

Ecosophical Justice: Some Pathways

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Abstract

Ecosophical Justice reminds us that ecological predicament is not merely ecological, but it is a human problem which indeed requires a radical mutation in human attitude. In our attempt to control and manipulate nature, we have forgotten that we are natural beings, sustained by the same environment we seek to dominate.

Very significantly, our domination over earth has spilled over to the human beings too, particularly the poor who cry out for justice and liberation. The logic that exploits the earth and the poor seems to be one and the same. Ecological and justice concerns, therefore, are inseparable. Justice is the way of ecology.

However, as going a little beyond ecojustice, *ecosophical justice* reminds us, the question lies beyond a more or less refined ecology. It is a problem rooted in our ways of thinking, involving indeed a new attitude and perception about the earth, ourselves and also the divine. It signals the collective identity and destiny of all the three dimensions of reality.

The following pathways are suggested, in the light of this ecosophical vision, towards an enlightened, loving and healing involvement and possibly some policies, towards the realization of ecosophical justice.

Introduction

Tsunami in 2004.

It indeed awakened us, at least for a short while, to realize that nature is not singing any longer its sweet song. It has only begun to let out its cry.

On this disastrous occasion, we heard people's cry too, a cry out of helplessness, loss and pain.

Though the groanings of nature and the poor appeared to outsmart one another, yet they also fused into one – not, of course, in a harmonic symphony, but in a horrifying cacophany!

The cacophany had a theme too! It portrayed that the cosmic display and the human displacement are connected and that the humans are not the only players on world stage. It perhaps signaled the need and a new opportunity for a fresh and urgent vision of a cosmotheandric (cosmos-divine-

human) solidarity.

Ecosophical Justice is presented in this very cacophonous world context and situation. It reminds us, among other things, that ecological predicament is not merely ecological, but it is a human problem which indeed requires a radical mutation in human attitude. In our attempt to control and manipulate nature, we have forgotten that we are natural beings, sustained by the same environment we seek to dominate.

Very significantly, our domination has spilled over to the human beings too, particularly the poor who cry out for justice and liberation. The logic that exploits the earth and the poor seems to be one and the same. Ecological and justice concerns, therefore, are inseparable. Justice is the way of ecology.

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Herein I would like to make a mention of, what I call “Ecojustice.” Besides portraying justice as the way of ecology, ecojustice indeed attempts to represent ecology as the symbol of the struggles of the poor for regaining their lost dignity, their land resource, rice and freedom.

Stated differently, behind the ecological disaster we can sense the reduction of the *anthropos* to the reduction of a particular race, country and worldview which indeed prepares the ground for the appropriation for one self of the natural resources and consequently the very means for livelihood of the other. It is this inhuman and exploitative practice against the other that has spilled over and has become an ecological disaster. Hence it is only by deeply entering into the human (unaffected by restricted and restricting anthropocentrism) that we can arrive at a sound ecological universe.

However, as going a little beyond ecojustice, *ecosophical Justice* reminds us, further, that precisely because of our present state of human emergency and seriousness of the ecological situation, mere short-term solutions and technical stopgaps are insufficient. In other words, it is not enough to find ways by which we can more effectively or more “humanly” deal with the Earth, unless, at the same time, we find the Earth as another dimension of our very selves, sharing the same destiny. This, in short, constitutes the ecosophical awareness.

The word “ecosophy” as coined by the intercultural philosopher Raimon Panikkar, suggests that the question lies beyond a more or less refined ecology. It further reminds us that the present predicament is neither ecological, nor technical but a human one. It is a problem rooted in our ways of thinking. It involves our new attitude and perception about the earth, ourselves and also the divine and the collective identity and destiny of all the three dimensions of reality. It, in short, points to a cultural mutation.

It appears, therefore, we need a radical re-vision of reality which would make us aware that the world is the manifestation of the total cosmotheandric reality (Panikkar 1993 and Anthony Savari Raj 1998) which calls for a holistic participation. It involves indeed a cultural disarmament and innovation and a participatory common life in solidarity with fellow human beings and the earth. This, of course, is our human dignity and responsibility.

Understandably, this requires from us distance and involvement, contemplation and action, theory and praxis and, of course, an openness to the transcendent. Spontaneous and authentic actions for the welfare of the eco-human can flow only from a serene insight and right evaluation born of an ecosophical vision.

The following pathways are suggested, in the light of this ecosophical vision, towards an enlightened, loving and healing involvement, and possibly some policies, towards the realization of ecosophical justice.

Subverting Greed

The current phase of globalization in the global economy has not been very helpful to the lives and livelihood of many, particularly of poor countries. The elites in these nations and other forces within domestic economies also have a role to play in its shortcomings. Self interest and private gain have become the guiding factors in all sectors of life. Greed has come to be a social sickness. True, it has always existed in the world, but now we have given it an official legitimation and approval. The media’s appreciation of the individuals who can muster millions and millions when the poor struggle for even a single meal a day, is a clear example of Greed’s sanctification in society. (Muzaffar 2002, pp. 199-219). A glorification of neoliberalism, the practices of financial markets and currency speculation are the in-thing today. They are praised because of their show of profit. A sheer speculation in currency can bring an instant profit and destroy economies of many poor nations. (Muzaffar 1998, pp. 10-2). Greed can not only devastate the lives of people of poor countries, but also their environments. The rich natural resources are abducted to the human consumptions and their extravagant lifestyles. (Schor, 2001, p. 56).

If Greed is the root cause, it needs to be subverted through ways that are possible. We like to indicate a few paths. The first is the wealth distribution: The world is not deprived of wealth, but we see how it has concentrated on few individuals and corporations. What is lacking is a fair and generous distribution. Perhaps, we need to restructure or even think of new global institutions and initiatives to realize this goal. Secondly, we need to give a serious thought to the advertising industry which is at the service of the power and wealthy and which advocates rampant global consumerism. The general public, affected as they are, can demand a change of motive and character of such advertisements. And thirdly, we need to

establish a mechanism which would eliminate currency speculation and reform stock market which have indeed made money into a commodity for profit through manipulation. Obviously all these efforts have to be a combined effort of the economists, religionists, sociologists, development planners, and others who are better versed in the workings of the global economy. Furthermore, there has to be a readiness and boldness to meet the strenuous challenges and opposition that would come from the powers that be. (Knitter et al. 2002, pp. 166-7).

Subserviating Money

Another task of ecosophical justice is subserviating the role that money plays in our lives. True, we cannot imagine human relationships without money which in fact has become "the desacralized heir of a monotheistic infinite God." (Panikkar 1982, p. 29).

But what has happened in our times is that it has indeed become a "totalitarian tyrant," penetrating all aspects of human life, making all of them totally dependent on it. Quantification has become order of the day. (Panikkar 1996, pp. 50-1).

Modern economy uses money as its tool. Self-interest is the guiding factor here. Public good takes a secondary consideration as private gain and the pursuit of wealth assume a paramount importance. Making a quick profit as much as possible is the guiding factor. But it appears that the very nature of money seems to have that orientation. "It is a natural exigency of money to go from minus to plus: growth, profit, more. Like water it flows downwards in one single direction. So it is not simply a question of the greed of multinational corporation; it is the very nature of thing itself." (Panikkar 1982, p. 29).

We cannot think of a better example for this than the practice of money speculation. Money speculation indeed makes money into a commodity of profit making the entire financial system volatile. Thus a widespread human suffering proceeds from a handful of currency speculators. "It is because of this volatile capital that currencies have plunged, stock markets have collapsed, and economies have disintegrated, leaving in their trail millions of unemployed and impoverished people, as happened in East Asia in 1997 & 1998." (Muzaffar 1998, pp. 10-2).

Like the modern economy the technological civilization too affirms that power consists in having more and more money. "Technical

civilization has identified power with money, but power is also to know, to love and to have. However, the ultimate question regarding power is whether power is also 'to be.' If being is only a condition for power the answer is no, but the answer is yes if being is itself power. We may not need money but we may need power for the human household or economic order." (Panikkar 1982, p. 28).

In the context of the absolute power that money seems to wield, the following may be thought of as possible efforts to subserviate it. Since money plays an important role in our daily dealings, we could consider ways to subserviate it in our relationships, beginning with ourselves and our family. It is important to realize that there are experiences in our day to day life, beauty, love and so on, which money cannot exhaust or buy. Those experiences are unique precisely because they cannot be repeated or quantifiable. A realization of this would indeed result in a better, loving and respectful relationships with our near and dear ones. Hence the need to set most of human values off-limits from the power of money.

Subserviating money has its importance also in our cultural, particularly educational, areas. Art is by which we articulate our lives. "Art is that which art-iculates life and brings it all together by the "artistic" creation of the person. The meaning of life is to make a work of art of each of us." (Panikkar 1996, p. 54). Hence we would give more importance to arts and shall resist the temptation of looking for the fruits of artistic activities only in terms of quantified results. This bears an important relevance to our modern sense of education which is only oriented towards "profitability." We will encourage children and students to take up more what goes well with their ability and inclination, rather than forcing them to undergo profitable disciplines like medicine, engineering and communications. Finally, since money speculation results in destruction of economies of so many developing countries, we will discover ways to establish a mechanism which would eliminate currency speculation and reform stock market which have indeed made money into a commodity for profit through manipulation.

Subjugating Poverty

One of the major challenges to ecosophical justice is the abject poverty and widening disparities between the rich and the poor nations. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a few has indeed resulted in a situation of haves and have-

nots. In a world of plenty, plenty die every day due to lack of food and other poverty-driven situations. The institutions which have purported to safeguard the interest and well-being of all nations have not quite succeeded in their mission, especially in favor of the poor and disadvantaged. It is important to note that the worst thing about poverty is its compulsion on the poor to surrender their self-respect for the sake of survival.

The situation we have mentioned above does not have to be this way. The crisis of poverty, of course, is severe and it is claiming millions of lives, but certainly it is not unsolvable. Poverty may be reduced and subjugated and prosperity may come for all with some collaborative efforts. Panikkar's inspiration regarding "cosmotheandric solidarity" indeed can lighten our path. Only when our actions are guided by this sense of solidarity they would indeed be effective and far reaching. We like to summarize and consider here some steps of commitment offered by a world-renowned economist Jeffrey Sachs who in our times has indeed made a tremendous effort to put extreme poverty onto the global agenda. (Sachs 2005). In sum, he focuses on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals are the internationally agree-upon plan to reduce extreme poverty, disease, and hunger by the year 2015. Making a plea to "give till it heals," he reminds the wealthy nations like the U.S. to keep its promise of assisting the world's poor who are "too poor to stay alive," and who, with a little help, could even "thrive." Sachs suggests the following nine steps. (Sachs 2005, p. 54).

1. *Committing*: Personally and collectively we have to commit ourselves to the task of "Making Poverty History." One day we should be able to tell our children that there was something called poverty that existed in the past.

2. *Adopting*: Besides the above commitment, we need to adopt a concrete plan of action like the U.N.'s Millennium Development Goals. The challenge before us is to follow up these goals.

3. *Raising*: Raising our voices to assert and demand our rights is an important task of our times. In this the democracies of poor countries should give a collective call to action.

4. *Redeeming*: When a promise for assistance is somewhat neglected, perhaps there is need for that commitment to be remembered. U.S. being the richest and most powerful country in the world can honor its commitment to give 0.7% of its national income to the MDGs. In this way, it can

ensure its own security and well-being and also redeem its role of being a leader even in matters of lending assistance.

5. *Rescuing*: The IMF and World Bank should make efforts to redeem themselves from being helpers and agents only to the rich and powerful nations. With all their talents and expertise, they should be ready to rescue the poor nations in ways that are possible.

6. *Strengthening*: The role of U.N can be strengthened to make it more operational, especially in its role of ending poverty. More authority could be acceded to the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) to perform their roles at grass root level.

7. *Harnessing*: Time has come to direct the efforts of science and technology towards the concerns and priorities of the poor. They should be prevented from becoming tools of the rich and powerful.

8. *Promoting*: There is a link between poverty and destruction of nature. When farms are productive, there is less need for destroying forests. In other words, one need not look for a forest land for agriculture, when farmland itself is made productive by efforts of sustainable development.

9. *Personalizing*: The above suggestions to end poverty will be effective only when we personalize them. In other words, we become agents of action in our own ways with a deep desire also for a collaborative action with others.

Submerging Consumerism

Another area which needs our attention and action is the unbridled consumerism. Sure, accumulation of goods is important only to the extent that it boosts quality of life and well-being. But the uncontrolled consumerism certainly involves competitiveness and a focus on the element of having rather than being. "I am (worth) what I *am*, Having, on the other hand, requires competitiveness: I am (worth) what I *have*." (Panikkar 1982, p. 29). Without elaborating much, we would like to briefly discuss the repercussions of consumerism on three areas: the social relationships, the natural environment, and the poor of our society. (Panikkar 1982, p. 29).

An overall well-being does not seem to be the focus of consumerism. What it focuses and promotes are wealth and accumulation of goods

which do not necessarily lead to a higher quality of life. Human experience teaches that joy is not the result of richness and consumption of goods. A satisfying social relationship can not be obtained by things ever available in new forms in the market. Sustainable environment is another casualty of consumerism. The product and marketing and the disposal of used consumer goods have a role to play in the depletion and degradation of natural resources. Oceans, forests and biodiversity have been greatly affected by the consumerist spirit. Meeting the basic needs of people, particularly of the poor has never been the concern of consumerism. It is a very contrasting and humiliating picture indeed that some can delight in luxury and ostentation of wealth when the majority suffer from poverty and misery without even being able to meet the basic minimum needs of life.

In the context and repercussions of consumerism mentioned above, it is clear and even imperative that societies should shift from an emphasis on consumption to an emphasis on well-being. (Gardner *et al* 2003). As a response by way of action, we like to indicate the following: nurturing relationships, facilitating healthy choices, learning to love in harmony with nature, and tending towards the basic needs of all. (Gardner *et al* 2003, pp. 164-79).

Consumerism, first of all, may be submerged by a promotion of social relationships and by orienting life around “human-spaces,” that is, people and communities. A better social relationship and interaction between people will reduce their over dependence on goods for personal joy and fulfillment. Festivals, outdoor markets, pedestrian zones, and so on could offer their contribution here. Promotion of seasonal and local products would bring closer the producers and consumers of certain localities. This appears important as there is a growing tendency of not wanting to eat what grows in our own localities and countries. As Panikkar rightly remarks, “I think that now we do not eat food but ‘kilometers.’” (Panikkar, 1996b, p. 4). In this context, choice of food would imply more than a selection among the given choices. More basically it would stand for the option to increase the quality of life, at times, even by our refusal to consume. This might even result in better attitudes and rethinking of the consumer goods companies towards the consumption needs of the consumers.

Environmental awareness and education could be yet another way to submerge consumerism. Besides reiterating the common identity between

and destiny of the earth and human beings, the awareness initiatives could focus on the sources and quality of water that we use, the disposal of garbage and their ill-effects, and so on.

Well-being in a society can never come about if the basic needs of people are not met. Lack of food, housing, healthcare, and education are indeed pressing problems which need to be addressed as early as possible. Among numerous ways suggested to tackle the above issue, an equal distribution of the resources in each country is one. This means that we have to cultivate, for instance, crops from our particular countries and build houses with native materials. (Panikkar, 1996b, p. 4). This could indeed be a good way toward self-sufficiency and self-supporting of the poor.

Subventing Religion- Economics Conversation

Well-being of all is the goal of both religion and economics. Perhaps both have fallen short of this ideal and therefore can resolve help each other in renewing it. We are indeed reminded here of Panikkar’s “sacred secularity.” For our purpose now we like to focus more on the contribution that religion could make to economics. This conversation can be facilitated only if religion is able to accept the global market as an important religion of our time. In and through the way the market works and in the way it is presented to people, it evinces all the qualities that are usually associated with religion and religious claims. (Loy 2000, pp. 15-28). and is even ready to have an “interreligious” dialogue with it. As we know the authority of the market is presented in our times as dogma. The belief that “outside the market, no salvation” makes us indeed believe how much the market has been functioning as a religion with its own absolute claims. Obviously, if there has to be any fruit in the dialogical enterprise that we are suggesting between the market and other religions, both sides have to be ready to learn and change. (Knitter 2002, pp. 9-10).

Besides the values of caring, sharing, justice, and the “middle-path” between total indulgence and absolute asceticism, the traditional religions can also offer a tremendous inspiration to the global market regarding the reciprocity, interconnectedness and interdependence of all reality. We are all dependent upon and connected to one another. The demand made, thus, on the global economy is that the rich should help the poor not merely in terms of charity, but in terms of necessity. By sharing with the poor, the rich

themselves are going to be the beneficiaries, because all of us are connected. It is “other serving” without denying the importance of serving oneself.

Another traditional religious value of “restraint” could have a tremendous influence on the global market. And in fact recycling efforts are already beginning to be seen as a matter of spirituality. “At the present stage of industrial and economic development and in view of the present consumption patterns of the wealthy nations, recycling is an important factor in long-term ecological balance, even though the individual person or a particular family has little direct gain from it. Recycling efforts are unselfish gestures costing a small amount of inconvenience, yet many good people do not see it as a matter of spirituality, a matter affecting their relationship to God.” (Hellwig 1999, pp. 83-4).

The value of restraint and recycling not only will help in reducing the ecological damage, it will have an impact on economy. It will also bring about a change in the official ecological policies of the policy makers. (Knitter 2002, pp. 160-1).

Besides the practice of relation and restraint, the religions can get more involved in promoting grass root activism in peaceful ways. More importantly, they can actively engage in expressing their voices of protest, especially through their main stream media, their stand and dissatisfaction against policies of institutions (like, for example, the WTO or IMF) that affect directly and directly people and environment. (Knitter 2002, p. 168).

It is encouraging to note that the policy makers realize more and more that religion cannot be ignored and religious values are accorded a better consideration in the contemporary global policy making. (Douglas et al. 1994).

We recollect here that the World Bank held a dialogue with the world’s religious faiths in London in 1998. The purpose of the conversation was to encourage “better understanding between development agencies and the world faiths in defining and delivering development programs.” (“World Faiths and Development Dialogue” 1998).

Sublimating the People- Ecological Movements

The role that the people and ecological movements could play in countering problems of ecojustice can never be ignored or minimized. We only like to

highlight here some points of action which would enable sublimite these movements.

First of all, since we may face “the cancer of individualism,” (Panikkar 1982, p.32), we need to work an alternative model of development. The contemporary dominant model of development is guided by the philosophy of self-interest and personal ambition as the way to progress and development.

This alternative model, however, can be effective only through collaborative and solidarity movements which aim to defend the poor and the earth. “Recovering animism,” (Panikkar 1996, p. 56) i.e. the experience that everything is alive could be one important guiding factor of these movements. “No ecological recovery of the world will ever succeed until and unless we consider the Earth as our own body and the body as our own self... The true ecological movement is not a new technological way of exploiting the earth more rationally and more lastingly. If there has to be an eco-philosophy worthy of the name, it entails a different relationship with the Earth altogether. The earth is neither an object of knowledge nor of desire. The Earth is part of ourselves—of our won Self. That is why I have taken the liberty of speaking (and writing) of *ecosophy*... Peace with the earth excludes victory over the earth, submission or exploitation of the earth to *our* exclusive needs. It requires collaboration, synergy, and a new awareness.” (Panikkar 1996, p.7).

Obviously this would imply a greater openness to other kosmologies and taking other world visions seriously.

Further, these movements would insist on the “economic system to take people into account, not things.” (Panikkar, 1996b, p.3). Our collective enterprise can also endeavor to control and check the production and marketing of goods, and indeed make a demand on the producers to be conscious of and considerate on the well-being of the masses and the earth. Since the producers and promoters of consumerism depend very much on the consumers, a protest from the consumers would indeed rethink and redress their manner, distribution and goal of consumer goods with the larger good of society in mind.

Among the movements, we would like to single out the movements of youth. In the formation and nurturing of these movements, the educational institutions can play a vital role. They can instill in the youth a critical sense regarding prevailing consumerist culture and a greater social sensitivity

and exposure to the struggles of the poor. Assisted by a deep social, political and ecological consciousness, and endowed by the capacity for sacrifice, the youth shall positively devote themselves towards the well-being of the earth and the humans.

Submitting to the Self

All the above efforts of commitment indeed presuppose and indeed start from the self. Our efforts to subvert greed, to submerge consumerism and so on can be really effective only if they come out of a transformation that begins with one self, since the self and the external environment exist in symbiosis. (Panikkar 1994, p. 5). Panikkar states: "I think that there is no other way to begin, but to begin with ourselves, with our style of life, but also with a sense of priorities in the same style of life, all the while realizing the complexity of the problem. I don't think there is cause for total despair but rather for total commitment to overcome the otherwise incoming despair." (Panikkar 1982, p. 36).

Turning to the self, however, is not escapism or taking a private refuge in the self or to indulge in selfishness. It only means that we exercise self-confidence on one hand, and exercise decentralization on the other. This self-confidence represents the conviction that "we are the center of the universe, because as a microcosm we reflect the whole," (Panikkar 1996, p. 52) and "Each Man (be it the chief, the clan or the people) is humanity and the human is for us the meeting point between the cosmic and the divine." (Panikkar 1982, p. 33). This indeed gives a different orientation to the question of decentralization which is much stressed in our times. "We can only be a center when we have no dimension of our own and are open to an ever-greater circumference. The center is stifled the moment it draws a circumference upon itself. This is the reason of the paradox that in order to decentralize and disarm culture we need more and more centered individuals and self-confident human societies. A self-reliant economy, for instance, means not self-sufficiency, but an equitable interdependent net of markets." (Panikkar, 1996, p. 52). In other words, decentralization does not amount to losing the real center, but it involves an awareness that we regain the center within ourselves. It is a centralisation on personal dignity on one hand and openness to other dimensions of reality, guided by the conviction that we are not alone in all our task. (Panikkar 1982, p. 33). Decentralization amounts to selflessness which will allow us neither to be guided by any selfish or any one particular

interest, nor will permit us to be swayed only by present urgings. (Francis X. D'Sa 1980, p. 346).

Self-confidence and decentralization have several other implications towards our commitment to ecosophical justice. We would like to mention only a couple of them here. First of all, self-confidence gives us courage, joy and confidence to go ahead with our personal and collective responsibilities towards the welfare of the world, despite all unjust structures of the system. It alone will deny the joy of allowing the oppressive system from overpowering and jeopardizing our efforts. Secondly, decentralization involves individuals, working in unison, to form and shape societies. "Great social forces are the mere accumulation of individual actions. Let the future say of our generation that we sent forth mighty currents of hope, and that we worked together to heal the world." (Sachs 2005, p. 54).

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