have been imposed on the intellectual area throughout finding real solutions rather than patchwork fixes in the problem of the failure of the human-environment relationship to give a list of ethical speeches that carry the real sense of responsibility, in other words, having the spirit of responsibility in its highest meanings inside its context and removing the human centrality over the environment as if he were its guardian and restricting his actions by lowering him from the rank of a guardian to the rank of a being like all the other beings where he posses them in having intellect(**mind**) and, yet this does not grant him the right to harm or exploit them at his disposal.

The achievements of the modern era have deluded humans into believing that they are the masters of nature due to the instrumental and the value of rationality and forgetting the dire consequences that result from nature's uprising against humans as the philosophers' efforts are based on the fear of an inevitable fate if these actions remain unchecked by legal deterrence in the event of the failure of the ethical side.

"Because humans' possession of mind or the immortal soul and their progression on the evolutionary ladder don't give them the highest rights than other beings, but rather it imposes many duties on them"(Nassim, 202, p. 1484).

Here we revive Kant's set of ethics, which advocates for the ethics of duty, as Kant glorified the idea of duty based on his belief in man's ability to build himself, starting from his moral disposition or his ethical conscience in his interaction with other beings; in addition, Kant links the idea of duty to freedom as long as freedom is an idea, but it is a fundamental requirement granted to all humans; so, **what is the relationship between freedom and duty?** According to Kant, freedom is an idea generated by the mind, and it is a desire founded on the liberation from any restraint and from any authority, whatever they may be, but in his discussion of this concept, Kant does not grant humans the right to act without legal or moral constraints; rather, he emphasizes accepting freedom that is built on the common good, as individuals' freedom ends where the freedom of others begins.

" It is not enough to fix the way we feel about our inclinations and desires but we have to carry out a revolution on our method of thinking, and it is not enough to reform our morals from the outside

but we have to carry out a revolution on our method of thinking about the using of freedom” (Kant, 2012, p. 17).

We can take into consideration Kant’s idea in rethinking our approach to the environment and our attempt to engage in a struggle to neutralize our freedom and our uses and acting according to what the moral conscience dictates because the only effective way to sanctify human behavior toward the environment and its beings, but when the actions and the interactions are based on respecting the rules from a political perspective, so here we cannot talk about the ethical value as everything is established according to precise laws and therefore the situation has no connection to ethical behavior because moral value stems from the concept of duty and the concept of duty arises from what the moral conscience dictates; so we may ask the question: **can duty-based ethics serve as universal ethics, in which duty respects the autonomy of nature for animals apart from humans?**

“The problem of the new cognitive model expresses a crisis of value, and the stability of nature is related to the changing of our values toward the environment” (Abu-Saoud, 2021, p. 229).

This text is considered an invitation to reconsider the foundations upon which values have been built, especially modern values that have stripped nature of its fundamental rights, reducing it to an empty subject and a rigid material susceptible to manipulation and domestication, as the contemporary bioethical speech opens the doors to environmental ethics and consequently raises the question again about the guidelines and ethical principles, but in a new and specific method, a method that does not separate the other beings (**animals and plants**) from the area of research and study; these new ethical directions open the opportunity to different many ways, each has the property to restate the peak of nature and preserve its resources, as the ecological philosophy has elevated the engagement to a higher level and that is what led to the appearance of many efforts, theories and attempts which differ from each other regarding the direction side but all converge to a common point, the point of thinking about new ways to advance environmental awareness toward the nature.

Among the pioneers who had a significant impact in building a new ethics based on the ethics of responsibility is the German philosopher Hans Jonas who placed the responsibility on humans for the dangerous turn that the ecological crisis has taken, as the critique done by Hans was based on the critique of early ethics (**traditional ethics**) which makes from the ethical theory, a theory based on rational beings only and according to the philosophers this set of ethics has become an ineffective ethics that fails to fulfill its role in raising awareness toward our environment and it does not even adapt to what contemporary human are experiencing, let alone the crisis of reification which has become an intermediary between humans and nature.

Jonas called for ethics that transcends the human level.

“It emphasizes the necessity of the feeling of responsibility to establish ethics, and here it shows the fundamental difference between the traditional ethics and the ethics of responsibility according to Jonas, and if the traditional ethics are human ethics which studies the humans’ ethical behavior in the present time, then the ethics of responsibility according to Jonas cares about the future of human and the nature with its fate” (Bin Sabae, 2018, p. 98).

The goal behind the responsibility slogan associated with the project Hans Jonas was to consider the dimension that will affect human nature in the future from a side as the ethical work which is based on the ethics of responsibility paves the way to the foundation of a new ethics all together ensuring the safety of the environmental ecosystem in the future and from another side presenting the profile of the conscience and the modern technologies within regulations that define and restrict irrational practices against the natural entities; from this perspective of Hans, preserving and thinking about the ecological field is a right and a responsibility of today’s humans to tomorrow’s humans on whatever foundations they were, whether cultural, social, or religious, for the sustainability of the ecosystem.

“Like that the ethics, according to Hans Jonas, took a dimension represented in the human’s feeling of responsibility toward the next generations and also the environment or nature.” (Bouhajla, 2020, p. 16).

The speech on the ethics of responsibility moved the gaze to the relationship between humans and nature and directed the view further than that on drawing straight paths and future milestones to ensure the continued stability for nature because together with this speech we obtain a nice transition, say that we move from the phase of thinking about the humans’ ethics to a phase of thinking about of universal ethics for the reason that if we look to the human as a rational being, we find that he is an element in this world and he shares with the other beings the property of life continuation on earth but he is not a center for the world at all.

Therefore, the environmental ethics based on the concept of responsibility can be considered as a new philosophy, a philosophy with new milestones through considering the other as a self even if it’s an irrational being and even if the other was a subject, so no problem exists as long as I share the property of the existence with it; for that reason, we can consider this speech as the key to arriving at the way of opening new horizons for the emergence of new philosophies and theories founded on a set of universal ethics that do not separate other beings from the ethical field of interactions.

The responsibility for which Hans Jonas called is further and deeper than Kant’s idea of duty to the human self in the face of another self (rational beings) and based on the current behavior bound by the present time while the ethics of responsibility according to Hans Jonas believe that it is not bound by the condition of rationality, as the responsibility is based on respecting the autonomy of this self; therefore, according to the perspective of Hans Jonas, the ethics of responsibility are universal ethics that do not separate the existing (beings) from each other and it’s ethics for all times, for the day and tomorrow because it cares about the future of the coming generations in contrast to the ethics of duty.

In the same context, we find another ethical speech that is represented in the deep ecology with the French philosopher **Luc Ferry**, who denied in his first research all the traditional frameworks that viewed nature as an independent world from the human world. Luc Ferry carried out a very constructive criticism of the Industrial Revolution movements and the development as he considered that the foundation of these major transformations were based on the autonomy of humans from his environment and as a result he concluded that the issue of quality on earth won’t be realized if and only if we reconsider the concept of human centralization over the environment.

“The human as a center in contemporary ecological ethics is the cause of the destruction of nature and so the direct responsibility for the destruction of nature according to Luc Ferry, and the failure to triumph for him regarding the ecological side and the living organisms of plants and animals are enemies for the human but looking on the depth with Luc Ferry shows that the human is the real enemy for the entities of nature” (Salima& Nadia, 2022, p. 152).

Luc Ferry did not separate from the other philosophers, but rather he took on a democratic dimension that requires an intervention policy and the resolution of the environmental crisis problem because ethics without restrictions and regulations cannot give real solutions; Not all people indeed hold the real meaning of ethics, but with the legal act, such a property may be possible because the law is the highest authority and it is almost up to everyone; in addition to that the view of Luc Ferry on the environment establishes a larger theory, surpassing the human event, and it’s at least an advertisement for surpassing the traditional ethics, which makes the ethical conscience based on the duty.

“Luc calls for a deep democratic ecology, but neither humanity nor metaphysical meaning that it is not centered around the human, the ethics of democratic ecology give the right of freedom and equality for all the beings to achieve the continuity and stability of nature and humanity”(Salima& Nadia, 2022, p. 156).

Luc Ferry does not doubt the reality of traditional ethics but today’s ethics is no longer valid for its awareness role and it does not realize the respect of autonomy and that human nature cannot be forced

without restrictions and regulations as the deep ecology is just a critical movement which represents a problem of autonomy (human-animal) like a difference but not a model of control and domination.

The work done by deep ecology is a radical study of the fracture of the relationship between humans and other beings, and the desired objective of this work is to fulfill the respect of the natural diversity among humans and other beings and all differences between them but such an objective won't be realized without a democratic ecology.

IV. Conclusion:

The philosophy of ecology has provided an aesthetic and idealistic vision for the awareness of the value of the environment, and it emphasizes the importance of nature for humans; furthermore, it tried to narrow the gap between humans and nature till the disappearance and establish a philosophy based on recognizing the other and respecting his or its autonomy, so that we obtain a set of universal ethics that does not separate the other existing from their living environment throughout removing the human from the rank of a center and a master over the universe and consequently for every single related theory there was a part of study for the ecological crisis and an attempt of proposing solutions for the universe problem; As a result, the ethical speech was founded based on new ethical standards that align with the current situation and the future too, which we have seen in the work of the German philosopher Hans Jonas and his invitation to establish new ethics based on the ethics of responsibility.

In the same context, the French philosopher Luc Ferry tried to adopt a more advanced vision by not relying on traditional ethics and moving towards a democratic ecology, surpassing human ethics.

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