

ETHICS OF EARTH

Foreword

We now well know what man is: he is an animal, wholly integrated in nature cycles. He feeds, grows, has cubs and die in the same way as other mammals. His behaviour too is generally similar to other more similar animals'. The gap of genetic information between man and chimp is less than one and half per cent.

The knowledge that our species wholly belongs to Nature should be a source of great happiness: we were freed from an heavy useless weight. But this was not the result, almost in Western culture. Not for now. In current language, in ethics, in law, man is still viewed as *opposed* to animal idea. What is above written does not *necessarily* mean that man is *only* an animal.

In Western culture, and therefore now almost all over the world, our species still is viewed not as a part of the Biosphere, but as an *outer* element that is the source of any value. The word *environment* often means "man environment": mankind remains the only reference for any ethic value. The so-called "environmentalists" usually speak about "to keep well our home", or "to maintain the everyone's estate", to well keep the Earth for future generations, and so on. Man is the obvious reference. Instead we know to-day that man *is not in the situation of a house-dweller*, but is like a cell group in an Organism, with a complete dependence on it. The Whole Ecosystem is an Organism and **not** the "man's environment": this situation is not yet understood by Western phylosophy: no institution or association or civil agreement is acquainted with it.

The "outer" position of mankind, exported all over the world in the wave of the disordered spreading of Western culture, is the thought background that caused the very great problems in which we now are. The idea of a man out and over the ecosystem has also caused the dramatic human overpopulation and the terrible consume growth of last two centuries.

How Biosphere keeps in life

If using the *system theory* language, a living being is a self-keeping system in a steady state far from thermodynamic balance. In other words, he/she *lives* if an energy-amount unceasingly flows throught with no alteration of general conditions, not regarding the small up-and-down changes around standard values. Living being is an *homeostatic* system, that is able to stay in life conditions self-correcting any small chance-change throught interactions among subsystems, components and energy flows.

The Complex of Biosphere has the same behaviour as a living system, but generally on longer times. This statement does not depend on metaphysical ideas if it *is* a living being (*Gaia*), if it has mind and, in the case, if it is *conscious*.

An ecosystem too, for exemple a big and primeval part of equatorial rain forest, behave as a steady-state system far from balance, *that is as a living being*.

When a system of this type loses its homeostatic skill caused by a dramatic external action, death of the living being, or in any way the system end takes place.

Time and importance of the external action that causes phenomenon are very different depending on the system type.

Western culture, that views mankind as external to Biosphere, has caused the aggression to Nature that has begun two centuries ago, that is when it had the technical power. Due to the way-of-working of that cultural pattern, which is overwhelming the whole Earth, the complex homeostatic power of the whole Planet is not yet able to reach again the steady state. Moreover many ecosystems are swept away and they cannot be replaced by the artificial ones, because the latter depend on continuous outer interferences for keeping life conditions. As an exemple, we cannot think that re-building a forest is to have again in life the primeval forest: may-be it is better than nothing, but life and mind wealth of the original ecosystem cannot have rebirth.

The Earth is in a steady state only if we look at decades or centuries times, it is not if we look at million year times: the problem is that industrial civilization changes into natural cycles have a speed ten-hundred thousand times bigger than nature's, that allow life gradually adapt to new standards. If we can use an approximate language, in nature cycles all happen as if going from a steady state to another one, with no "dangerous" transitory. However, regarding the present subject, all is like Earth would act in a real steady-state process.

We are to-day in a high-speed transitory: the present way-of-operating cannot last longer. Many data at present characteristic of global system cannot be kept if the Earth comes again in a life condition. In particular it is clear that human population now existing on the planet are too many to allow Biosphere way-of-operation, if we want to keep a pro-capite consume so high as present.

Economics and human population

Economic system, that is the *producing-selling-consuming* process, can be reported to an only parameter: money. Economic subsystem cannot act in a complex and steady-state system far from balance, as the Biosphere, that is depending on a great number of parameters. Economic process substantially prevents the Biosphere from homeostasis: the Complex system ends its *steady-state* acting. In a living being this is the organism death. Moreover, if we think that the present economic system must be *in permanent growth* to autokeep, is again and again clear it is impossible in a permanent way in the greater system in which it is.

An economic system that must be in never-ending growth can only be a transient, a pathologic phenomenon in the Biosphere: it necessarily brings to a collapse-point. This is an optimistic position: The true pessimism is to think that present trend can go on for a long time, because this means a terribly degraded world, biodiversity disappeared, psychopatry and crime, the end of variety and world beauty.

Man never avoids catastrophes, but recovers from them: we hope it's true.

It's really astonishing to note there are very few researches about a problem as the maximum number of people that Earth can support: for exemple, in the study described in the book *Assalto al pianeta* by Pignatti and Trezza (*Ed. Bollati*

Boringhieri, 2000), the maximum possible human population is calculated in less than two billion people, according also to a Cornell University study. In one of projections of well-known report *The limits to growth* (1971) it was possible to reach a vital steady state only if human population was stable around year 1975, corresponding to a human number of less than four billion and a consume level pro-capite smaller than present. Six billion humans may stay on this planet only for very short times, because they can live only “eating earth”.

Beyond any numerical evaluation, it is however clear that is necessary to decrease human population if we want increase the pro-capite consumes.

It should be a science task to study if we can make a particular product and its quantity with no danger for life operating of Earth. As an exemple only, if we like to build and carry on private motor-vehicles, total human population must be much lesser than one billion people, with a one-car-per-family hypotesis.

Competition and selection

A background idea of our society is that competition and selection are a kind of “progress spring”, or the only evolution-way of life! When the idea of biological evolution appeared, in the mid-ninetenth century, a great evidence was claimed on struggle for life and survival of the fittest. But the true and deep news were the realization that our species entirely belongs to Nature, with all consequences of this news. The accent on the survival of the fittest as evolutionary or progress factor was not a biological evidence, but a need of the former industrial civilization. Some new study by Lynn Margulis has brought evidence to evolution as product of cooperation among unicell beings for about one billion years. Competition and struggle are only one among many factors.

Earth is sacred

Together with the action to exit out from Biosphere, and above it, Western man *has deprived World from Soul*. But to-day, in our culture too, some thinkers have improved the concept of *mind* to make it independent from a nervous central system: mind can be simply the consequence of a complexity degree (*Gregory Bateson*). Also the Jung-follower psychiatrist *James Hillmann* often speaks about the idea of a World-Soul. Mind in Nature is here again, from different ways: these ideas have not a great spreading, just for now, and in Western culture.

Religions have a much greater influx on people majorities than some isolated thinkers’ philosophy.

One of prime task of religion would be to give a general world-view and ethic prescriptions not regarding only some small short-timed problems or only human questions, but primarily to preserve the Earth in good health, as an inherent good: this cannot be a task for politics nor for “practical” institutions.

Religions must give diffusion to empathy and love towards any sensing beings, that is to all natural entities, much better than thinking on what “truth” is.

Regarding these questions, philosophycal-religious traditions interested in long term natural complex were some eastern traditions (like Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism)

and some animist cultures, that is American natives'. Often European people didn't perceive they had many ecological-type ethical duty.

We have above written about some Westerner thinkers; we can now mention the biologist and philosopher Rupert Sheldrake, who writes:

What is the change if we think Nature alive instead than non-animated? First, we put doubt about humanistic hypothesis on which modern civilization is founded. Second, we have a different attitude towards natural world with a different perspective on human nature. Third, a new sacred sense in Nature becomes possible.

(Rupert Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature*)
(translation from the italian version of the book)

These are only the most recent writings: they are sparsely isolated exemples, with few followers, but they exist.

By the above mentioned exemples, there is evidence that, for a deep sense of sacrality, we need not the Western idea of a *personal and world-external* God thinking only to humans, that is the case of Middle East traditions spread out in all Western culture.

Regarding this religious background of the West (of laicist party too), a good change in the attitude towards natural world would be if we had awareness of the Indian-Buddhist source, and **not** Jewish, of Christ's teaching.

Conclusions

We can have very many value-lists, but it is now clear that the first place would be to allow life in the Biosphere, on which we depend: the Earth survival must be the first value.

The ethics of Earth is not only a philosophical view, but a need to keep in good health the Organism in which we are, together with other species, ecosystems, atmosphere, sea, rivers and mountains.

If we like to listen to the voice of heart, or soul, instead of systemic logics, let us read a statement by a native American culture (*Wintu*, north-west of present U.S.):

When we natives kill an animal, we eat entirely meat. When we take roots, we make very small holes: When we built houses, the ground has very small changes. We do not break down trees, but we use dead wood. But this man-race break the ground, break down trees and kill all animals. The tree says: "Do not wound me. Do not break. I am not well". But white man throws down him and put in pieces. How can the Spirit of Earth love this man? Wherever he touches, Earth is wounded.

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