Nature-Environment Consciousness and Education in Terms of Moral Philosophy*

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ABSTRACT

One of the most controversial issues in the world of thought is the relationship between man and nature. Considering the education of values, human being, as part of nature, has a great importance in this respect in terms of perception of nature and environment. Some of the environmental problems have come out as a result of bad feelings that depart from the ethical, such as greed, jealousy, dissatisfaction, indifference, irresponsibility and laziness. With the development of technology, problems have increased even more day by day. Although scientific, social, religious, moral, artistic, political and legal studies have been carried out, prompted by environmental and nature consciousness, the desired results have not been obtained completely. In fact, the development of moral elements such as conscience, self-sacrifice, and justice related to environmental education is started first in the family. The next phase takes place either by original or by non-formal education, and perceptions, truths, and mistakes are formed in these settings. But in this process, applicability, continuity and volunteering are essential. The moral principles emphasized in İslam, such as blessings, beliefs, entrustments, power of attorney, meaning of creation and existence, unity, mutual communication, balance, compassion, love, servitude, holiness, which are expressed in relation to environment, have important functions in regard to understanding and solving the issue. In this study, human and nature relations will be given in the direction of these principles and it will be evaluated in terms of existence, knowledge and morality.

Keywords: **Nature, human, environment, morality, education**

I. INTRODUCTION

Morality is a phenomenon that is actually and historically lived at individual, group, or social levels. Ethics is the name of the discipline of philosophy that discusses this phenomenon, examines and classifies moral ideas and teachings, reveals and criticizes the similarities and differences between them (Özlem, 2010: 28). Therefore, ethics also means moral philosophy. There are many areas in which ethics or moral philosophy is concerned. One of the most popular areas of discussion today is environmental ethics. Environmental ethics has emerged due to an increasing degradation and deterioration of Nature as a result of human behaviors. In general, environmental ethics is a systematic study of the moral relations between people and their natural environment (Jardins, 2006: 46). Researchers who search for the causes of morality have often resorted to three sources: God, universe and man. These foundations also include theological, cosmological, and anthropological problems (Özlem, 2010: 29-34). There have been similar groupings in environmental ethics.

Actually man's interest in Nature and environment is not a recent development. Since the ancient times, it can be said that there are opinions about harmony in human-nature relations. In this adventure, scientists have followed a different attitude about Nature from time to time. For example, for ancient philosophers, the source of essence was Nature. Later, Aristotle developed a systematic nature philosophy. Stoa philosophy was to live by complying with the nature. According to this point of view, the universe is a macrocosmos and the human is a microcosmos. The holy books also contained parts directed towards Nature. Although the interest in Nature decreased in the Middle Ages, the focus was back on Nature in the Renaissance. In this period, the aim was to dominate nature. Francis Bacon's statement "knowing is to be dominant" happened to be the aim of this period. His other expression, "anyone who wants to dominate nature has to know its laws and principles," resulted in more improved nature research. As a result, thinking that the same forces exist in the whole universe also exist

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in human, has brought the concepts of human and nature together (Gökberk, 1990: 221-222, 241).

However, as time passed, the human being, who tried to be the owner of the nature, began to consume nature unconsciously. Thus, unity and integrity between the human and the nature have been radically shaken by industrialization. As an expected result of this, human domination over Nature replaced the unity and the integrity (Yıldırım, 2016: 17). Fuelled by the instinct of the modern human to rule Nature, materialistic understanding of the nature dragged the environment into a growing degeneration with ambition and greed. Thus, man experienced a spiritual fatigue not only for economic purposes, but also for his passion for capturing Nature (Nasr, 1988: 15-16).

As a result of all these, factors such as population growth, needs, unplanned urbanization, excessive or licentious consumption, agriculture, transportation, industry, lack of education, failure to comply with environmental rules, moral insensitivity, etc. caused environmental pollution and deterioration. Physical, chemical and biological contamination such as air, water, soil, radiation, genetics and noise pollution has made the world a difficult place to live in. However, the destruction of the natural environment, pollution and poisoning of the resources have forced recognition of the need for environmental sensitivity. In this way, solution-oriented research has accelerated as environmental problems threaten the future of humanity. Therefore, the first ecology movements have emerged in this period (Evkuran, 2008: 36; Özdemir, 2017, 86-87).

II. METHODS AND MATERIALS

Analogical, inductive, deductive and descriptive methods were used to make holistic reading about environmental awareness with ethical and educational focus. The methods used in the study are developing hypothesis based on qualitative reading and comprehension.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Environmental Ethics and Environmental Education

The field of environmental ethics concerns human beings' moral relationship with the natural environment. While numerous philosophers have written on this topic throughout history, environmental ethics developed into a specific philosophical discipline only in the 1970s. Recently, environmental morality improved in parallel with environmental problems has been presented as a sub-branch of ethics, and its universality has been emphasized in particular. In the West, anthropocentric, pain-centric, bio-centric and ecocentric ethic types have emerged in the field of environmental ethics. According to anthropocentric ethics, man is the master of the nature. The pain-centric ethics has emerged from the prohibition of torture against animals and is the type of ethic that envisages responsibility to them. Bio-centric ethics include humans, animals and plants. Accordingly, each living creature has a value which is independent of the degree of sophistication. One of the first examples of bio-centric ethics is Albert Schweitzer's principle of "respect for life". From this point of view, Paul Taylor developed the responsibility of not involving evil, non-interference, loyalty and restorative justice. Holistic environmental ethics (ecocentric) also includes inanimate creatures. Accordingly, every living, non-living creatures are parts of the consistent system and have a value (Kılıç, 2008: 38-42; Jardins, 2006: 264, 280). Deep ecology is a critique of the dominant worldview that is responsible for the destruction of the environment. It is based on anti-anthropocentrism and eco-centrism (Jardins, 2006: 403).

As for the Islamic world, studies on the environmental ethics have recently grown in quantitative and qualitative ways. These studies focus on the dissemination of environmental consciousness with religious and moral education. Thus, based on the basic principles of Islam, the theories of

usefulness, responsibility, virtue and wisdom are accepted as the basic theory for environmental ethics. In addition to these, concepts such as blessing, sign, trust, power of attorney, compassion, love, servitude, holiness are added as basic principles for environmental education (Yaran, 2008: 124,127-132).

It will be easier to understand the human-nature relationship and solve the problems between them if Nature is accepted as a living organism regarding environmental problems. According to the Qur'an, "So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it" (Qur'an, Zilzal/99:7-8). Therefore "The nature sees you in the way you treat it". For example, pollution diminishes our health, wasting resources threatens our standards of living, climate change puts our homes at risk, declining of biodiversity results with the loss of potential medicines, and the eradication of wilderness means we lose a source of awe and beauty (Cochrane, 2018, https://www.iep.utm.edu/envi-eth).

Another point of emphasis in teaching people about the environment and nature is recognizing the problems, and to actively participating in making solutions. Therefore, raising awareness in terms of environmental education, to make people sensitive, act with responsibility and duty consciousness, to live in harmony with nature in the framework of love and respect and to draw a consciousness map in the form of protecting the ecological balance can be counted among the basic issues of environmental ethics.

Humans are the causes as well as the solvers of the problem regarding environment. As mentioned in the verse, "Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by (reason of) what the hands of people have earned so He may let them taste part of what they have done that perhaps they will return" (Qur'an, Rûm/30: 41). It is also seen in the Qur'an that while people are responsible for the human universe, but it is emphasized that they do not know the importance of the issue: "Indeed, We offered the trust to heavens and the earth and the

mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man (undertook to) bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant" (Qur'an, Ahzab/33: 72). For this reason, protection and development of the environment, the necessity of conserving environmental values requires a balance between the personal benefits of selfish individuals and society's short and long-term interests. Thus, evaluating nature qualitatively (not quantitatively) in environmental science will enable us to develop a more hopeful discourse for the future. In that case, it is clear that there is a need for moral rules and social values where the rules of law are not sufficient in terms of the value-morality relationship. However, the sufficiency of morality, which is the sanction of reaction and condemnation, remains a matter of debate (Keleş-Hamamcı, 2005: 247-248).

On the other hand, it is the duty of education to make the environmental consciousness understandable and applicable. Environmental education is the process of cognitive, affective and behavioral transformation that is essential for humans to survive without destroying nature. The cognitive dimension means to know the structure of the nature and its operation, its relationship with human nature and the future consequences of human impact on the nature. The emotional dimension, on the other hand, includes developing empathy for, forming emotional bonding with, caring, valuing and preserving living and non-living beings. The behavioral dimension is also the process to gain the ability to cope with the environmental problems of the present and the future. Sustainability for environmental education is essential. Therefore, effective participation is required. Basic principles for this are consistency, sufficiency and efficiency (Özdemir, 2017: 3-4, 10).

However, until recently, as it is in ethics, in human-centered education systems, human-human or human-society relations have been deemed important, and no responsibility has been directed towards the environment. Therefore, the classic human-centered approach that continues until recently has to be replaced by an

environment-centered and totalitarian approach. In fact, as a part but not the master of Nature, the human being has to think about the interests of the entire eco-system and not only its own interests (Özdemir, 1999: 306). Thus, in order to be more productive about environmental awareness and education, it must give up science that dominates nature and shows its power over it. In other words, it is necessary to adopt an understanding of science that knows its limits and place. According to this, understanding, enlightenment, compassion and responsibility are essential. Moreover, it is more appropriate to base the foundations of environmental ethics on this understanding of science. Therefore, it is necessary to prevent dominion, to rethink the organic and aesthetic dimension of the nature, to be sensitive about the relations and responsibilities with nature, and to redefine the nature as a value by taking ecological principles into consideration (Özdemir, 1999: 308). Hence, the effects of environmental ethics will not be limited to influencing and informing business ethics alone, but will undoubtedly feed into and merge with more mainstream ethical thinking. Because the environment is not a place where a person can isolate himself from it. In light of this, once it is recognized that we have environmental obligations; all fields of ethics will be affected, including just war theory, domestic distributive justice, global distributive justice, human rights theory and many others (Cochrane, 2018, https://www.iep.utm.edu/envi-eth).

Although the physical and social environment is important for understanding Nature, individual awareness and education should also be underlined. In this respect, ecological citizenship means building an environmentally conscious and livable environment with this awareness. In addition, this term refers to a consciousness that is equipped with ethical values, which aims to leave a cleaner environment for future generations. In this context, environmental ethics deals with the moral relations between man and nature, as a product of values and behaviors that protect the ecological integrity of the world (Gül, 2013: 19-20). On the other hand, when looking at the environment from a metaphysical point of view, an environmental ethic evaluated in terms of the relationship between God- universe-human will be able to provide significant improvement in the material and spiritual solution of the problem. As long as the person has the principle of "it is necessary to love and protect the creature because of the creator", the solution of the problem will be overcome more easily.

According to Nasr, the matter of nature has a sacred aspect. From this point of view, if the philosophy of nature is based on revelation and wisdom that could provide scientific findings and assumptions criticized and re-evaluated (Nasr, 1988: 156). Because harmony with nature depends on rediscovering the spiritual meaning of nature. It is impossible to have peace between people, unless there is peace and harmony between man and nature. Therefore, harmonious relations can be established among those who understand the metaphysical knowledge that leads to the love and respect for nature. Peace and harmony with Nature depends on being in harmony with the Heavens and the source of everything. A person who is at peace with God will be at peace with both nature and man, because s/he will be in peace with His creations (Nasr, 1988: 180-181).

According to the approach which is not limited to new and alternative ethical look, the contamination in nature consists of a result and extension of pollution in culture. In terms of environmental consciousness, man materializes himself when he realizes his relation with his own nature and the entities he has relation to. Thus, the person knows himself through this relationality (Evkuran, 2008: 37, 43). Ecological obligations cannot be solved only by an ethic that addresses interpersonal relationships. For this reason, we need to think about the limits and principles of comprehensive ethics that includes the entire ecosystem. In this respect, ethical theory encompasses a wide range of areas ranging from individual views to social

policies (Evkuran, 2008: 47). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the concept of "common life" in order to make progress in environmental awareness and education. If living, an ontological necessity is accepted as a common life, it becomes an existential concept (Türer, 2015: 374). To live with everything that surrounds human beings, whether they are living or inanimate objects; it requires acceptance, understanding, protection, sharing, love and respect. Indeed, it is necessary to know the necessity of living together to make progress in environmental awareness and education. That's why, firstly, there is a need to realize the existence of the entity integration. In this respect, it is necessary to reconsider the notions of creation and existence, integrity, mutual communication and balance in terms of moral philosophy.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is essential to be conscious and to see the environment as a value in order to have a clean and sustainable environment. As well as there are measures to be taken before a problem arises in terms of education, there are solutions to be corrected, removed or transformed after the problem. In nature and environment education, it is useful to act on this approach. The main thing which needs to be done in this area is to disseminate studies such as nature-environment knowledge and education, environmental ethics, nature and aesthetics, environment and art, philosophy of nature, environmental philosophy, environment and ethics, environment and religion, environment and individual, environment and society, environmental law. In addition, these studies need to be updated and brought to the attention of the public. While there are economic, political, legal, scientific and technological perspectives in solving environmental problems, moral and religious approaches will be triggering factors for raising society's awareness.

The development of moral elements such as conscience, sacrifice and justice related to environmental education begins in the family and progresses with formal and non-formal education. It is necessary to consider environmental education as theoretical and practical information in universities, in audio and in visual media, in places of worship, in conferences, in symposiums and in social media. In this respect, environmental policies also play an important role. Therefore, in terms of nature and environmental ethics, it is necessary to determine the regional and encompassing needs correctly about production-consumption and recycling. As a result, it can become a principle to avoid negative emotions such as selfishness, laziness, waste, extortion, impunity, injustice, cruelty, war and pollution.

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