

Environmentalism, Indigenous Wisdom, and Practical Ethics (Volume 6, Number 1, April 2020)

The discourse on Environmental Philosophy is rooted on anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric principles. Contemporary scholars have advanced varying views in this discourse that range from anthropocentrism, biocentrism and egocentrism. However, research on indigenous knowledge systems and practices reveals that nature has a reciprocal and dynamic relationship with humanity. In this regard, environmental stewardship arguments, particularly its link to anthropocentrism, are challenged. Meanwhile, Deep Ecology, with its emphasis on the appropriation of non-western beliefs, needs to be grounded on concrete and practical approaches.

This volume consists of five articles that explore alternative perspectives on the concepts of sustainability, development and environmental ethics. The authors pay particular attention to the collective wisdom that many IP communities have preserved and practiced amidst the modern onslaught of corporate intrusion and influence. The topics in this volume range from Biopiracy, Deep Ecology, Rainforestation, Ecological Philosophy, and the relationship between Stewardship principle and indigenous beliefs. The arguments in each of these articles present a positive contribution to the current discourse on environmentalism and applied ethics.

In "Biopiracy in the Philippines: Why a *Sui Generis* System should be adopted in Philippine Law for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge: An Argument from Entitlement Theory and a Libertarian Conception of Justice," Enrique Benjamin R. Fernando III observes that many forms of traditional knowledge harnessed for generations by the indigenous communities in the Philippines are "exploited by the existing patent system because of gaps in our legal framework: the ambiguity of the Intellectual Property Code, the lack of biopiracy laws, poor implementation of international treaties, and the absence of a system for documenting indigenous innovations." Given these social and legal problems, he aims to construct a framework based on entitlement theory and libertarian justice that exposes the flawed reasoning implicit in the philosophical arguments justifying what he calls "patentability

claim”, which maintains that “the intellectual property of pharmaceutical firms is patentable, while the traditional use of endemic species is not.” He concludes by arguing for a *sui generis* system that aims to protect indigenous intellectual property rights.

In “Intimations of Deep Ecology in the Cordilleran Environmental Worldview”, Oscar D. Sison Jr. takes off from the principles of Deep Ecology, which recognize the significant contribution of indigenous knowledge in providing practical solutions to modern environmental problems. He argues that “the Cordilleran indigenous environmental worldview carries an ecological character that coincides with the deep ecology platform.” Drawing from their ways of life, knowledge of biodiversity, and forest management, he avers that the indigenous peoples in the Cordillera region demonstrate an ecological consciousness that is both holistic and non-anthropocentric. Their understanding of their deep relationship with the natural world is subsumed in their concept of land as well as in its management. He further argues that such indigenous ways must be explored in view of the search for sustainable ways of relating with the natural world, which depart from the dualistic and rationalistic approaches.

Meanwhile, in “Rainforestation as an Instrument for Sustainable Development: Narratives from the Nagkahiusang Katawhan sa Esperanza (NAKASE) of Pilar, Camotes Island, Cebu,” Fritz Geraldine Y. Fernandez and Guiraldo C. Fernandez, Jr. describe and analyse their narrative study with the members of the Nagkahiusang Katawhan sa Esperanza (NAKASE) - a people’s organization in Cebu - to see how they construe Rainforestation as an instrument for sustainable development. Rainforestation, an innovation that was adopted by the Visayas State University (Baybay, Leyte) since the 1990s, is designed to make use of unproductive lands by planting native tree species which are not widely used in the Philippine government’s reforestation program. Gathering from the participants’ narratives, they infer that sustainable development can only be achieved when people in the area share and collectively participate in achieving the goals and purposes of the program. They argue that “when people realize that they need to save the environment in order to save themselves, they would naturally do whatever is required of them to do their share in the name of environmental and self-preservation.” They also recognize that there is a greater chance for the program to

prosper if accompanied by activities that also bring economic advantages. Aside from the environmental and economic benefits, they observe that the Rainforestation adoption by NAKASE has also caused the emergence of women empowerment, gender equality, and equal division of labor among the members of the organization.

Moreover, in “Communing with Mother Earth: Indigenous Way to Care and Manage the Ecosystem,” Rogelio P. Bayod argues that the fight against modern environmental crises should have the support and participation of the local people, particularly the indigenous. Drawing from the ecological philosophy of Vandana Shiva and Satish Kumar, and from his personal experiences with several indigenous communities, he discusses the role of the indigenous peoples in managing the ecosystem autonomously and without the encroachment of profit-oriented corporations. He takes issue on the fact that a lot of these corporations intrude in IP territories without the proper consent from the locals, which has resulted in the destruction of their culture and environment. He claims that “to be able to save Mother Earth from further destruction, it is necessary that indigenous peoples and communities must have a voice in the design, deliberation, implementation and monitoring of policies and programs related to farm and environmental management.”

Finally, in “Stewardship of Creation: Towards Indigenous Filipino Environmental Principles,” Danilo N. Keh Jr. makes a contribution to the discourse on indigenous environmental principles using the lens of traditional Filipino values. He argues that stewardship and ecological principles must be connected to the people’s indigenous beliefs not least because culture plays an important role in the formation of ecological values. For him, “indigenous Filipino values have much to offer in the mission to save the world...As Filipinos are group oriented, a *sakop*-based environmental principle will help them acknowledge nature as home (*tahanan*). Animistic traces of the past encourage them to treat nature as *kapwa*; to imbibe the *sapat* mentality. It impels the concept of solidarity (*pakikisama*) and the virtue of *hiya* as environmental sensitivity. More so, it establishes the dialogical relationship between persons and nature as seen in the concept of *utang na loob*.”