

## Reconsidering the Paradigm Shift from Environmental Philosophy to Global Environmentalisms

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The Earth has arrived at such a point that the speed of human change has had effects that are now irreversible. This picture tells us that the crises in nature are not the crises of nature but the crises of the societal system as the socio-political system ruled by political leaders, opinion-makers, and liberal extremists. The current discussions on climate change, both among environmental philosophers and in international assemblies, represent how the human-nature interaction became a complex crisis in environmental ethical dilemmas and in political and economic practices. This paper offers an examination of the validation of some classical concepts of environmental philosophy after the paradigm shift to global environmentalisms in terms of sustainability.

**Keywords:** eco-paradigm – anthropocene – environmental ethics – climate crisis – sustainability

We overuse nature, we pollute it, and we make all-natural products the objects of aggressive marketing policy. The burning of fossil fuels on a large scale, more acidic and toxic production processes, deposits of calcium carbonate on the deep seafloor, and irreversible warming as climate change are all apparent in our daily lives. It is a fact that the planet will not be the same in the future. The profound and long-lasting effect of human agency on our Earth writes a history, called the Anthropocene. In this context human actions and political decisions are power-oriented and unjust. The “humans-only” orientation of the represented reality becomes a “totality on nature” (Hamilton 2017, 23). The Earth is older than humans and has a natural history; however, the independence of human history as a modern idea changed the Earth into an

unstable environment. Catastrophic climate disasters have a human fingerprint, and virtue ethics have been ignored.

Consumption is the foundation of global economic growth, and the use of natural resources needed for it increases the acceleration that continues in many ways today. We are entering an epoch of irreversible human impact on the global environmental. Our human-friendly Earth is gradually being destroyed. We have overruled nature with our belief in humankind and our culture as a civilization, as well as our post-economic, developmental, and progressive ideas. This is indeed not an alert, nor an apocalyptic scenario but a direct and clear result deduced from the philosophical criticism of the Anthropocene epoch. The speed of change and the shift in the Anthropocene will be much more apparent in the near future, and our children will experience how our world sinks into a catastrophe. The Earth has arrived at such a point that the speed of human change has had effects that are now irreversible. This picture tells us that the crises in nature are not the crises of nature but the crises of the societal system as the socio-political system ruled by political leaders, opinion-makers, and liberal extremists. Remarkable debates about the rapidity of the change with direct and indirect results, and the human disturbance to the Earth system took place during the period after World War II (the nuclear age), and scientists warned us how humankind's history dominated natural history (Gormley 2021).

The most prominent question is to ask, according to environmental ethical theory, whether to attempt more control or to stop interfering. We must erase our imprints and the destructive results of wrong decisions in terms of development, civilized lifestyle, metropolitan culture, and the so-called "industrial metabolism of humankind" (Hamilton 2017, 19). After these considerations it is appropriate to say that environmental issues are based on anthropological and cultural issues and political outputs as well. This is why environmental ethics are no longer valid for criticism as long as they remain in their classical form.

I call this philosophical turn the paradigm shift from "nature" to "environment." The various forms of "environmentalisms" with the basic idea of sustainability are used for legitimizing cruel ideas for sustaining the capitalist global system, not nature itself. The Western ethics here turned its face to some Eastern wisdom and deeper naturalistic philosophers. The dialectic is indeed not between the West and East but between the notions of nature (in philosophy) and environment (in capitalism). It reflects the phase of global human disturbance politically and in an economic sense. Unfortunately,

global environment thought is still unable to comprehend nature on its own. Rather than being an integrated system based on human needs, nature is rather a collection of diverse organisms. This understanding demands a philosophical reconsideration of climate change as a global crisis.

### **I. Philosophizing Climate Change: Nature or Environment?**

Many people all around the world share a genuine concern about our impact on the ecosystem (land, water, air, plants, and animals). Considering the first era of philosophy (*philosophy perennial*), it is appropriate to say that human thought was humble but voluntarily ready to amplify the enhancements of nature as a “cosmos” with *logos*. In other words, the emergence of philosophy as a philosophy of nature reveals a perfect correspondence between human thought and an ontology of nature. In this relation, there is no center and no periphery. When human being decided to separate itself from nature with the power of industrialization and mechanization, as well as scientific developments and possibilities, the material and technological processes of the natural sciences increased the gap between human and nature. This gap was based on the idea of using nature as an environmental source. Francis Bacon’s scientism, Descartes’ dualism, and Kantian rationalism are leading frameworks for developing the authority of reason in nature (Collingwood 2014). Our relationship with nature, as called “environment” today, is composed of our habits, intentions and cultural motives in connection with the industry of capitalist culture. The environment can only express exchange values as the *meta* in the sphere of the diffusion of capitalist culture in social interaction.

Even though many environmental philosophers discussed the ethical situations or concerns of the living and/or non-living beings in nature; it seems appropriate to take the discussion from the middle: all-natural beings are ethical subjects and deserve moral consideration. *The Land Ethic* by Leopold along with Callicott’s revisions on the topic encourage us to think that there is a paradigm shift in the way in which we reorganize our moral obligations toward the entire ecological system, i.e., the “biotic community.” Nature as something existing for its own sake is beyond all individual economic interests; because Leopold and Callicott tell us to recognize the history of natural objects as the objects of consciousness (Thorsky 2021, 15). This type of relationship is autonomous and free from economic interests and instrumental values. Natural objects do not depend on human nature. From the 1970s to the current debates in environmental philosophy, the critique of anthropocentrism characterized this asymmetrical dependence of humans upon the more-than-

human world. The difference between the “environment” and the “natural-environment” is that it expresses a description of nature in which culture and society exist, as Guy Debord mentions in *A Sick Planet*:

This society is ruled by an overdeveloped economy which turns everything – even spring water and city air – into economic goods, which is to say that everything has become economic ill – that “complete denial of man” which has now reached its perfect material conclusion (Debord 2004, 88).

Today, “environmental humanism” as an interdisciplinary field of study tries to reconnect those ideas with the “green approaches.” The first assumption has an ontological point of view as the paradigm shifts from *nature* to *environment*, not only as a theme or a notion but also in the anthropocentric practices in the history of our planet. Thus, the anthropocentric point of view through the ages resulted in an environmental crisis. The latter assumption is based on capitalism, in which global over-consumption, demographic growth as overpopulation, the daily life in mega-cities as wild urbanism, the reproduction economy with the varieties of commodities, etc. all result in a new post-balance for “Capitalocene” age. Jason W. Moore prefers to define this term not to stand for capitalism as an economic and social system but rather as a radical totality of signifiers which is situated in the capitalist world and ecology (Moore 2016, 1 – 11). This turn results in normative, prospective and speculative questions concerning the anthropological shift in the Anthropocene. The questions are about the materialization of the Anthropocene, as Wallenhorst mentions. This materialization results in the annihilation of the human adventure, the path to destructive alienation of humanity, and corruption as the mechanism of acceleration for a post-capitalist world (Wallenhorst 2023, 15).

For Kovel, this has shown to all humanity that the ecological crisis is a bigger crisis than individual interventions in the ecosystem. The pathological lifestyle of humankind becomes explicit for all after the circumstantial evidence of climate change as stated by Joel Kovel. The industrial pollution directed by technological rationalism in this era is called “the ecopathology of daily life.” For this reason, ecology policy has to take on an internal revolutionary aspect, not only externally, but internally. Unless this is achieved, the destruction of nature will continue as long as the criticism remains at the level of “sustainability” (Kovel 2005, 9).

Under the heading of “sustainability,” there have been years when global green politics has been institutionalized as a measure of development, and

nature has been handled as a discourse. At this point, we encounter environmental movements: one claiming that nature is the new commodity of organic agriculture and consumption, and another arguing for the need for sustainable and renewable environmental elements. Yet another argues for the right to nature conceptualizations that manifest themselves in the discourse of human rights. The various environmentalisms defending various centrists such as ecocentrism, biocentrism, and anthropocentrism prefer to suggest a polarity between humans and non-humans (Hannis 2016, 43). The notion of climate change and the officially declared planet crisis as the core issue of our century represents the necessity of reconsidering the philosophical conceptualization of risk, future, and sustainability.

## **II. Risks and the Future: The Problem of Sustainability**

It is a fact that, even at the stage of presenting the problem as a problem, environmental philosophers lose a lot of time. Every choice brings with it an ethical responsibility. In this type of relationship, people have exploited nature for centuries without any ethical concerns, preferring a one-sided relationship and choosing to take a position “against” nature and to “dominate” nature. To call nature the environment is to degrade nature. When nature was confined to the definition of environment, it was opened for use again. We should recall the ecosophic perspective defined by Guattari. The awareness of environmentalism is the awareness that all the structural deterioration that witnesses the deterioration of our relationship with nature is integrated and accelerated to destruction like a crazy whipping top (Guattari 1990, 90).

Green politics and all “green” movements in this context are partial, and they are in favor of restoring the regulatory and supervisory authority of the system to the civic authority in an equal, fair and free manner, despite the political pressure of capital for continuous growth, in other words, the policy of imperialism. Especially in the last decades, the “climate change crisis,” the discourse of which has been created in terms of representing the holistic regime of the environmental crisis and ecological thought, has been a result of this aforementioned capital imperialism. The grounding of a risk society, which is against the sustainability of environmental movements, appears in Ulrich Beck: Beck thus broadens our horizon of understanding by directing the sociological imagination to the area where the ethical is rendered dysfunctional (Beck 2011, 19 – 21).

The climate change crisis has shown to all humanity that the ecological crisis is a bigger crisis than individual interventions in the ecosystem. It shows

that man has not only an economic but also a “pathological” way of existing (Kovel 2005, 9). For this reason, ecology policy has to take on a revolutionary aspect, not only externally, but internally. This notion is a result of the current model of civilization, and there is room to transform it into an “ecological civilization,” as Sťahel defines a transformation of understanding “to ensure a dignified life” (Sťahel 2023a, 62). Unless this is achieved, the destruction of nature will continue as long as the criticism remains at the level of “sustainability.”

Certain kinds of environmental issues are reduced to the phenomena of sustainability. The concept of nature as an environment refers here to pollution, consumption, a recycling economy and all the related issues concerning natural resources. This post-environmental scope can be represented through the difference between two concepts, namely, *preservation* and *protection*. In the first long period of environmentalism, the concept of preservation was about keeping nature as nature, conservationist ethics. Ethics for protecting the environment represent a post-environmentalist paradigm. Post-balance theories are radically and heavily about action aimed at stopping extreme policies and pollution of the environment. Political practices are not free from ethical theories. As Sťahel notes “the global environmental crisis threatens the availability of these preconditions, which makes environmental responsibility a fundamental issue in political and legal thinking” (Sťahel 2020, 14). Thus, the ontological understanding beyond all political traditions has already been left by post-truth politics. That also means that there is no epistemology based on scientific methods or testing that is universally applicable and consistent or coherent anymore. This contemporary political systems are therefore “more accurately described as industrial democracies” (Sťahel 2023b, 117). The idea of reduction for the sake of the future of industrial systems results in policies of misinformation and proliferating disinformation among the members of society. In other words, post-truth politics is a kind of temporal policy-making situation that works against the common habits of civil society, while taking the pragmatic and economic benefits into consideration.

### **III. Discussions on Sustainable Human Development in the Anthropocene**

If environmental movements lose their “criticism” then as a result they inadvertently open new ways of legitimating new kinds of consumerism. This new world, where the big picture is lost, is a world where post-balance ecology acts with the motto of providing continuity while consuming. Thus, the loss of

nature is taken for granted, and corruption becomes permanent. Therefore, the ecocriticism of the new world cannot go beyond wishful thinking: “sustainable human development requires not the incorporation of nature into the system of value, but the abolition of commodity value itself” (Foster – Clark 2020, 206).

Today environmental ethical thought has no other choice but to be a political philosophy because global powers and policy-making discourse control daily life as a hegemony of capitalist growth culture:

Ethics focuses on individual actors; it assumes that they can make choices that matter. But these global problems are systemic, and they require a systemic solution. That is, solving these problems requires us to change our political and economic systems, and that requires political action (Smith 2018, 36).

In terms of this paradigm shift, Conferences of the Parties (COP) have been globally organized as the supreme decision-making body of ecological global arrangements. “Sustainability is not sustainable.” This slogan was first declared at the 27<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Sharm-el Sheikh in November 2022. It was an important event that brought governments, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, and other stakeholders together to discuss climate change and its impacts. This was the first distinguished feature of COP27. Secondly, the harm-producing activities were defined in COP27. The new administrative conditions to be checked and legal control of the industrial constitutions are the subject of inspection. The production chain is under the control of carbon footprint criteria, and the firms should balance themselves, auto-control themselves, and check their processes. That means in the various industries and sub-production branches, “new prices” will be added to the outcomes of the corporations. The Ecomodernist idea here is not the right path since the problem with ecomodernism is its aggressiveness. Ecomodernists hold the idea that

the unconditional application of technologies like nuclear energy, geo-engineering, and negative emissions technologies will allow the Earth and its environment to be used and operated in an optimal way (Saito 2024, 113).

The solutions are under the threat of the world economic system, and the world economic system is under the threat of ideal solutions. As a result, the idea of sustainability is still problematic since it is based on the idea of neoliberalism and its accelerating strategy for the sake of reproducing and growing the

economy. Environmentalism cannot be detached from politics anymore. Environmental philosophy has to turn its theoretical roots to justify its fundamentals in terms of political philosophy for the sake of the universal rights of humans *within* nature. In this respect, green politics has to be expanded to all societies and the disadvantaged layers of developing societies in terms of gender equality, democratic rights, and life standards.

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