

Environmental Ethics and Ecological Preservation: Integrating Social Justice for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

This paper addresses social justice, ecology, and environmental ethics and how they can be used to improve sustainable development. While ecological preservation focuses on preserving the natural environment to maintain the biotic community's balance and the services it offers, environmental ethics deals with how humans morally understand the environment. Social justice deals with properly allocating the ecological advantages and the costs. This paper also seeks to present a framework of sustainable development that considers the concepts above and their interactions to achieve sustainable development that does not transgress the natural carrying capacity and is progressive in its distribution of resources. The discussion links the argument to theoretical concepts, stressing the necessity of integrating ethical elements into environmental policies and activities. All the principles of justice in the distribution of resources, moral reasoning, and reverence for ecological systems were introduced in developing the proposed framework to ensure comprehensive and sustainable growth.

Keywords: *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Preservation, Social Justice, Sustainable Development, Environmental Governance, Ecosystem Services*

INTRODUCTION

Environmental ethics is a perspective that helps individuals to consider their interaction with their surroundings thoroughly, shapes policies for environmentally friendly development and conservation, and helps people understand them. From Callicott's analysis of the moral status of the objects within the biotic community (1989) to the present-day debates on environmental conservation, it becomes clear that natural assets are scarce and are part of the system supporting human existence. The ways through which societies assess, allocate, and employ these resources, which are in one way or another conditioned by culture, can be strongly affected by environmental ethics, a branch of philosophy that focuses on the ethical interactions of people with the natural environment (Taylor, 2011; Leopold, 1949). While environmental ethics encompasses a variety of theoretical dimensions, its practical applications are significant. For instance, the study of values and valuation, known as axiology, relates to various duties and obligations within the human-nature relationship. Like social ethics guide human interactions, environmental ethics can direct how humans engage with and manage the natural resources surrounding them.

For numerous scholars, particularly economists and environmental scientists, discussions about nature's value typically focus on the benefits it provides to people, often described as ecosystem services. This perspective evaluates the value of nature through factors and processes that generate tangible outputs impacting human health and well-being (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). Such a pragmatic approach is undeniably essential, yet environmental ethics suggests that the value of nature and its services transcends purely quantitative metrics (Naess, 1973).

Ecological preservation emphasizes maintaining the integrity of ecosystems, which are vital for the survival of numerous species, including humans. Ecosystems deliver essential services such as water purification, air quality maintenance, and food provision, indispensable for human health and survival (Costanza et al., 1997). A report called the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) says that everyone agrees that the idea of ecosystem services and protecting those services are essential for people's health and the stability of the environment- this is said to be the case in light of the growing globalization.

Deeply rooted in ethical theory, social justice addresses equitable allocation of resources and possibilities. To

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reconcile the preservation of nature with economic development, well-considered environmental policies that consider long-term sustainability goals and social repercussions are necessary (Rawls, 1971). Ecological justice emerged in the 1980s; it concerns the interactions between environmental and social problems and emphasizes the justice of oppressed minorities exposed to risks (Bullard, 1990).

Hence, several conditions must be met for sustainable development, social justice, ecology, and environmental ethos. The Brundtland Commission report affirms that sustainable development is a development that can meet the needs of the present without putting the ability of future generations in peril (Brundtland, 1987). This approach advocates appreciating natural features, distributing resources fairly in society, and safeguarding the environment and human welfare.

This paper aims to show how environmental ethics, social justice, ecological preservation, and environmental ethics might all help to develop sustainably. Therefore, this paper seeks to create a framework highlighting the need to make ethical decisions, allocate resources fairly, and have a responsible attitude toward the natural environment using the analysis of theoretical principles.

Theoretical Foundations of Environmental Ethics and Ecological Preservation

Ecosystems and environmental ethics are two fields that provide a solid theoretical foundation for the defense of the environment and the recognition of its intrinsic value and people's duties towards it. These foundations include biocentrism, ecocentrism, deep ecology, and the principle of ecosystem services, which form part of the principles and practices that define practical ecological preservation.

According to biocentrism, all life has inherent worth and should be granted moral respect (Goodpaster, 1978). Ecocentrism contrasts anthropocentrism since it grants moral concern to the earth's inhabitants and all living organisms and natural processes. This view of the world acknowledges that all living things and ecosystems have their worth regardless of the uses that people give to them. Thus, from this point of view, individuals will be inclined to engage in activities supporting biodiversity and the environment. For example, efforts to protect critically endangered species like the black rhino or the Amur leopard are based on ecocentrism thinking, meaning that people care more about the animals' right to exist than how they might help people.

According to Leopold's (1949) classic work "A Sand County Almanack," the strategy stresses how all ecosystem elements, living and nonliving, are connected. So, ecocentrism pushes for a broad approach to managing the environment, putting the health and balance of whole ecosystems ahead of the needs of any one species, even humans. Since it acknowledges that all species depend on one another and that environmental health is the only means by which all living things may survive, the approach is essential for preserving the environment. For example, maintaining the systems that control the planet's temperature and thus support life and preserving the species that call the Amazon rainforest home is essential to its preservation.

Deep ecology takes these ideas even further by encouraging people to change their perception of the world and their role in it to accept the moral value of the existence of other species and biotic communities. According to deep ecologists, pollution and other manifestations of environmental decline are caused by anthropocentric perceptions of the world and propose a fundamental shift in people's approach to the natural environment. This philosophy inspires the idea that humans are part of the ecosystem and should change their ways to protect the environment. This position includes radical changes in societies' attitudes towards nature, which is why deep ecology calls for such steps as limiting the growth of human populations, practicing life-sustaining technologies, or preserving large parts of the biosphere. These measures are crucial in creating a balance between man and the environment so that the future health of ecosystems can be guaranteed.

Ecosystem services can be described as a concept that brings out the connection between human beings and the ecosystem on which their well-being depends. ES includes the elements that nature offers to society in various ways, such as the purification of water resources, timber production, food and other resources, and

recreational services (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). The following services are considered vital for human life and should be preserved: The ecosystem services framework can promote a systematic view of a given system about the elements that make up a system and its capacity to provide services to humans. For instance, green spaces offer many ecosystem services, which include visual appeal, shade, and recreation that help to mitigate health issues like obesity, cardiovascular disease, mental health issues, and heat stroke (Jennings et al., 2016).

Alterations in ecological structures and functions entail significant consequences for human health, and comprehending such alterations is essential for fostering health that considers the sustainability of human populations and the biosphere. Ecosystem services are provided through the influence of biophysical characteristics, ecological components, and processes that produce outputs for human use. Still, these services are not homogenous in space and time due to environmental quality, ecological changes, and socio-demographic shifts. For instance, green spaces are known to have positive impacts on physical and mental health; nevertheless, they are not accessible to everyone since some neighborhoods have well-kept parks and natural areas while others have none at all (Maas et al., 2006; Mitchell & Popham, 2008).

Biocentric, ecocentrism, and deep ecology theories establish the moral foundation for preserving ecology based on the importance and ethical obligation to safeguard it. These concepts partly preserve essential for human health and happiness, biological diversity, and ecological processes (Costanza et al., 1997). Parks and reserves, safeguarding threatened species, and ecosystem restoration are just a few ways one might help preserve wildlife. Protected sites, including marine protected areas, wildlife reserves, and national parks, help to prevent human and animal damage to species and environments. These areas are for the conservation of species and species genetic variation, scientific study, environmental education, and ecotourism. Besides, species threatened with extinction are protected through habitat rehabilitation programs, breeding of endangered species in captivity, and legal measures to enhance conservation and reduce the extinction rate.

It is also essential for ecological preservation to fix up ecosystems that have been damaged. Reforestation, building wetland areas, and restoring soil can fix up ecosystems physically, make them more diverse, and make them more resistant to environmental stresses. For example, to restore Florida's Everglades, the natural flow of water must be brought back, and habitat conditions must be improved to improve the lives of local wildlife and people.

Nevertheless, some inherent trade-offs and issues regarding ecological preservation have to be discussed. While increasing healthy, active lifestyles through park-based physical activity and stress relief, green spaces also increase pollen dispersal, which is unsuitable for allergy sufferers. In addition, the internal structure of the ecosystem services framework provokes different interpretations depending on the geographic scale and goals set for management. This continuous ambiguity as to how to measure impacts, to whom they should be distributed, and wherein the analysis of costs and benefits may become contentious requires the incorporation of environmental ethics into decision-making.

Environmental ethics offers a way of managing these issues by considering the moral implications of decisions and their impact on everyone and everything in the environment. Thus, ethical principles become a part of environmental policies and practices in society that help solve the trade-offs and challenges of preserving ecology and delivering ecosystem services. For instance, maintaining green spaces in urban surroundings implies avoiding plant species that aggravate allergies and suggesting leisure and mental health benefits.

The Role of Social Justice in Sustainable Development

To reconcile environmental preservation with economic development, well-considered environmental policies that consider long-term sustainability goals and social repercussions are necessary. This method considers all aspects of distributive justice, procedural justice, and ecological justice to guarantee the inclusion of everyone involved in environmentally sustainable management.

Environmental justice focuses on the inequitable share of ecological gains and losses among the various groups of people. This paper also posits that disadvantaged groups suffer from ecological risks, including

pollution and toxic wastes, more than they benefit from environmental assets like clean air and green areas (Bullard, 1990). In one instance, a study by Mohai, Pellow, and Roberts (2009) revealed that living close to manufacturing facilities and dumps increases the risk of environmental risks for Black and Hispanic populations as well as those with lower incomes.

Distributive justice, one of the many facets of social justice, focuses on properly distributing resources and chances within a society. In environmental questions, distributive justice guarantees that all people have equitable use of ecological goods and services such as water, air, and green areas and are shielded from environmental risks (Rawls, 1971). Research has shown that exposure to green spaces positively impacts physical and mental health. However, such exposure is unequal across the population, so many prosperous districts have more green areas than the less prosperous ones (Wolch et al., 2014). This way, the distribution of these resources forms part of measures that enhance social cohesiveness and the reduction of inequalities (Agyeman, 2003).

Procedural justice deals with how decisions are made and whether or not the less privileged groups in society, especially in environmental matters, are allowed to express themselves and their concerns are being heard (Young, 1990). The governance models involving the people in the environmental planning and management systems have improved the legitimacy and efficiency of environmental policies (Reed, 2008). For example, integrating the citizens in the planning process can result in better solutions for urban development since the citizens' point of view and their knowledge of the area will be considered (Forester, 1999).

Environmental justice, distributive justice, and procedural justice are the three forms of justice that work hand in hand to guarantee that sustainable development does not leave behind any group of people. Environmental justice entails working towards improving the ecological quality that has been poorly affected by minority groups. For instance, measures taken to control pollution in industries within densely populated areas are usually directed at those areas where the poor population is most affected by bad air quality (Jerrett et al., 2005).

Distributive justice takes the idea of fairness and applies it to the distribution of environmental resources and the gains made from them. All people and groups must have the basic requirements to live a healthy and sustainable life. These are the necessities of life, such as clean water, air, green areas, and economic resources for business and the growth of society. For example, policies to provide renewable energy sources, solar power, and wind power in the areas that lack electricity or have limited access contribute to solving energy disparities and environmental concerns (Carley & Konisky, 2020).

Procedural justice also focuses on the decision-making process and each participant's rights. Incorporating people's participation, predominantly minority ones, in environmental decision-making systems fosters legitimacy in environmental policies. Involving the public—public hearings and community advisory committees, among other things—guarantees that all points of view are considered and included in the decision-making process (Schlosberg, 2007).

Realizing sustainable environmental and social benefits calls for including social justice in environmentally friendly growth. Incorporating social aspects of ecological challenges makes it easier for policymakers and implementers to find fair and efficient solutions that will help improve the environmental situation as well as the quality of life of the population. For instance, projects that provide green space in urban areas for disadvantaged communities can boost physical and mental health, mitigate the effects of urban heat islands, and foster social inclusion (Jennings, Baptiste, & Osborne Jelks, 2017).

Prescribing social justice into sustainable development also involves the willingness to solve social and environmental injustices. This entails acknowledging and combating institutional racism for environmental racism like zoning, resource, service allocation, and power relations (Bullard, 1990). Using improved structures developed to resolve these fundamental issues, legislators and practitioners can enhance the welfare of all society contributors (Pellow & Brulle, 2005).

Thus, applying the ideas of environmental justice, distributive justice, and procedural justice is necessary to promote fair and equitable sustainable development benefiting everybody. The incorporation of social

aspects of ecological morality and environmental conservation guarantees that every person and community will be able to contribute and benefit from sustainable development. Growth in society and environmental protection work hand-in-hand to strengthen communities and create a fair and long-lasting future for subsequent generations.

Integrating Environmental Ethics, Ecological Preservation, and Social Justice for Sustainable Development

Fair resource management, environmental protection, and the search for society's well-being are at the heart of sustainable growth. These concepts overlap in supporting the sustainability agenda, which means that environmental policies are fair, efficient, and ethical. The integration of these principles responds to the current necessity of achieving harmony between people and the environment and fairness between individuals.

Environmental Ethics as the Moral Foundation

Environmental ethics is the basis of the protection of the environment and the rights of people. It assumes that nature is worth and should be preserved regardless of its usefulness to humanity and that people have moral responsibility for nature. This ethical standpoint goes against anthropocentrism, which presupposes that human needs and wants should dominate over the health of the ecosystems.

Biocentrism and ecocentrism are the two ethical theories cornerstone of this moral system. Biocentrism postulates that every organism should be right-bearing and valued morally (Goodpaster, 1978). This view takes ethical consideration to the next level by embracing animals, plants, and other life forms, fighting for certain species' extinction, and protecting ecosystems. In contrast, ecocentrism recognizes the worth of total ecosystems and their biotic and abiotic components (Leopold, 1949). It focuses on the interdependence of all elements in a system and the necessity to preserve the balance in an ecosystem.

Deep ecology goes one step further in demanding a dramatic transformation in the paradigms of human view so that the inherent value of life forms and natural processes is acknowledged (Naess, 1973). Deep ecology advocates for an ethos to preserve the integrity of the natural world, which calls for drastic changes in people's attitudes and behavior toward the surroundings. The moral basis for the preservation of species, the protection of environmental systems, and the continuation of ecosystems are these ethical values.

Ecological Preservation as a Practical Imperative

Environmental conservation is the implementation of ecological morality. This includes implementing measures that will help conserve biological diversity, environmental systems, and the sustainable utilization of natural resources. The idea of ecosystem services is the key to understanding the need to preserve ecosystems, as these are directly connected to people's needs and well-being.

ES refers to the vast array of values people derive from ecosystems, including provision services such as water purification, timber production, food, and recreational purposes (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). These services are essential in human existence and quality, hence underlying preservation needs. Such a framework as the ecosystem services promotes system thinking, as it identifies the elements of a given system and how they benefit people.

Conservation projects involve the development of protected habitats, implementing programs for the recovery of endangered species, and rehabilitating damaged ecosystems to safeguard biodiversity and lower human influence on terrestrial, aquatic, and marine environments. These areas are conserved for biological diversity and provide research, education, and tourism scope.

It is expected that cases will arise where the endangered species' protection includes preserving the species' natural environment, breeding in captivity, and legislation. They aim to reduce the rate of species loss and sustain the balance of ecosystems by targeting the species at the highest risk. Afforestation, water body construction, and soil rebuilding involve returning the ecosystem to its normal state and increasing the natural

world's capacity to withstand environmental pressures.

Social Justice as an Equitable Framework

Social justice deals with allocating resources and rights in society and how everyone can benefit from a healthy environment and be protected from degradation. Environmental justice, distributive justice, and procedural justice are the three principles that guarantee fairness and justice in sustainable development.

Environmental justice is a concept that points out the unfair distribution of environmental advantages and disadvantages to the various social groups. It is reported by Bullard (1990) that people of color suffer from unfair exposure to hazards like pollution and toxic waste and receive low access to environmental assets like clean air and green surroundings. To overcome such disparities, policy and intervention strategies must focus on the concerns of the deprived groups of people and engage them in the decision-making processes relating to the environment.

Distributive justice further applies justice in distributing the environmental resources and the benefits that come with it. Distributive justice is an essential component of sustainable development where all people and groups should be provided with the resources that enable them to lead healthy and sustainable lives. This consists of the availability of clean water, fresh air, green areas, and areas for economic development and social promotion. These resources should be well distributed for the benefit of everyone so that there is unity and people with differences are brought together (Agyeman, 2003).

Procedural justice relates to how environmental decisions are made, and the fairness of the processes used also characterizes it. Including all interested parties—especially marginalized groups—in ecological decision-making is crucial, strengthening the policies' legitimacy. All parties involved in the decision-making process are given a voice throughout, thanks to procedures like community advisory boards, public consultations, and involving beneficiaries in selecting the best action to resolve their issues (Reed, 2008).

Integrating Environmental Ethics, Ecological Preservation, and Social Justice

Environmental ethics, ecological conservation, and social justice are the main components of the sustainable development paradigm that ensures the equal and environmentally friendly use of resources. It also guarantees that environmental goals and objectives are moral, sound, and just for people and the environment, meeting the needs and respecting the rights of all the people and the ecosystems.

Environmental ethics offers the first principles for natural protection and justice for people. It focuses on man's inherent nature and moral responsibility to conserve nature and its resources. Ethical principles like biocentrism and ecocentrism can be used to develop policies and practices that enhance the welfare of the ecosystems.

The final principle is the reasonable utilization of these moral values in the ecological preservation of the current flora and fauna, or more precisely, in protecting the biotopes and sensible use of natural resources. Emphasizing the interactions between people and their surroundings, the ecosystem services method can help clearly show the need to maintain ecosystems for individuals' good health and well-being. People can protect the natural environment and its services through preservation measures like protected areas, species, and ecosystem renewal.

Environmental policies involve a fair share of risks and rewards given to different social groups, especially the vulnerable ones. Environmental justice, distributive justice, and procedural justice ensure that all people and groups enjoy a healthy environment and do not suffer from harm in it. This way, social justice can influence the improvement of the distribution of resources and the decision-making process about environmental policies and, therefore, increase their legitimacy and efficiency.

Applying these principles in sustainable development entails balancing the physical and social aspects of the environment. This includes acknowledging the role of structures and systems that continue to cause environmental injustices and understanding how they work, for instance, discrimination in zoning, limited access to resources and services, and power relations. In resolving these issues, policymakers and practitioners

can design better structures that benefit all societal stakeholders (Pellow & Brulle, 2005).

An example of this integration in practice is the provision of urban green space projects for people of color. Studies have indicated that greenery enhances physical and mental well-being, mitigates the urban heat island phenomena, and increases social connectivity (Jennings, Baptiste, & Osborne Jelks, 2017). Therefore, through well-coordinated green space projects in low-income areas, cities can improve the health of the deprived populace and the quality of life in those areas. Besides, most of these projects encourage people to be involved in the planning and implementing of environmental projects, hence empowering the community.

Another example is the provision of renewable energy resources to unserved/under-served societies. Measures that give people access to solar panels, wind turbines, and other clean energy cut energy costs, enhance environmental conservation, and address economic disparities (Carley & Konisky, 2020). These initiatives aim to ensure that the people in the low-income and minority groups can also benefit from the shift to the low carbon economy, as it is also a way of ensuring environmental justice.

Incorporating environmental ethics, ecological conservation, and social justice also requires a reconsideration of conventional economic paradigms and strategies. The “just sustainabilities” concept is a form of environmental sustainability that incorporates social justice since it aims to enhance people's living standards while respecting the carrying capacity of the supporting ecosystems (Agyeman et al., 2003). It supports the fair use of environmental assets and promotes social justice for sustainability.

For instance, policies supporting sustainable agricultural and food systems can help promote food security, generate local employment possibilities, and influence the environment through measures meant to raise food production and availability. These laws seek to assist rural people and small-scale farmers, lower social and economic inequality and concurrently promote ecological justice. Policies in sustainable transportation and infrastructure investments can similarly help lower greenhouse gas emissions, enhance air quality, and provide better transit for all people—including underprivileged groups.

Environmental ethics, ecological preservation, and social justice are critical elements of sustainable development that should be handled holistically and transdisciplinary. It involves the participation of legislators, experts, practitioners, and citizens in improving policies and procedures that address several aspects of sustainability. Therefore, this method produces better and fairer people- and planet-friendly solutions by raising a community's knowledge of environmental concerns' ethical, ecological, and social consequences.

Therefore, the principles of environmental ethics, ecology, and social justice should be incorporated to reach the concept of sustainable development that is both socially and environmentally responsible. This way, societies would be able to ensure that nature is valued for its own sake, people act responsibly towards the environment, and the social aspect of conservation is considered. It aims to establish a sustainable environment, improving social relations, resistance, and health within the society, thus making the world a better place for everyone.

CONCLUSION

Environmental ethical considerations, environmental conservation, and social justice are the critical premises of sustainable development. This approach affirms the worth of nature, calls for reasonable use, and provides a fair share in the costs and gains of environmental conservation. Environmental ethics gives the moral direction of preserving the environment and the rights of society by recognizing the rights of every individual and natural entity in the environment. The ethical principles are implemented in ecological preservation as the practical actions of conserving the biotic structures, defending the ecosystems, and preserving the natural resources, emphasizing the importance of ecosystem services in supporting human welfare. Social justice guarantees that environmental policies are well formulated to accommodate all needy groups and respect their rights. In this way, social justice optimizes the legitimacy and efficiency of environmental policies by providing proper resource distribution and including the affected population's representatives in decision-making.

This kind of integration is not a one-dimensional and reductionist process but a complex one that demands a broad framework that addresses the existing system's limitations and encourages cooperation between various stakeholders, such as policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and community members. Thus, societies should consider ecological and social aspects to develop efficient and fair solutions that will be useful for people and the environment.

Therefore, the merging of environmental ethics, ecological conservation, and social justice forms the basis of sustainable development in society. The broad framework is for environmental, social, and ecological balance, social inclusion, and community, individual, and global harmony to make the world a fairer and sustainable place.

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