

# Relevance Of Environmental Ethics And The Need Of An Environmental Medicine To Encounter Potential Health Issues

Dipu Basumatary

*PhD Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy  
North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya*

*E-mail Id:dipubasumatary111@gmail.com*

***Abstract: This present paper will mainly focus on the relevance and practical implication of the study of environmental ethics and it will also exhibit how humans must realize the value of the environment and its sustainability and along with that it will also focus on how the potential adverse health effects of environmental factors are generally well recognized by the medical community but not always well understood. In its broadest sense, the environment is at least partially responsible for all diseases except those determined solely by genetics and includes such factors as housing, nutrition, socioeconomic status, and lifestyle. As a branch of ethics, environmental ethics deals with the study of normative issues and principles relating to human interactions with the natural environment. It comprises an increasingly significant field of applied ethics, crucial for the guidance of individuals, corporations and governments in shaping the principles affecting their lifestyles, their actions and their policies across the entire range of environmental issues. It is very easy for all of us to carry out our duties and responsibility properly that may lead to sustainable development which we could hope for a healthy environment for our future generations. Its scope includes the interpretation and application of the precautionary principle, policies of sustainable development, grounds and policies for biodiversity preservation and the nature and basis of obligations to assist adaptation to global warming and to mitigate the anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions widely recognized to constitute one of its principal sources. It is a sole purpose of environmental ethics to make us realize about the indiscriminate and destructive human activities are welcoming threat to our environment.***

***Keywords: Environment, Values, Sustainability, Global warming, Human activity, Bio-diversity***

## **1. INTRODUCTION:**

Environmental ethics is the study of ethical questions raised by human relationships with the nonhuman environment. Environmental ethics emerged as a distinct field of philosophy during the 1970s and its scope has since expanded significantly. Ethical questions are those about what we ought to do and ethical claims are prescriptive rather than descriptive or predictive. The environmental crisis is an outward manifestation of the crisis of mind and spirit. It all depends on how we think and act. The strains of the ecological crisis are so apparent that the task to preserve the environment is a must. Adjusting the relationship between humans and nature is one of the most fundamental issues we face and must deal with today. With the increasing deterioration of ecological systems on which human beings rely and the aggravation of the environmental crisis, human beings have realized that we cannot

rely on economic and judicial methods alone to solve the problems of environmental pollution and ecological imbalances. Only after we have adopted an appropriate attitude towards nature and have established a new ethical relationship between human beings and nature will we can love and respect nature automatically and can deal with the issues of environmental pollution and ecological imbalances. In this context, environmental ethics and its approaches can play a vital role to run our life smoothly and can make a balance between man and other beings in our surrounding environment.

Environmental ethics is the philosophical discipline that considers the moral and ethical relationship of human beings to the environment. In other words, it considers the ethical basis of environmental protection. Its emergence was the result of increased awareness of how the rapidly growing world population was impacting the environment as well as the environmental consequences that come with the growing use of pesticides, technology and industry. It aims to provide ethical justification and moral motivation for the cause of global environmental protection and it also considers the ethical relationship between people and the natural world and the kind of decisions people have to make about the environment. Should we cut down the main forest for the sake of human consumption? Should we knowingly cause the extinction of other species? Should humans be forced to live a simpler lifestyle to protect and preserve the environment? Thus, environmental ethics has no specific international environmental code; it simply tries to answer the questions of how humans should relate to their environment, how we should use the Earth's resources & how we should treat other species etc. An example of a prescriptive claim is as follows, People should reduce the ecological impacts of their lifestyles. This claim could be true, even if lifestyles are currently unsustainable and future change is unlikely. Thus, prescriptive claims are not reducible to either descriptive claims about people's acts and beliefs or predictive claims about possible future events. They are instead normative and aspirational describing the behaviours, practices and character traits for which we ought to strive, even if these are difficult to achieve.

The central to environmental ethics are the tasks of determining what things in the non-human environment are valuable; how and why they are valuable; and how we ought to consider these values in deliberations about principles, actions, practices and laws. The goals and methods of particular environmental policies, ecosystem management strategies and practices of environmental activism among other things can then be assessed in terms of how responsive they are to what is valuable in the environment and how well they embody the principles that those values justify. Many environmental issues e.g., endangered species protection, sustainable resource management, genetically modified crop use, greenhouse gas mitigation, population growth and chemical contamination areas many ethical issues as they are economic or legal issues. Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate the policies and practice regarding them in terms of what is right and good in addition to what is efficient or expedient.

#### **Challenges of Environmental ethics:**

Environmental ethics indulges many challenges which are needed to be addressed properly. Suppose putting out natural fires, culling feral animals or destroying some individual members of overpopulated indigenous species is necessary for the protection of the integrity of a certain ecosystem. Will these actions be morally permissible or even required? Is it morally acceptable for farmers in non-industrial countries to practice slash and burn techniques to clear areas for agriculture? Consider a mining company which has performed open pit mining in some previously unspoiled area. Does the company have a moral obligation to restore the landform and surface ecology? And what is the value of a humanly restored environment compared with the originally natural environment? It is often said to be morally wrong for human beings to pollute and destroy parts of the natural environment and to consume a huge proportion of the planet's natural resources. If that is wrong, is it simply

because a sustainable environment is essential to present and future human well-being? Or is such behaviour also wrong because the natural environment or its various contents have certain values in their own right so that these values ought to be respected and protected in any case? These are among the questions investigated by environmental ethics. Some of them are specific questions faced by individuals in particular circumstances, while others are more global questions faced by groups and communities. Yet others are more abstract questions concerning the value and moral standing of the natural environment and its non-human components.

In the literature, on environmental ethics, the distinction between instrumental value and intrinsic value has been of considerable importance. The former is the value of things as means to further some other ends, whereas the latter is the value of things as ends in themselves regardless of whether they are also useful as means to other ends. For instance, certain fruits have instrumental value for bats who feed on them, since feeding on the fruits is a means to survival for the bats. However, it is not widely agreed that fruits have value as ends in themselves. We can likewise think of a person who teaches others as having instrumental value for those who want to acquire knowledge. Yet, in addition to any such value, it is normally said that a person has intrinsic value i.e., the value in his or her own right independently of his or her prospects for serving the ends of others. For another example, a certain wild plant may have instrumental value because it provides the ingredients for some medicine or as an aesthetic object for human observers. But if the plant also has some value in itself independently of its prospects for furthering some other ends such as human health, or the pleasure from the aesthetic experience, then the plant also has intrinsic value. Because the intrinsically valuable is that which is good as an end in itself, it is commonly agreed that something's possession of intrinsic value generates a *prima facie* direct moral duty on the part of moral agents to protect it or at least refrain from damaging it.

Many traditional western ethical perspectives, however, are anthropocentric or human-centred in that either they assign intrinsic value to human beings alone i.e., what we might call anthropocentric in a strong sense or they assign a significantly greater amount of intrinsic value to human beings than to any non-human things such that the protection or promotion of human interests or well-being at the expense of non-human things turns out to be nearly always justified i.e., what we might call anthropocentric in a weak sense. For when environmental ethics emerged as a new sub-discipline of philosophy in the early 1970s, it did so by posing a challenge to traditional anthropocentrism. In the first place, it questioned the assumed moral superiority of human beings to members of other species on earth. In the second place, it investigated the possibility of rational arguments for assigning intrinsic value to the natural environment and its non-human contents. It should be noted, however, that some theorists working in the field see no need to develop new, non-anthropocentric theories. Instead, they advocate what may be called enlightened anthropocentrism. Briefly, this is the view that all the moral duties we have towards the environment are derived from our direct duties to its human inhabitants.

The practical purpose of environmental ethics is to provide moral grounds for social policies aimed at protecting the earth's environment and remedying environmental degradation. Enlightened anthropocentrism is sufficient for that practical purpose and perhaps even more effective in delivering pragmatic outcomes in terms of policy-making than non-anthropocentric theories given the theoretical burden on the latter to provide sound arguments for its more radical view that the non-human environment has intrinsic value. Furthermore, some prudential anthropocentrism may hold what might be called cynical anthropocentrism, which says that we have a higher-level anthropocentric reason to be non-anthropocentric in our day to day thinking. Suppose that a day to day non-anthropocentrism tends to act more benignly towards the non-human environment on which human well-being depends. This

would provide a reason for encouraging non-anthropocentric thinking, even to those who find the idea of non-anthropocentric intrinsic value hard to swallow. For such a strategy to be effective one may need to hide one's cynical anthropocentrism from others and even from oneself.

#### **Scope of environmental medicine:**

The potential adverse health effects of environmental factors are generally well recognized by the medical community but not always well understood. In its broadest sense, the environment is at least partially responsible for all diseases except those determined solely by genetics, and includes such factors as housing, nutrition, socioeconomic status, and life-style. For the purposes of this report, however, the Committee on Curriculum Development in Environmental Medicine defines "environment" and "environmental medicine" more narrowly and in concert with the definitions in the 1988 Institute of Medicine (IOM) report *Role of the Primary Care Physician in Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. That is, the committee's use of the term environmental medicine refers to diagnosing and caring for people exposed to chemical and physical hazards in their homes, communities, and workplaces through such media as contaminated soil, water, and air. This definition excludes diseases caused by tobacco use, alcohol, diet, or other life-style factors as well as conditions that are a direct consequence of genetics, violence, and iatrogenically caused illness or injury. As stated in the 1988 report, this definition is not meant to diminish the importance of these factors in disease, but to reflect a concern and strong belief that non-life-style environmental factors are equally deserving of study and attention; in this view, when taking a history or formulating a diagnosis, physicians should consider non-life-style environmental factors, such as workplace, home, and community exposures, as well as the "traditional" environmental factors such as alcohol and nicotine. Occupational exposures are some of the most important environmental exposures, and many of the concepts and principles of occupational medicine are directly relevant and applicable to environmental medicine. Like occupational medicine, which is limited to the workplace environment, environmental medicine is prevention oriented. In essentially all cases, environmentally induced illness and injury are preventable, largely through nonmedical risk management interventions, such as engineering design, product substitution, and education. Thus, many of the most effective prevention activities of environmental medicine occur outside the traditional clinical paradigm. However, many of the interventions flow directly from an individual physician-patient encounter that identifies a health problem or risk attributable to specific environmental factors or conditions. The clinical encounter provides a unique opportunity for the clinician to practice prevention-oriented primary care. Moreover, a single diagnosed case of environmental or occupational illness often serves as a sentinel, alerting the public health community that prevention has failed, that other members of the population may be at risk, and that intervention is needed.

#### **The need for environmental medicine: creating concern about possible health effects:**

The recent pandemic situation which has created havoc and mortality destruction amongst the masses of the world has surely raised a doubt about the effectiveness and potentiality of the medicine world and how are they supposed to deal with the potential health issues which might arise due to the environmental damage. The above examples are typical of the complex questions and situations associated with environmental factors increasingly encountered by physicians, who, in the course of their clinical training, may have had little preparation for dealing with them. Unaware of this potential shortcoming and faced with growing concerns about the potential health effects of environmental damage and contamination, people seek help from their physicians because, in general, they trust them and value their advice. To respond appropriately, physicians need to be clinically competent in environmental medicine and dissuaded from the all too common practice of reflexively offering blanket reassurance to

patients who feel they have been exposed to, or harmed by, an environmental toxicant. The environment, including the work environment, is a critical factor for both health and disease. There is clear evidence that the health effects of environmental agents and environmental degradation are serious, whether they are direct, such as the effects of lead exposure on infant and child development or indirect, such as the effects of climatic changes on vector distribution and ecosystem damage resulting in outbreaks of infectious disease. Although the precise impact of environmental illness and injury is virtually impossible to compute—partly because adequate surveillance mechanisms do not exist and partly because the environmentally related disease often goes unrecognized as such—there is enough undisputed evidence of the relationship between environmental exposure and disease to justify moving from concern to action. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 3 million preschool children in the United States have blood lead levels greater than 10  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$ , a level associated with neurotoxic effects (Centers for Disease Control, 1991). The prevalence of asthma, especially among children (Larsen, 1992; National Center for Health Statistics, 1989), and of waterborne diseases from chemical contamination is increasing (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991).

There is growing concern that a substantial fraction of cases of cancer and a variety of adverse reproductive outcomes may be associated with environmental agents (Landrigan, 1993; Paul, 1993). Similarly, there is also growing concern about the possible relationship between pesticides and breast cancer (Wolff et al., 1993). Also, illness and injury related to occupational exposures and conditions continue to take their toll on the U.S. workforce, with 6.3 million job-related illnesses and injuries reported by the private sector in 1991 alone (U.S. Department of Labor, 1993). Despite the association between environmental contaminants and adverse health effects, the use, release, and disposal of potentially toxic chemicals into the environment continues. In 1991, the U.S. industry reported the release of 3.39 billion pounds of potentially toxic chemicals into the air, water, and soil (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], 1993). Also in 1991, more than 31,000 sites had been reported to the EPA as potentially in need of cleanup; 1,189 of these were designated as hazardous waste (Superfund) sites. In addition to these specific examples of the important relationship between the environment and health, there are other reasons why primary care physicians need to understand the basic concepts of environmental medicine. First, the increased use of right-to-know laws in the context of the workplace, the community, and in the labeling of consumer products means that the public will have more information about chemical threats. The increased availability of information will make it more likely that patients will appear in their physicians' offices seeking advice about the possible relationship of these chemicals to their current symptoms or their potential for future adverse effects. Second, recent advances in molecular biology suggest that medical science will soon be able to tease out the role of genetic factors in common diseases. If genetic factors cannot be identified or are found to provide a less than full or satisfactory explanation about why individuals contract a particular disease, the need to focus on environmental factors will grow. These same advances in biology pose every likelihood of providing direct insights into the relationship between environmental factors and common diseases. Finally, physicians' skills and knowledge must be adequate not only for treating their patients but also for explaining their actions in public health, legal, and regulatory arenas, if necessary. The magnitude of the production, use, release, and disposal of known and suspected toxic agents gives some urgency to the need for physician participation in these contexts.

## 2. CONCLUSION:

Thus, given the widespread distribution of environmental hazards and their potential effect on the health of individuals and populations, one can expect only increasing demand for information, services, and treatments from medical professionals in the future. By taking an active role in educating and preparing their students in environmental medicine today, medical schools can demonstrate leadership in caring for people adversely affected by or concerned about environmental agents. Ecological consciousness safeguard against cruelty to all creatures. Rather it involves a safe and sustainable temperament to live happily with nature. Due to the lack of ecological consciousness, we pollute our environment. Finally, it can be opined that the importance of environmental ethics in present-day society is indispensable. In so far as we are living in harmony with nature, so apart from a viable environment, we cannot think of human life possible in this eco-centric universe. To make a viable environment we have to comprehend the distinction between ecological balance and ecological imbalance. Thus, so far as environmental ethics is concerned, ecological consciousness leads to the welfare of all in our environment and nature.

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