Innovations

Establishing Virtue Ethics as an Alternative Theory to Consequentialism and Deontology for Addressing Environmental Problems

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Abstract:

Environmental Problem is globally witnessed in the twenty-first century. These environmental problems are deforestation, acid rain, ozone layer depletion, loss of biodiversity, climate change, pollution of air, water, and soil, which require urgent attention. The reason behind these environmental problems is: (a) urbanization, (b) modernization, (c) industrialization (d) population growth, (e) poverty, and more importantly (f) the growing materialistic needs of humans, their unethical practices and immoral conduct. Humans are the most powerful beings on the earth and they have misused their physical and mental power to satisfy their greed rather than need which gave them mastery over nature and consequently destroyed it. The effect of these destruction is not only limited to humans, but it is also effecting the other beings of this planet. Only science is not sufficient to provide the solution to these environmental problems, hence we must have to emphasize on the need of ethics. Ethics teaches us which actions are good or bad, right or wrong for human being. Therefore, this present would focus on virtue ethics for addressing the environmental problems instead of other ethical theories such as consequentialism and deontology because presently instead of focussing either on the consequences of an action or the duties and responsibilities of an individual, there is a need to inculcate good virtues among the humans for building a good character so that they can act morally and take moral decisions towards environmental problems.

Keywords: 1.Consequentialism, 2.Deontology, 3.Duties, 4.Environmental Problems, 5.Immoral Conduct, 6.Moral Decisions, 7.Virtue

Introduction

From oil falls in the Gulf War to nuclear disasters; from the destruction of tropical rainforests to polar ozone holes; from pesticides in food to water toxins, the planet earth and its entire existing life are facing difficulties and human activities have been observed globally responsible for environmental change. In spite of the fact, environment provides the resources which are required for the continuity of life as it supplies them with food, energy, and manure for agricultural uses, various flora, and fauna for medicinal requirements and plant's products for construction purposes. Environment performs these functions without any hindrance as long as these are within its carrying capacity, i.e., resource extraction does not exceed nature's capacity of resource regeneration, and waste generation does not exceed nature's capacity of waste assimilation. Therefore, the human should maintain a harmonious connection with the

natural system as it fulfils their requirements and provides them nourishment through fulfilling their necessities which are necessarily required by them for their day-to-day life. In the 16th century, with the advent of the scientific revolution, the perception of humanity towards nature started changing gradually. The scientific revolution led one to think empirically, which upholds the notion of performing experiments and observations to explain different theories in the universe. Humans implemented these experimental ways of thinking for understanding nature but it resulted in its devastation.

In order to provide solutions to environmental problems, this paper suggests that there is a need to accentuate on virtue ethics which mainly focuses on an individual's character building instead of consequentialism and deontology ethics which are consequences and duty based ethics.

Importance of Environment for Human Existence

The environment has a crucial role in human existence because it provides resources that are essentially required for every individual to fulfil the basic sustenance of their life. Humans consume the resources of the environment for their living; they cultivate and harvest, clear the land for human habitation, make roads, use minerals, and dredge rivers for transport. Not only this, but the environment also provides the resources required for the continuity of life and assimilates the wastes produced by us. It performs these functions without any hindrance as long as these are within its carrying capacity, i.e., resource extraction does not exceed nature's capacity of resource regeneration and waste generation does not exceed nature's capacity of waste assimilation. When resource extraction gets exceeded the nature's carrying capacity, it fails to perform its third and most vital function of life sustenance and this ultimately subject to environmental problems (NCERT, 2005) which directly impacts the health of human beings and risks the life chances of individuals as well as the productivity of agriculture, forests, and fisheries. The depletion of natural resources like the fishery stocks, mineral reserves, and drinkable water, have served to highlight the environmental problem in an immediate way both to the general public and to the policymakers. Thus, the environmental problems has become one of the main problem that people are facing today and it became the source of human sorrow as their life, health, and economic productivity is dependent upon the natural and ecological systems in which they live. An environmental problem does not only hampers human lives, livelihoods, safety and happiness but the entire human existence

Human's Attitude towards Nature

"By destroying nature, environment, man is committing a kind of matricide, having in a way killed 'Mother Earth'. Technological excellence, growth of industries, economical gains has led to depletion of natural resources irreversibly. Indifference to the grave consequences, lack of concern and foresight has contributed in large measures to the alarming position.

(Dutta and Yadav, 2005)

Urbanization, modernization, industrialization, population growth, poverty, and the economic activities of human beings are in direct connection to the increasing destruction of the natural system, which has become a challenge for both current and future generations. The accentuation on industrial manufacturing by worldwide demographic reproduction has stressed the ability of nature to reproduce life. Pollution generation which resulted in increasing global temperatures, degraded soils, land, water, forest, and air; depletion of natural resources and poverty are interconnected in a systematic manner that was not experienced by humans on earth before. Population explosion after World War II, perhaps brought most striking change as human "population doubled in just 50 years, to over 6 billion by the end of the 20th century, but the global economy increased by more than 15-fold" (Steffen, Crutzen, & McNeil, 2007). This acceleration in the human population had drastic impacts, from the danger of emerging climate change to the beginning of the sixth major event of Earth's extinction (Gardiner & Thompson, 2016). Each of these menaces is significant because it is impossible for humans and animals to survive without a healthy environment.

Moreover, it is a human activity that is represented as a significant cause of worldwide destruction and systematic change in the environment. Human civilizations for the survival of their increasing population

are exclusively dependent on natural resources because it supplies them with food, energy, and manure for agricultural uses, various flora, and fauna for medicinal requirements and plant's products for construction reasons. This demonstrates that human's overemphasis on natural assets brought deterioration of the biotic communities and terrestrial environment. In this sense, human effects were therefore likely to be comparatively restricted because humanity "is a part of nature - not essential for nature" (Shastri, 2008). Thus, human should maintain a harmonious connection with the natural system because it fulfils their requirement and provides them nourishment through fulfilling their basic necessities which are necessarily required by them for their day-to-day survival. Again, human's impact on nature should be illustrated through an event which occurred during the Pleistocene and Holocene period around 12,000 years ago (Shastri, 2008). The late Pleistocene extinction i.e. the death of the woolly mammoths that occurred was a global mega fauna extinction phenomenon, particularly noticeable in North America. The reason behind it was hypothesized by Palaeontologists as follows: major trophic cascades, climate change, and human predation (Sandom, Faurby, Sandel & Svenning, 2014). Another one more acquainted instance is related to the 'agricultural revolution'. This revolution was first started in Mesopotamia about 10,000 BC (Curtin, 1984) and from there it spread throughout the Middle East, some parts of Africa, Asia and ultimately to America. With the advent of new methods for food cultivation, encompassing farming and animal domestication, people get involved in the wholesale modification of landscapes and ecosystems for human reasons (Kathleen Lyons, S., et al. 2016). For example, DDT is used in farming for killing pests, but it has a severe effect on human health.

Again, the 'industrial revolution' era arrived in England in the late 1700s and in the United States in late 1800s. It brought transition, instead of relying on producing goods by hand; manufacturing has been started by machine which is run by the use of coal, fossil fuels such as oil and gas. Industrial Revolution's success is numerous such as growth in economy, imposing collection of goods and services, an improved way of living a life and many others. The progress made throughout this time were not without severe impacts on the environment, a number of this risk everyone long-term future.

Thus, it can be said that human actions are globally responsible for environmental change. Previously, the planet earth was rich in resources and requirements of people were less. With time, humankind's ever increasing requirement and their greed had created widespread destruction as Mahatma Gandhi says, "there are enough world resources for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed" (Cho, 2004). Only in search of pleasure and to fulfil the growing materialist need, they destroy the forests, dug into the earth, and kill all kinds of animals for food. Humans are the only predator killing a species' young adults, damaging the latter's reproductive assets. The greed of humanity resulted to the near depletion of the environment that will take millions of years to form. Conclusively, it can be said that "the earth is slowing dying, the end of life is actually becoming conceivable. We human beings have become a threat to our planet" (Nhanenge, 2011). This reflects that humans are endangering the planet earth. Humans are ignoring to take care of the Mother Nature and are forgetting their dependence on it. Hence, there is a need to bring changes in human activities for protecting the 'Mother Nature'. For example, it has been noticed that in March, 2020 the ozone layer of the earth has healed itself (WION, 2020). This is mainly because of COVID-19 pandemic the lockdown procedures have been adopted globally which has reduced industrial as well as human activities and it ultimately brought a good impact on the environment by healing the ozone layer of the earth.

Existing Environmental Problems cannot be resolved by Science Alone
Our society seems to have profound faith in science as the ultimate authority on questions of knowledge and truth and this idea is so universal and unquestioned that this really takes on a new dimension of cultural myth. Our beliefs according to this myth of scientific objectivity are considered simply as an opinion which is prejudiced, arbitrary, subjective and personal. Moreover, the rapid acceleration in science through various inventions and discoveries has brought advancement in technology and industrialization. Though it provided different conveniences to the humanity, but it too provided them freedom for exploiting the resources of nature without taking environmental concern into account. For instance: The Bhopal Gas Disaster of 23rd December 1984, occurred in Bhopal, India where ethyl

isocyanate (MIC) got leaked from the Union Carbide Corporation causing death of more than 4,000 people, disabling 5 lakh and imposing danger to several plants and animals (Mishra, Pradyumna K., et al., 2009). This incident is considered as one of the world's greatest industrial tragedy, indicating an unplanned and unregulated industrialization which threatens human beings. Another instance is atomic waste. It also contributes great menace to plants and animals as well as to the humans. The tanneries in the state of Uttar Pradesh in India are contaminating the Ganga's holy water, the humans and other living creatures of the metropolis like Kolkata and Delhi are getting choked because of air pollution. Even the white marbles of the historic monument Taj Mahal is becoming yellowish due to pollution. All these examples illustrates that Science instead of solving environmental challenges, has created more problems which affected both humans and the environment. Moreover, the arrival of scientific revolution brought different perceptions in humans. They started to think scientifically to explain principles of the universe. Humans implemented these scientific ways of thinking to understand nature, but it resulted in its destruction. In addition, it was noted that relying on scientific manner of thinking was quite tough for a better understanding of environmental problems because "technological or scientific solutions have often resulted in as many new problems as they have solved" (Jardins, 2001). For example 'Green Revolution' in Punjab demonstrates it better. It is because the intensive utilization of synthetic fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides infected crop, soil and had negative impact on environment, despite bringing crop abundance. Hence, it is argued that environmental problems are not scientific, but it is an ethical problem.

Environmental Problems is an Ethical Issue
Ethics think deeply about human's behaviour when engaging with other individuals, interconnecting with nature, satisfying social and moral duties, and giving justification for an individual's actions and behaviours. Thus, regarding environmental concern, ethics is more important as it entails us to rethink our attitude, behaviour, and action towards the environmental problems suggesting that there is a need to bring certain changes in humans' action while utilizing natural resources to save unavoidable destruction of the environment.

Ethics is a subdivision of philosophy, also known as moral philosophy. It is derived from the Greek word "ethos", meaning "way of living" (Thakur, 2014) and it belongs to human conduct, specifically an individual's behaviour within society. Moreover, ethics examines and inquires about the moral judgements through rational justification. It investigates moral rightness or wrongness and everyone act whether it is justifiable or unjustifiable. There are three branches of ethics: 1) Meta-ethics, 2) Normative Ethics and 3) Applied Ethics. 1) Meta-ethics: It mainly put emphasis in interpreting ethical terms such as right, wrong, good, bad, moral and immoral instead of applied questions: 'what one should do in a specific situation?'. Therefore, meta-ethics concerns regarding the nature of ethical properties, statements, conducts and decisions. Moreover, it involves topics such as the meaning of moral questions and the basis on which people will decide what is "true" or "false". 2) Normative Ethics: In comparison to meta-ethics, normative ethics analyses ethical actions. So, broadly it clearly focuses on questions such as 'what's the right thing to do?'. It concerns about the questions what people should do and how they can decide about the 'right' moral actions to take. 3) Applied Ethics: It concerns in examining and solving the practical moral issues, particularly in the areas of business or corporate, environment, law, politics, medicine and others. Furthermore, the normative ethics is subdivided into three kinds: consequentialism, deontology and virtue. Consequentialism upholds the opinion that the normative properties are dependent solely on consequences, which means it permits such action which provides benefits to the maximum number of people. Deontology accentuates the idea of acting on principle and it is the intent behind an action which needs to be given prime significance. Virtue ethics mainly concerned towards the moral character of human beings for assessing an action's moral status.

Application of Consequentialism and Deontology to Address Environmental Problems
1) **Consequentialism**: Consequentialism incorporates the fundamental intuition that what makes the world best in the future is right or optimal because it is not possible for us to change our past; therefore it's not beneficial to think about the past. This approach of consequentialism has been applied towards

numerous normative properties of various types of things; however the most leading instance is perhaps consequentialism regarding the moral rightness of an action, which maintains that whether an action is morally right or wrong depends on the consequences of that action or anything relevant to that action, like the motivation behind an action or a general law necessitating actions of the similar type. Moreover, consequentialists aim to achieve the best possible results through one's actions and practices. In this context, what one would take as the "best results" depends on which action is regarded as good or bad, right or wrong, and indifferent.

The most well-known type of consequentialism is utilitarianism. It upholds the opinion that only pleasure or even more specifically the fulfilment of one's desire or their interest has intrinsic value and subsequently an action that should create more pleasure rather than pain is morally right. Now the question arises, one should keep concern regarding whose pleasure and pain. The answer in a line is, 'everyone who can be affected by the action' (Hospers, 2013). There are two versions of utilitarianism: hedonistic utilitarianism and preference utilitarianism.

For hedonistic utilitarianism - the feeling of pleasure and pain matters morally and it considers "pleasure" as good which should be maximized and "pain" as bad which should be minimized. Then, the objective of an action is to cause the utmost quantity of anticipated pleasure rather than pain constituting the "best result" (Palmer, 2013). In contrarily, preference utilitarianism emphasizes only on good which is happiness, resulting when one's desires being satisfied. Through this vision, people should become happy when they attain everything whatever they need and when they are fulfilled with their desires. Additionally in preference utilitarianism "good" and "bad" are viewed as "satisfied preferences" and "frustrated preferences" respectively, which reflect that a world would become ethically best if the people would be able to satisfy their desires more as per their requirements.

Utilitarianism upholds an anthropocentric approach because it carries intrinsic value solely for human's interests. However, the supporters of utilitarianism such as Jeremy Bentham and Peter Singer have made efforts for raising utilitarianism above its anthropocentric boundaries. Both Jeremy Bentham (1789) and Peter Singer (2011) argued that while evaluating the moral standing of an action the interests of every sentiment beings including non-human beings must be taken into consideration because taking into account the interests of humans alone is an 'speciesism' act that is morally reprehensible similar to an acts of 'sexism', 'racism', etc. Consequently, non-anthropocentric utilitarianism emerged in a broader reach than conventional anthropocentric utilitarianism. An environmentalist ascribes intrinsic value towards the natural world, while for utilitarian the experience of happiness or the satisfaction of interests is of intrinsic value. Even after utilitarianism reformation, it has conflict with environmentalists as utilitarian keep beings such as ecosystems, plants, species and so on completely out of the domain of ethics as they do not have the experience of happiness or the satisfaction of interests (Sagoff, 2017). Not only this, they also justify the unwarranted suffering of non-human beings on the basis that they generates greater happiness to humans. Occasionally, it is said about utilitarianism that it is individualistic when compared with holistic environmental ethics which do not repudiate individuals, however it insists ones obligations towards species, nature, ecosystems, etc. superseding individuals' interests or obligations (Callicott, 1980). Furthermore, Norton claimed regarding environmental ethics that it should be fundamentally non-individualistic. Yet, the proponents of utilitarianism does not embarrassed of being incapable for incorporating intrinsic value to non-sentient being in its approach, and to be individualistic instead of holistic. Hence, it has been argued that instead of vice it is virtue, in order to protect the environment. Refusing intrinsic value towards non-sentient entities does not suggest that they are not valued by the utilitarians. In actuality, for policy-makers to protect and value nature for humanity sake is more sensible than the appeal of environmentalists towards the rights of ecosystems, trees, etc. for directing moral concern. In fact, it is really very difficult to prove the existence of intrinsic value as well as its recognizable in non-sentient beings similar to sentient beings. For Callicott his holistic ethics are preferable than individualistic utilitarian ethics, as the latter one would not allow to cull an individual deer although it is necessary to protect the ecosystem. Nevertheless, utilitarianism does not preclude such kind of action even if it improves the well-being of sentient beings population, under the condition that such an action would be undertaken by providing minimum suffering for the person. This

situation illustrates a virtue of utilitarianism which the ethics of Callicott cannot offer. Therefore, it may be seen that the arguments towards utilitarianism derive from a shallow view of the utilitarianism theory.

2) **Deontology**: Humans have moral duties such as faithfulness, truthfulness, promise-keeping and so on, whose performance has been regarded intrinsically good. Further, deontologists rely on the intrinsic worth of lives which it applied in order to justify moral obligation. Nevertheless, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was the first to formulate the theory of deontology which has been acknowledged popularly as Kantianism, having the essence of anthropocentrism. Immanuel Kant accepted that as we are incapable of controlling the consequence of our actions, so the morality of an action should be judged on the basis of an actor's intent or motive instead of consequences or outcomes. Furthermore, as per Kant, morality is placed on reason and does not rest in conscience, tradition, intuition, attitudes or emotions (Kant, 1963). Therefore, humans are the only rational actors with their distinctive abilities of free will and reason.

In every circumstance of environment ethics, deontology theory seems to be appropriate. This depends on the criterion to determine if an individual deserve moral regard. It is important to fix the criteria in such a way that non-humans also come into the domain of morality. According to Tom Regan (2004): if an individual has moral status, then it must have right too to remain alive and one should not encroach on the rights of a being, though it would cause the best overall results. Keeping this view into consideration, the practices like eating of the meat and experimenting with animals must be put an end as they infringe the rights of animals. This demonstrates that Tom Reagan includes even animals into morality scope by putting forward the argument that the criteria to deserve moral consideration are being 'the subject-of-a-life' that is being who ever have desires, perceptions, motives, beliefs, memories and so on (Reagan, 1983, 243). The approaches of deontology are just not limited towards the views centered on sentience. The influential bio-centric ethicists, Paul Taylor, has widened the scope by encompassing every living entities of nature such as plants, bacteria or animals, who are 'teleological-centers-of-life and they have their own wellbeing and good which could be either improved or harmed (Taylor, 1981). Certain theories view biosphere in its entirety (Callicott, 1980). Due to its ontological existence (Katz, 1997), each natural system while forming the composite ecosystem (Fox, 2006), is the locus of intrinsic worth. The opinions of deontology might also be holistic; for example, we must have duties towards the different species of the world that is why one should not make a specie to extinction, even if it would encourage the survival of another five species.Moreover, Immanuel Kant's theory of Deontology is duty-based where people are expected to obey such moral values which emerge in them by motives that direct one towards what to do or not to do. It suggests that this theory focuses on the individual's duty and rules. It also firmly accepts universal principles like "we should always speak the truth" as a criterion for evaluating good and bad behaviour. For example, the Kant's *Categorical Imperative* that has been put forward is a basic ethical obligation according to which one should "act only in those ways that all rational beings would find acceptable" (Jardins, 2001). It is the supposition of Kant that he could express the basic ethical obligation in different manners. The Kant's *Categorical Imperative* too necessitates that human beings should treat non-humans never merely as means but as ends. Human are ethically obliged for treating non-humans as an independent or free beings. Non-humans should never be treated by humans merely as an entity and it should not be exploited for our sake. Humans as rational beings are morally obligated for respecting nature as they have their own purpose and intentions. Therefore, Kant's *Categorical Imperative* established the basic ethical obligations of humans that they should treat non-humans never as an objects or means but as an end. Similar to humans, non-humans also have the right and so that they must never be treated as a means but as an end. Non-humans must have the right that they should be treated as a rational and an autonomous being as they have their own purpose and aim. So far non-humans do not use others to meet their ends; they have the right for pursing their target. Depending on these considerations, this ethical practice placed prime significance on the duty in order to provide fair care and respect to non-humans as well. It too offers the autonomy and equality rights for them.From the above mentioned paragraph it has been elucidated that both the consequentialism and deontology theory tries to provide solution towards environmental problems in their own way, but seems to be insufficient because both of these theories are based on the concept of right and it provides priority to abstract reasoning, emotional

detachment, separateness, rationality, objectivity and universality. Therefore, this thesis suggests for addressing the environmental problems, there is a need to emphasise on eco-feministic perspectives because:

Establishing Virtue Ethics to Address Environmental Problems
Virtue ethics mainly concerned towards the moral character of human beings for assessing an action's moral status instead of focusing on consequences and motives as consequentialists and deontology theory advocate. This theory predominantly involves human virtues such as honesty, kindness, sincerity and so on. The historical background of virtue ethics are marked in ancient Greek philosophy (Aristotle, Socrates, and the Stoics) and Indian philosophy (Buddhism). The fundamental question of virtue ethics is 'how to live a happy life'. The main constituent of the recipe for living a prosperous or flourishing life was 'wisdom' or 'knowledge' for Socrates and Plato; whereas it was 'virtuously living' for Aristotle. St. Thomas Aquinas, the Christian theologian, added the 'theological virtues' of faith, charity and hope to the list. One modern advocates of the theory is G.E.M. Anscombe (1958) who advocated that moral philosophy should be reconstructed with virtue as point of reference. Rosalind Hursthouse (1999), consider an action to be morally right if it is what a virtuous will do in the same condition. Since virtue ethics accentuates on the person's character traits and on the moral character development above and beyond cognition, reasoning and utility then it tends to seem interconnected to science, particularly psychology which studied nature of human. Anscombe, (1958) in fact, made clear that moral philosophy must be put to the side until an adequate psychological philosophy exists. Virtue ethics keep asking how one ought to live, what kind of human beings one ought to be, what type of "good person" one should be and how one should be able to become such a person. Moreover, virtues are known to be as character traits or dispositions that are necessarily wanted to have by each individual. Therefore, in an environmental sense, what are in support are not so much the *norms of actions* as *norms of character* (Sandler & Cafaro, 2013). This reflects that virtue ethics concerns about one's attitudes and character in context of environment. Evidently, it gives rise to a very dissimilar moral philosophical approach for that which is either result-based (as consequentialism) or follows rule (as deontology). This is the reason; environmental virtue ethics is obviously keeping less concern regarding the policies and legislation of the environment. However, it is argued by virtue ethics that character seems to be the right place for one's main focus on ethics. Our actions for the environment depend on our character. If greediness, selfishness, short-sightedness, ungratefulness and callousness are witnessed in the behaviour and action of an individual towards humans, non-humans and animals, then one should not be astonished that it will result in environmental problems. As Sandler and Cafaro make the argument: "How one interacts with the environment is largely determined by one's disposition towards it, and it seems to many that the enabling cause of reckless environmental exploitation is the attitude that nature is a boundless resource for satisfying human wants and need" (Sandler and Cafaro, 2013). Thus, virtue ethics is indeed an ethical approach that finds root cause of the environmental problems by questioning the type of people one is and the type of character possessed by them. An article has been published by Thomas Hill Jr. in 1983 with a thought showing the relevance of virtue ethics in environmental ethics. He requested us to look at the following mentioned situation. A rich eco-centric purchased the wonderful house enclosed with plantations and primordial plants. Yet, the eco-centric is less worried with natural beauty; instead he desire to be sure about its safety. He cleared the beautiful grounds through cutting the plants, and lights and video monitors are installed in their place. By such actions, most of us would get repelled. But what's wrong about it? The objectives here is not the violation of rights, he has actually helped himself and has not put any harm to anyone else. The key complaint will be against the person's character which is best explained by the phrase 'what kind of a person would do such thing' (Hill Jr, 1983)? Therefore, virtue ethics is relevant for discussing the environmental problems.

Conclusion
This present paper has explored that humans are globally responsible for the present environmental changes and so there is a need to accentuate ethical theories like consequentialism, deontology and virtue

ethics for addressing the environmental problems. However, by the analysis of both consequentialism and deontology, it has been observed that both of these theories are either result-based or follow rules. That is why this present paper highlighted virtue ethics as it supports norms of character. In the present scenario it has been anticipated that in the context of environmental problems an individual's attitude and their character plays a significant role because if an individual would become selfish, short-sighted, ungrateful, and unsympathetic towards non-humans and humans then definitely it would result in environmental problems. Hence, it has been argued that a focus should be given for an individual's character building so that one must act morally and wisely while using the resources of nature and should be able to control the present environmental changes.

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