



Original Contribution

ETHICAL AND ECOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

M. Nikolov*

Department of Regional Development, Faculty of Agriculture, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

ABSTRACT

An attempt is made to back up with arguments the proposition that ecological ethics is a significant application for substantiating the concept on sustainable development. Four basic arguments are used: the evolution of the notion of sustainable development, the radical change in approaches of modern ecology, the main vector of the ethics of civilized action, the regulatory and applied nature of modern ecological ethics in its capacity as discourse ethics. On these grounds it has been concluded that there is significant interrelation and mutual determination between the concept of sustainable development and modern ecological ethics.

Key words: sustainable development, ecological ethics, discourse ethics.

STARTING PROPOSITION:

Ecological ethics is a significant scientific application for substantiating the concept of sustainable development

To prove the proposition we shall use four basic arguments, an expression first and foremost of the counter movement of two tendencies – the tendency of “greenification” of ethics and the tendency of “ethization” of ecology.

First argument:

Evolution of the notion “sustainable development”.

That notion has undergone vast expansion of its scope: from expression of its own ecological principle requiring conscious responsibility of present-day generations for the life of future generations to the so-called “magic triangle”, including ecological equilibrium, economic security and social justice. In the opinion of some, that makes it so abstract and poor in content, that it is depleted of any specific meaning and significance.

But, in fact, the notion is still considered fundamental both in social and

practical aspect /various documents of the UN, the European Union, companies, institutions/ and in science and education /for example the UN decade “Education for sustainable development”, 2005 – 2014/. Probably we can change the “triangle” to various “polygons”, including other main spheres of social activity. However, the important thing is that environmental problems will always be in the centre of sustainable development. All other relations and interactions, all other aspects of the notion “sustainable development” result from it and are subjectivised. Moreover, in all cases it is presumed that it requires overall change of the system of values of all and every person, i.e. a new approach to ecological values. Hence, we proceed to the second argument, which is in the sphere of ecology.

Second argument:

Radical change in the approaches of modern ecology - from “shallow” to “deep” ecology. The point is that a number of ecologists declare themselves “deep” ecologists /A. Neis, W. Fox, B. Givol, G. Sessions, etc./ They blame “shallow” ecologists for limiting their concern only to some non-human /extrahuman/ life forms, mainly the ones that serve human goals and interests. The platform of “deep” ecological movement involves propositions such as:

* **Correspondence to:** Milcho Nikolov, Dept. of Regional Development, Faculty of Agriculture, Trakia University, 38, Bratya Zhekov Str., Stara Zagora 6000, Bulgaria; Tel.: +359 42 234222; E-mail: milcho_nikolov@abv.bg

- The flourishing of non-human life on Earth has the same self-value as the flourishing of human life.
- The value of human life forms is non-dependent on their value for narrow human goals.
- The richness and diversification of life on Earth is valuable in itself and in every specific case it contributes to flourishing of all life on Earth, including human life.
- People are not entitled in any way to reduce that richness and diversity unless for the necessary satisfaction of their vital needs.

From here we pass on to the next argument taking into account the nature and significance of modern ethics.

Third argument:

Future is the main object of modern ethics.

We live in a “risk society”. Human life nowadays has two common features: insecurity and uncertainty. No technological, economic and social structure can guarantee security of human life. Hence, the main trust of people is ethics, “ethics of civilized action”. In it the main object of ethical responsibility is the future and the main principle is the principle of non-symmetry between rights and obligations. The principle of obligations rises above the principle of rights since every single human act has to be preceded by the question: “what will happen next?”.

Hence, the next argument about the exceptional place of ecological ethics /environmental ethics/.

Fourth argument:

Ecological ethics is regulatory and applied and therefore it can be only “discourse”. What exactly do these three characteristics of modern ecological ethics mean:

- Ecological ethics is regulatory /prescriptive, prescribing/ since it studies the nature of norms, standards and principles of activity, but not in general, in an abstract way, but according to the nature of the job of an ecologist. Hence, the second characteristics of ecological ethics – its applied nature.
- Ecological ethics is applied ethics since it does not try to provide ready answers, does not use moralization, admonitions, instructions, moral demagoguery. It applies analysis of various alternatives of possible behaviour, creates taste and skills

to free choice of solutions. In other words, it is based on mastering “the coping behaviour”, which does not aim at maximum and idealistic goals /”the best”/, even not always to optimum /”the possible good”/, and most often to “minimization of the evil” its reduction to a degree of human and social tolerance. The main issue is in what sense ecological ethics is a necessary component of managing professionalism, of ecological management.

We have already pointed out that modern ecology is “deep” ecology. Hence, contemporary ecological ethics has to be “deep” ethics. What does that mean? The old /shallow, reformist/ ethics is anthropocentric /man-oriented/, because it studies human life as a self-value, as exceptional from a moral point of view. The new /deep, radical/ ethics is eco-centric /globally oriented/, because it is based on the view about innate value, the self-value of the life of all living creatures, members of the global ecological community, united by a network of interrelations. It is for moral equality of all living creatures. A. Schweizer defined ethics as “admiration, awe and limitless responsibility of man to all living creatures”. The founder of ecological ethics himself Aldo Leopold stated its basic principles in this way: each issue is to be discussed both from the point of view of ethical and aesthetic legality and from the point of view of economic conformity; each activity is justifiable if it aims at preserving the integrity, sustainability and beauty of biological community.

Hence, the notion of “nature” is expanded, including not only material resource, but aesthetic, scientific, philosophical and by substantiating ecological ethics, moral resource of mankind, as well. It is ecological ethics that provides to the utmost degree the preservation of mankind /recently other names have evolved: cosmic ethics, holistic ethics, spiritual ethics, etc./

Of course, viewed in that way, ecological ethics could cause some danger, too. For example:

- The principle of biocentric egalitarianism /about moral equilibrium between man and animals – T. Raegan, L. Taylor, P. Singer/ could distort into “green fundamentalism”. Some “deep” ecologists think that the flourishing of human life and culture is possible only with significant reduction of human population and starting other forms of life. It is

interesting how do they envisage more specifically these solutions.

- Curious and at the same time debatable are the concepts about “the two-factor egalitarianism” /D-Van de Veer/ and about hierarchical ethics” /M. Schoenfeld/. Here “shallow” ecologists are quite ironical.
- The so-called “green protectionism” pretends to protect national state from the world market and globalization. National state is defined as an extinct “political biotope”, which is the only one that defends ecological standards and hence we have to protect it like endangered nature.
- Some aspects of ecofeminism have specific sounding, the typology of participants in ecological activities, total activists, situationally involved, passive ones, ultra nihilists/, the so-called negative types of ecologists, *etc.*

The third basic characteristics of ecological ethics is that it is discourse /communicative/. This means that it is a result of agreed reasonable consent among the subjects of moral conversation about the norms and principles of their activity. It is based on mutual understanding the product of which is not necessarily consensus /final universal agreement/, but is a peculiar project, open, able to reproduce and renovate itself in a dynamic argumentative environment in the course of its social and practical application. And it is this constant productive debate among social activity subjects that is in the basis of implementation of the sustainable development concept.

We are going to go into greater detail into those characteristics. The fundamental methodological problem is the one about the philosophical substantiation of ecological deontology. Our proposition is: not just axiological /value/ but mainly deontological discourse, communicative/ are the reasons of each applied and in particular – of ecological ethics.

Of course, from a rather wide point of view, everything in the sphere of human activity and relations can be called value. Also deontological components can be called deontological values in their dichotomous relation to eudemonistic values. Moreover, the moral point of view is both deontological and axiological. But these are basically general postulates. Apart from having already a substantiated strong mother proposition that valorization (valuation) precedes and creates value, it is not difficult to note that each

fundamental value is based on a specific principle. When substantiating applied ethics a more adequate and even the only possible is the relationship of norms to values.

Deontological point of view also has its limitations. But even Paul Ricoeur trying to reveal these limitations fully still thinks that the ethical strive (for better life, with and for the others, in fair institutions; self-respect, concern and sense of justice) has to pass through the sieve of norms. (1)

In fact, this is our main proposition: for substantiating the ecologist’s professional and moral point of view the most suitable philosophical means is the so-called discourse (communicative) ethics. What are our specific arguments in defence of that statement?

The similar etymological meaning of the basic notions moral, ethics and morality is well-known – they originate from the Greek *ethos* and the Latin *mores* – customs, habits, character, behaviour. However, there are some differences in their modern use. In general, the traditional understanding in the spirit of classical New European science involves the theoretical, reflexive aspects of the notion ethics, real practice, action and behaviour – in the notion moral, and the private, emotional, individual, intimate-personal side of moral – in the notion morality. Therefore, the relationship “ethics – moral” is based on the relation “theory – object”, and the relationship “moral – morality” – on the relation “public – private”. Of course, in the day-to-day usage we encounter them as interchangeable synonyms (for example “moral behaviour” and “ethical behaviour”) and as close but yet different areas (for example the expression “on moral and ethical topics”).

A more modern understanding of ethics derives from the following logic:

- In modern pluralistic societies no uniform opinion of good (and evil) and right (and wrong) can be sought.
- Moral is a question of an individual and inviolable choice of every man; there are many types of moral with their subjects.
- Ethics is the moment of accord among various moral concepts and types of behaviour, the agreed acceptable behaviour, the system of rational covenants in a given community, the compromise type of ethical norms, standards and principles achieved through dialogue and consensus. Hence, according to Sigmund Baumann, “we have to see whether the postmodern time, the so-called “postdeontic era” of Gilles

Lipovetsky, the “post duty” era will remain in history as a sunset or Renaissance of morality” (2), but in any case “the postmodern perspective reveals the relativity of ethical codes and moral practices they recommend or support”. (2)

This gave the start of discourse (or communicative) ethics substantiated for the first time by Karl-Otto Apel and specially grounded by Jürgen Habermas (3, 4), further developed by a number of liberal critics and feminist thinkers such as Seyla Benhabib (5), *etc.*

Referring to some generalized philosophical and sociological analyses (6), we agree that the discourse ethics of J. Habermas forms a “third position” between ethics of beliefs and ethics of responsibilities (about possible consequences), between ethics of justice (autonomy and freedom of the individual) and ethics of solidarity (the common welfare), i.e. between subjectivistic and communitarian positions. It is reasonably determined as post-Kantian, neo-Kantian or reformed Kantian ethics, since it aims at combining the advantages of these two positions and correcting their drawbacks.

More specifically, J. Habermas:

A) Shares the main characteristics of the ethics of Kant, which:

a/ deals with typically moral issues abandoning the wide notion of ethics comprising the combination of cultural codes, regulating daily communication and interactions;

b/ is at the same time:

- cognitive ethics (adds veracity to valid moral norms);
- formalist ethics (does not formulate specific instructions, but defines only formal criteria for validation of moral norms);
- universal ethics (thinks that grounded moral principles and norms have to be recognized and accepted by all rational beings)

B) But along with that J. Habermas predefines the theory of Kant according to a communicative procedure.

Discourse ethics has both followers and fierce critics. We agree with Seyla Benhabib’s valuation that “the main insight” of the Habermas project is not in “the strong deontological interpretation” of communicative ethics in itself, but in the fact that a formalistic theory is oriented to justice,

i.e. “the fairness of moral norms and the integrity of moral values can be established only through a process of practical argumentation” (5). Of course, some basic rules of argumentation such as equality and symmetry of chances to start discussion, which in themselves are “deontological”, aim at providing “fairness” of the result through providing “fairness” of the process and in this sense in communicative ethics the “good” perceived by the participants in the practical discourse is limited by the “right”, i.e. by the conditions of fair argumentation and fair dispute. Because of that Seyla Benhabib thinks that communicative ethics remains deontological ethics, but she is a proponent of a “weak deontological” interpretation, according to which the issues of fairness and the issues of good life, norms and values can be a subject of discourse dispute and check in an open-ended dialogue aiming not at consensus but at “reaching understanding” (5). “The nature of my reformulation of the universalist tradition in ethics – states S. Benhabib – is the construction of “amoral point of view” according to the model of moral discourse, exercising the art of “expanded thinking”. The goal of that discourse is not consensus or unanimity... but “a foreseen communication with the others, which I know I have eventually to reach an agreement with”. It is obvious that it differentiates between “consensus” and “reaching an agreement”. She suggests to regard the “common interest” stipulated by J. Habermas less as a content of a substantive consensus and more as a resulting principle. “In ethics the procedure of universalization if understood as a reversal of perspectives and readiness to reason from the point of view of the other(s) does not guarantee consent; it demonstrates the will and readiness to seek understanding with the other and reach some kind of reasonable consent in a continuous moral discourse” (5).

Thus, consensus (as common final consent) is in fact an idealization. It is not always, and in fact very rarely is, achievable. In this sense Nicholas Rescher had grounds to oppose to “the canonization” of consensus (which he attributes to J. Habermas) the position of pluralism, comprising four moments: legitimate diversity, moderate dissension, reconciliation in difference, respect to the autonomy of others (7), but one can hardly blame J. Habermas in so much “deification” of consensus. In fact, Paul Ricoeur is right to add that ethical discussion in addition to rational arguments has to

include moral emotions and feelings, too, as firm arguments that ethics of argumentation is based on “consensus through juxtaposition” (1) and involves “conflicting consensus”, “positive conflicting tolerance” (1).

However, according to the communicative ethical model, the important point is:

- not that everyone would agree with the same set of principles;
- but that these principles had been adopted as a result of a procedure considered reasonable and fair by everyone.

Hence, it is the approach of J. Habermas that allows us to believe and to struggle for the opportunity of understanding, agreement and consent (8). The emphasis in it is not so much on the rational response rather than the maintenance of those norms, principles and relations in which reasonable consent is developed as a way of life, activity and communication.

When J. Habermas talks about “an ideal speech situation” he has in mind the following requirements:

1. To recognize the right of all human beings to be participants in the moral discourse. That is called “a principle of universal moral respect” by S. Benhabib (5).
2. In these discourses everyone shall have the same symmetrical rights towards the various speech acts, to introduce new topics, to require thinking over the conversation perspectives, etc. That is termed “principle of egalitarian reciprocity” by S. Benhabib (5).
3. Then the mere suppositions of the argumentative situation have regulatory content preceding the moral argument.

In other words, there are three points in the continuous moral discourse:

- reversibility of the argumentation positions;
- universality of the inclusive meaning;
- reciprocity in recognizing claims. (4)

Indeed, the original reciprocity of the relationship between I and You, philosophically grounded by Martin Buber (9) is argued by some authors. For example. Emmanuel Levinas, proceeding from the concept that “first philosophy” as “philosophy of dialogue” is ethics, that “ethics is before ontology” (10) talks about “asymmetry” and “radical inequality” between I and You since any relation to the other is a relation to a being who I have obligations, responsibility to. He emphasizes the groundlessness of “about the

other” (10). But as we have already pointed out, J. Habermas himself came to the conclusion that justice, perceived deontologically, need solidarity as its reverse side.

Thus, in modern communication:

- Everyone is entitled to the right to change his own arguments.
- Everybody has to try to put in common meaning.
- Everybody’s claims have to be equally accepted by everyone.

Thus, deontological position is implemented in the following stages:

- Mutual orientation of validity claims.
- Their critical processing.
- Their intersubjective recognition.
- Rationally motivated consensus.
- Mutual participation in the reproduction of the common living world.

Viewed from these theoretical and methodological positions, ecological ethics is a type of regulatory ethics, which is:

1. A problem area of applied ethics (along with human medical ethics, veterinary medical ethics, bioethics, engineering ethics, computer ethics, etc.).
2. A variant of occupational ethics.
3. An aspect of business ethics.

What does that mean in fact?

Applied ethics is part of applied philosophy. And the core of all philosophical problems are the value relations. Hence, ecological ethics as applied ethics deals with solving value problems, moral conflicts and other contradictions with which neither professional expertise, nor law science can cope.

Ecological ethics is a value regulatory knowledge about the behaviour of people in that profession. It reveals the creative nature of the individual moral choice and the specifics of the undertaken moral responsibility through its basic notions of duty and responsibility, assesses the moral positive behaviour of the professional, seeks ways for the vastest implementation of the socially recognized goals of the ecological profession.

The common characteristics of any profession in G. Millerson’s opinion are:

- applying skills acquired from theoretical knowledge;
- training and mastering those skills;
- competence of professionals provided through checks;

- doing services to the benefit of common welfare;
- professional association that organizes its members (11).

These characteristics which can be used to define the degree of professionalism in any social work, refer entirely to the ecological profession. Moreover, as socially significant and highly prestigious job, enjoying special public attention, great expectations and hopes, ecology seems very close to the “strong” definition outlining the extreme requirements of the surgeon’s job:

1. At least 5 years of training and 5 more years of practice to be admitted.
2. Specially authorized competent bodies admitting new practitioners.
3. A special body providing against payment conditions for professional and scientific service to all community members.
4. Own ethical code.
5. Own annual conference. (12)

Since professionalism is a quality aspect of the work, then it is not just a technical issue, not only an expert work, but more likely - an ethical issue. (12) The professional “practices” his job unlike the craftsman, who “does” it (with the only purpose to sell the service). Practising his job, the “professional” defends its value (according to Aristotle “practis” is what the individual does on behalf of the professional community as well).

In this sense ecological ethics is an aspect of business ethics, too. Business ethics is not just activity, but practice, and practice, as we have already said, is social activity, i.e. activity based on the common belief about goals and generally recognized standards about its quality (13). Every businessman “makes profit” and “makes benefits” at the same time, i.e. desired goods and services of quality (12).

So far it has become clear that ecological ethics is a scientific applied discipline, because it:

- Adds specific nature to the main ethical issue: “What can and what shall I do in my
- professional capacity of an ecologist?”
- Outlines the moral aspect of ecological activity and relations through the prism of other three more particular questions:
 - How shall these activities and relations be implemented?
 - Can they be implemented as they should?

- What shall I do to make this implementation take place?

In order to give specific and meaningful answer to these questions, two groups of conditions have to be fulfilled:

One: To start a permanent process of scientific applied research of important issues of ecological ethics such as:

- ethical analysis of specific professional business and managing situations in ecological business;
- studying value controversies, moral conflicts and ethical dilemmas in ecological work;
- revealing ethical dimensions of the social responsibility of ecological subjects;
- analysis of the process of ethical decision making; moral arguments in choosing a morally acceptable behaviour; influence of individual factors, “the important others”, organizational structure and company culture in ethical decision making;
- studying the process of ethical control; organizational standards and ethical keys; ethical code.

Two: Concentrating on the “regulatory creative process” in preparing, discussing and approving the “Ethical code of the ecologist:

- a) This code will considerably facilitate:
 - the consolidation of people in the profession and the relevant organizational structures;
 - regulating their relations with the public stating its duties, too;
 - regulating the ethical aspects of professional relations.
- b) The ethical code has to be a system of shared values, morally admissible and acceptable, agreed principles, standards and norms of behaviour, responsibilities desired by each and every member of ecological community;
- c) Ethical behaviour standards have to comprise elements:
 - both from the basic rules of professional work with imperative nature (not only the prohibiting, negative, but also the positive, urging, stimulating ones);
 - and from the moral ideals which are not imperative requirements by their nature, but are more desired ways of professional behaviour;
 - the ethical code shall not be mixed up with institutional regulators (legal,

administrative, internal rules, etc.), but should complement them in a specific way;

- d) The ethical code should be a sum total of standards of prescriptive nature, which are:
- widely discussed in advance by the professional community;
 - formulated not as managing instructions, but as an expectation or declaration;
- e) The code should contain clearly and unambiguously stated both:
- professional role norms
 - etiquette rules
- f) The code should look for a balance between:
- approved, traditional, spontaneously imposed, abstractly formulated ethical principles and rules and requirements that are hard to apply, often infringed, specific situational, subject to subjective interpretation;
 - moral and commercial targets and interests. (12)

CONCLUSION:

The applied logic of analysis and synthesis of the sustainable development notions “deep” ecology, civilized ethics, ecological ethics confirms and enriches the original proposition about interrelation and mutual determination between the sustainable development concept and ecological ethics. Of course, these interrelations are specified on an ethical level through constant agreement of principles and norms developed by ecological ethics,

business ethics and institutional ethics respectively.

REFERENCES

1. Ricoeur, P., Lectures. ”St. Kliment Ohridski” University Publishing House, Sofia, 1996.
2. Baumann, S., The Postmodern ethics. Lik, Sofia, 2001.
3. Habermas, J., The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. EA, Pleven, 1993.
4. Habermas, J., Moral, Law and Democracy. Home for Man and Society Science, Sofia, 1999.
5. Benhabib, S., Situating the Self. KX, Sofia, 2001.
6. Znepolski, B., Trends in modern social philosophy – Ricoeur and Habermas. Sociological problems, 3-4:183-187, 1999.
7. Rescher, N., Pluralism: Against the Demand for Consensus. KX, Sofia, 2001.
8. Yotov, S., On catching up on Habermas in Bulgarian. Sociological problems, 3-4:191, 1999.
9. Buber, M., I and Thou. Heart-to-Heart Talk. Divine Occultation. STENO, Varna, 1992.
10. Levinas, E., The Other and Transcendence. Sonm, Sofia, 1999.
11. Abercromby, N., Hill, St., Turner, B.S., World dictionary in Sociology. Dolphin press, Burgas, 1999.
12. Sotirova, D., Business ethics. INI “Industry-idea”, Sofia, 1995.
13. MacIntyre, A., After Virtue: a Study in Moral Theory. KX, Sofia, 1999.