

Chapter 73

The Loss and Damage of Environmental Ethics in the Threshold of African Culture: Environmental Ethics and African Culture

Essien D. Essien
University of Uyo, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

It has been argued that human actions through pollution and other activities have imperil survival, harm health and dislocate the well-being of man on earth. This argument's corollary is that, given the curious datum that human beings are implicated in loss and damage of the environment, actions performed by individuals have aggregate negative consequences on the environment. Yet, what African culture is and how it matters in environmental ethics is regrettably unexplored and disproportionately contested. This study examines the contributions of culture toward the preservation and protection of the environment for future generation. The study adopts qualitative methodology and content analysis, as well as "relational theory" to respond to the thesis that African culture has a moral responsibility and an in-built mechanism to protect human interactions with nature and environment. The findings show that culture has the capacity to avert loss and damage of the African environment through African ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of all the distinctions that can be made on a theoretical level amongst ethicists and their different value positions in environmental ethics, there seems to be a growing need today in the world to articulate a pragmatic environmental ethics that can guide our actions, decisions and preferences in the individual, social, economic, corporate and public decision-making contexts (Pojman, 2001). This is why in Africa; environmental ethics is part of the larger issue of how to live an ethical life. This clearly manifest in the verity that harm to the natural environment though come in great measure from the collective detrimental actions and practices of the inhabitants constitutes the collective responsibility

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of all. It is against this backdrop that it is proper to state that cultural and geographical contexts shape environmental orientations in all societies, Africa inclusive (Murove, 2004). This also explains why there exist interactions between the people and their environment which are as old as human civilization.

However, the problem of managing those interactions has today been transformed by unprecedented increases in the rate, scale, and complexity of crisis, degradation and other environmental challenges. In spite of this development, African societies, as organized and functioning human communities, have undeniably developed for itself ethical systems such as ethical values, principles, rules and norms intended not only to guide her social and moral behavior but protect her environment (Masaka & Chemhuru, 2010). This clearly depicts the sense in which human beings in Africa value nature as a vital component in the construction of their environmental ethics.

Nonetheless, the problems and crises afflicting the management and preservation of Africa's environment today are primarily the symptoms of the deep-rooted, long-term effects of centuries of neglect and insensitivity (Weberzik & Wilson, 2008). It is apparent that Africans have always been dependent on the natural resources in their environment for their livelihood. That is why about 70% of the people in Africa rely solely on forests for their food, shelter, energy and even medicine. This lends credence to the fact that the character of the environmental changes that today's lifestyle and technological advancement has produced and the increased public awareness of the importance of the natural environment connotes that we have entered a new age of environmental challenges (Omari, 1990). Across the world however, people are beginning to understand that part of what is needed to meet these challenges is the development of a new and more robust environmental ethics. This study therefore provides an overview of some of the environmental issues facing Africa and examines the role of African culture cooperation in meeting these challenges. An environmental performance analysis is used to identify the loss and damage of environmental challenges in Africa, as well as the significance of environment in African ethical life.

Conceptual Clarification

In order to commence an effective conversation on this paper, it is pertinent that we offer some clarification of notions that would facilitate effortless comprehension of the subject matter of our discussion. They include the following: environmental ethics, environment, African environment, deep ecology, and Humanistic ethics.

Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics is a theory and practice about appropriate concern for, values in, and duties to the natural world. In this study, environmental ethics is understood as a research field and academic discipline, which focuses on principles and values regulating human relations towards nature, either as a whole or in its particular forms, the prerequisites and consequences of these relations, and theoretical, normative and practical issues related to them. Environmental ethics is deeply connected to the environmental sciences, on the one hand, and the humanities on the other hand (Guha, 2000). These are important epistemic resources for environmental ethics. Environmental ethicists need to understand environmental problems to be able to provide their ethical analyses. Environmental issues, like global climate change, air pollution, reduction of biodiversity and wilderness, desertification, etc., are practical issues and in so far as they have been produced mostly by un-precautious human activity, they cannot be solved by scientific and technological means only. Humans as individuals and communities should

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