

Nature and Life

Essays on Deep Ecology and Applied Ethics



Md. Munir Hossain Talukder

Preface by Holmes Rolston III

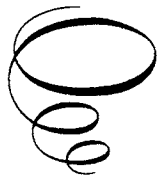
Nature and Life:

*Essays on Deep Ecology
and Applied Ethics*

By

Md. Munir Hossain Talukder

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Nature and Life: Essays on Deep Ecology and Applied Ethics

By Md. Munir Hossain Talukder

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2018 by Md. Munir Hossain Talukder

Cover photograph by Zaheen A-Rahman

Cover designed by Shabnam Akhter & Zaheen A-Rahman

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-0920-6

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0920-7

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface.....	vii
Holmes Rolston III	
Acknowledgements.....	xi
Chapter One.....	1
Environmental Crisis and Deep Ecology	
Chapter Two.....	11
Self-realization: The Basic Norm of Deep Ecology	
Chapter Three.....	30
Self, Nature, and Cultural Values	
Chapter Four.....	48
Companionship with Nature: Asian Perspectives	
Chapter Five.....	65
Intimacy, Admirability, and Virtue: A Critical Analysis of Slote's View	
Chapter Six.....	76
Virtue Ethics and the Human-Environment Relationships	
Chapter Seven.....	84
Ethics in Health Care: Inducement	
Chapter Eight.....	95
The Concept of "Person" in Bioethics	
Chapter Nine.....	102
Patient-Physician Relationship in Bangladesh	
Chapter Ten.....	123
Informed Consent and the Patients of Bangladesh	

Chapter Eleven	137
Developing a Context-Sensitive Patient–Physician Relationship Model	
Chapter Twelve	150
Multiculturalism and Minority Rights: A Defense of Geo-Cultural Identity	
Chapter Thirteen.....	172
Is Professional “Ethical Expertise” Possible?	
Bibliography.....	183
Index.....	195

PREFACE

HOLMES ROLSTON III

Munir Talukder is an environmental philosopher in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is commonly regarded as one of the lesser developing nations, with many in poverty, so those of us in the developed West might not expect an environmental philosopher from that nation to be a deep ecologist. Munir Talukder comes as something of a surprise. But here he is.

Bangladesh has been making significant progress fighting poverty, so considering their development goals is timely. Talukder argues for a complete system of environmental values, both intrinsic and instrumental. He takes his inspiration from Arne Naess, Norwegian philosopher in one of the most developed nations on Earth. Nevertheless, Naess found the Western lifestyle, for all its wealth, incomplete and distorted.

Naess wrote: "Progress has in all seriousness been measured by the rate of energy consumption and the acquisition and accumulation of material objects. What seems to better the material prerequisites for 'the good life' is given priority without asking if life is experienced as good" (See Chapter 1). Westerners had become worried about the *standard of living* instead of the *quality of life*.

Now it can seem quite rational for a philosopher in a developing nation to wish to listen to a powerful critic of developed nations. However, Bangladesh might be better off seeking a higher quality of life rather than attempting to imitate those Westerners whose search for wealth has actually left them impoverished. The rich countries too are filled with poor people—often economically and often also in this deeper sense of poor.

Nor is it only one somewhat eccentric philosopher like Arne Naess who has been asking about the quality of life in developed, over-developed countries. The ethics of development is a live philosophical issue globally.

Global inequalities in income increased in the 20th century by orders of magnitude out of proportion to anything experienced before. The distance between the incomes of the richest and poorest country was about 3 to 1 in 1820, 35 to 1 in 1950, 44 to 1 in 1973, and 72 to 1 in 1992 (United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP), 2000, p.6).

In 2017, this may have reached 100 to 1.

Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize winning economist, has been concerned about “focusing on production and prosperity as the essence of progress, treating people as the means through which that productive process is brought about rather than seeing the lives of people as the ultimate concern and treating production and prosperity merely as means to those lives” (Sen, 2004, p.41). The primary objective of development should be the increased enrichment of people’s lives—the quality of their lives, their well-being.

Amartya Sen refers to this as people developing their “capabilities”. Talukder finds this already in Naess when he states: “Naess maintains that human beings have the interest of preserving their existence. However, this interest is basically the realization of their ‘inherent potentialities’” (p. 14). Such wisdom about making a life beyond making a living does go back millennia in the West: “A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12.15). “Thou shalt not covet” is one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20).

Talukder is well versed in ancient Greek philosophy. See his insights into how Plato’s ideas of self-development and Aristotle’s anticipation of “biocentric holism” figure into his deep ecology. He is likewise comfortable moving from East to West and back again (See his Chapters 2, 3, and 4). He analyzes the “self–nature relation in both Western and Eastern cultural traditions”. Although the West has exaggerated the differences between humans and nature, Talukder further argues that, both West and East, “the common cultural value ‘identification’ can be demonstrated to build up a harmonious coexistence with nature” (p. 30).

In the West, Arne Naess, as we have noted, emphasized a self-realized identification with nature in that, “Deep ecology considers all organisms, plants, and so forth, as a ‘total-field image’. So, deep ecology dissolves the ‘man-in-environment’ concept and establishes a more symbiotic relationship; a relationship which is intrinsically valuable and based on an enlightened principle ‘the equal right to live and blossom’” (pp. 13-14).

In the East, “Buddhism persistently emphasizes meditative awareness about the interconnectedness of all life forms” (p. 26). “The Hindus are alive to their environment in which they live. They have respect for the flora and fauna. They believe in the ecological balance of creation” (p. 35). Likewise, the Chinese have a “conception of dynamic, mutually constitutive, internal relatedness” (p. 37). Talukder is fully aware of the tensions and contradictions between East and West (pp. 30-32), but he returns to Naess

illustrating that there are common values that the West and East share which can be used when seeking ecological harmony (pp. 41ff).

I once myself asked the question whether the East can help teach the West how to value nature and, with regard to this, I found Talukder's analysis of my own worries insightful (pp. 41ff).

Seeking such identification and relatedness to our environment, the issue of how much and to whom needs to be clarified. Talukder next worries about a position called "balanced caring" (Chapter 5). Perhaps no one will object to "balanced caring", but no one will know how to do it without further guidance. Balanced caring, the argument further proceeds, means giving more attention to "intimate caring (our concern for near and dear) and humanitarian caring (our concern for people in general)" (p. 67).

One advocate, Michael Slote, claims, "it is morally good to care more for intimates than other people. In fact, caring more for intimates is a moral requirement for virtuous people." He adds that, "[o]ne can and should care more about some friends or relations than about others" (p. 67). There is an old adage: "charity begins at home." Slote has modified his account somewhat to allow for supererogation. Those who care for distant others have in a "most praiseworthy way gone beyond the call of duty" (p. 74).

This scheme of priorities and duties, of course, leaves caring for the natural world at the bottom of the list, so Talukder needs to refute, even reverse, such priority. "In the reverse account, the caring person is not only caring for those who are closer to their heart but also for those who are less close. In fact, the latter is more favorable. Thus, according to our closeness scale, favoring the environment rather than favoring oneself is a virtuous character trait. Eventually, this account could contribute significantly to the broader moral perspective, such as the relationship between humans and nature" (p. 72).

Talukder concludes with his account of "virtue ethics and the human-environment relationships" (Chapter 6). Yes, we may need to recover some old virtues, in both the West and East, but we also need to discover some new virtues: participation in the intrinsic values in nature in an ecological mode. Perhaps readers from the West will think we do not need to go to Bangladesh to learn this. Talukder agrees, since he takes his inspiration from Arne Naess. But readers from both the East and West will be surprised (as we remarked at the beginning) to hear this so forcefully from a keen and insightful Bangladesh philosopher.

References

- Sen, Amartya, 2004. "Development as Capability Expansion," in Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and A. K. Shiva Kumar, eds., *Readings in Human Development: Concepts, Measures and Policies for a Development Paradigm*, 2nd ed., New Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2000. *Human Development Report 2000*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

This volume explores some recent thoughts and trends in environmental philosophy and applied ethics. The topics selected here are contemporary and offered in academic programs across the globe. This book is an essential reference work for those who are keen to conduct detailed research within the fields of environmental philosophy, environmental humanities, culture, public health, applied ethics, bioethics, and political philosophy, as well as the general reader interested in the ethical and philosophical issues that are transforming and touching our lives. The book uniquely focuses both western and non-western approaches.

"I once myself asked the question whether the East can help teach the West how to value nature. I found Talukder's analysis of my own worries insightful."

Holmes Rolston III

University Distinguished Professor and Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Colorado State University, USA

"The author gives a clear and instructive overview of the attitudes to self and nature in the Western (Greco-Roman), as well as the Eastern (Indian and Chinese) traditions, starting with the environmental problems facing humanity and modern philosophers' attempts to cope with them, in particular the deep ecology of Arne Naess. He focuses on identification as a value that is common to all traditions."

Olav Asheim

Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Classics, History of Arts and Ideas, University of Oslo, Norway

Md. Munir Hossain Talukder, PhD, is a Professor of Philosophy at Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh. He received his PhD in Comparative Environmental Philosophy and Ethics from the National University of Singapore and a Master's degree in Applied Ethics from Linköping University, Sweden, and Utrecht University, the Netherlands. He has published several journal articles on bioethics, political philosophy and environmental ethics, and served as a member of the editorial boards of various academic journals. His work *Self, Nature, and Cultural Values* was translated into Italian as *Una Nuova 'Filosofia' Ambientale* [A New Environmental 'Philosophy']. As Adjunct Faculty, he also teaches at North South University, Bangladesh.

978-1-5275-0920-7

www.cambridgescholars.com

Cover image *The Door to Life*

© Zaheen A-Rahman, 2018

