

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

In 1960s people realized for the first time that their actions, especially those sparked by the industrial revolution, had yielded disastrous consequences for the natural environment. "Silent Spring", a book by Rachel Carson outlining the impact that an insecticide DDT, widely used in agriculture, had on bird's natural habitats stirred debate that would go far beyond the limits of ecology and well beyond the limits of scientific community. Carson, who herself was born on the farm in Pennsylvania, made a strong claim there, namely that the use of DDT must be deterred. And more generally - that people must not influence natural ecosystems. This was anything but trivial. In contrast to the deep-seated conviction she made a step from the domain of facts to the domain of norms. Hence - to the domain of ethics. Her voice would become a starting point of a debate on the relationship between the man and the environment; the relationship in which the environment became a subject of moral attitudes. This is how environmental ethics came on stage.

Although quite intricate, all the debates in environmental ethics are arrayed around the question of what is the reason for protecting the environment. In short, there are two opposite paradigms: anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism. According to the former, we should protect the environment as long as it serves our best interests. A value ascribed to nature is thus instrumental. Meanwhile, according to the latter, nature has an internal value which is independent of any human evaluation; independent of human interests. Hence, anthropocentrism situates values in the subject, as it were, whereas non-anthropocentrism finds them in the environment itself. At the end of the day this polarization, although it had propelled insightful conceptions at the beginning, became an obstacle driving environmental ethics to stagnation.

My proposal called *relational environmental ethics* tries a different way. Values ascribed to the environment exist neither in the subject alone (they are not produced freely by the subject) nor in the environment alone (as if they were just another "thing"); instead, values are brought forth as a result of the relation between the subject and the environment. Note that maintaining a relationship engages both sides equally. Hence, a value that is thought of in a relational manner must be grounded in the properties of real things, but at the same time we can hardly speak of values without any appeal the subject who is, in a sense, actualizing or unpacking them.

I argue that within such a conceptual framework the subject-environment dichotomy, which is widely recognized as the genuine source of environmental crisis, can be overcome. Therefore, while in the dichotomist way of thinking we must deal with a somewhat troubling and outdated idea of the subject as merely an observer of the environment; here we have the subject thought of as a genuine part of the environment.

Relational environmental ethics draws mostly on the ideas of William James, particularly on his radical empiricism. On James' view, the subject is always an agent acting in the particular environment, while experience is the only source of knowledge and justification. At the same time, the experience itself is not thought of as a collection of atomic sense data, but it, being much more broadly construed, constitutes the richness of life of the subject, including those parts or aspects involving values. In accordance with actions undertaken by the subject, there is also an experience of values - values which are not recognized as being merely out there in the world, but also not as being "in the head", but precisely as something that is brought forth as a result of the "meeting" engaging the world and the acting/experiencing subject.