

ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES AND ETHICS

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Summary

The activities of human beings are always affected by our values. Although the environmental crisis has been brought about by the activities of human beings, it is in fact a crisis of values. It is about the idea of realizing the values of the environment and accepting it.

1. Introduction

Should the natural environment be included into our system of values? Do humans have to act ethically towards life and nature? These are among humanity's more recent philosophical inquiries but they are vital to the future of the environment and sustainable development.

Humans create cultural values based on nature (i.e. natural values). However, people used to believe that only humans had values while the environment did not. We recognized only cultural values, but not environmental values. Moreover, we often realized cultural values by damaging environmental values. Those behaviors have caused the loss of environmental values and damage to the natural basis on which humans create cultural values, which has led to the problem of non-sustainability. It is under such circumstances that the issue of environmental values has arisen.

2. Nature's Part in the Creation of Civilization

Apart from reproducing ourselves, humans do not produce any material resources.

Human production simply changes the form of materials through technology so that humans can use them. This is a process of converting nature into civilization. In the process, while humans create cultures, nature participates in and supports the creation of civilization. Most cultural achievements by humans have been at the expense of the environment and natural resources. Now the loss in environmental values has started to harm human culture, and it is losing the support of nature. If nature no longer supports civilization, cultures will not be able to exist without nature's givens and the life-support system of the earth. The development of human civilization can be possible only in a healthy environment. Therefore, we must recognize the values of the environment.

Values are the soul of human activities. The environmental crisis is fundamentally a crisis of values. Therefore, the future of human sustainable development depends fundamentally on a change in our values, especially on our recognizing and preserving environmental values. We must give up our ways of production and lifestyles that realize cultural values at the expense of natural values. Using the great intelligence and creative power of humans, we should neither destroy natural values to realize cultural values, nor reduce cultural values to preserve natural values. Instead, we should achieve both ends. This is sustainable development.

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Biographical Sketches

Mouchang Yu, born in 1935, got his bachelor's degree from Wuhan University in 1962 and his master's degree from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). Since then, he has worked on natural dialectics in the Institute of Philosophy. Professor Yu is currently a professor, doctoral supervisor, and president of the Chinese Society for Environmental Ethics.

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