

‘MEANING CRISIS’ IN ENVIRONMENT: A MODERNIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The phenomena, processes and states related to the field of environment have been developed within complex contexts. Similarly, the meanings given to concepts in the context of environment too have gone into problematic situations. This leads to a dispute over meanings between environmentalist and philosophers within the same school of philosophy and among different schools such as western and eastern thoughts. This, further, has led to crippling of both the national and the international programs and plans that have been aimed at solving environmental problems and conserving the environment. The broader objective of this paper is to inquire theoretical and historical evolutionary process of the concept of environment in the field of philosophy. In particular, this study discusses theoretical positions that were created in the history of philosophy in the context of modernity. In conclusion, this paper problematizes some issues which create ‘crisis in meaning’ in the context of environment and suggests practical and realistic orders to search a solution for the said crisis.

Keywords: Meanings crisis, environmental conservation, sustainability, conceptual analysis, environmental ethics

Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to discuss the ‘concept of environment in Philosophy’ and its evolutionary process. Further, it discusses the issues and meaning of concepts related to environment which has been one of the main subjects in many eras of philosophy up to our own time

First of all, it is important to note here that though environment has not been recognized as a separate discipline until twentieth century, the concept of environment had become one of the central issues in philosophy from the early ages¹. As Hughes rightly explains, philosophers from classical age had paid considerable attentions to the concept of environment and to define the meaning of environmental conservation.² It is essential to examine those interventions in the history of philosophy In order to understand the evolution of the concept of environment.

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¹ Carone, Gabriela R. “The Classical Greek Tradition” in *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, ed Dale Jamieson. (Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001)

² Hughes, D. J.; “Environmental History” in *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*. Ed. J. Baird Collicott and Robert Frodeman. (USA: Macmillan Reference, 2009) as cited in *Environmental Ethics and International Policy*. UNESCO

The central theme of the epistemological issue of environment lies on the questions such as 'the way we recognize nature' and 'the way we value the impact of nature and its influence on human being'³. It can also be seen that the philosophical discussions in the Modern western Philosophy has paid considerable attention on this matter. Contemporary Analytical Philosophical tradition discusses the nature of 'meaning' and 'truth' in human understanding and develops a criterion for claiming the epistemic foundation of our knowledge (Positivism). On the other hand, Contemporary Continental philosophical tradition discusses 'nature of human subject and 'methodological interpretation on the contextual existence of human knowledge' (Phenomenology). These two varieties have paved the way to the development of the subject of environmental ethics. The paper discusses the main philosophical concepts of Contemporary Analytical tradition and Continental Philosophy in details. Further the paper discusses key concepts related to the subject of environmental ethics: (a) Meaning of the concept of environment (b) *Crisis of the Meanings* in the context of environment, (c) *Oder of Things* in the modern world and (d) Environmental crisis: Epistemological understanding.

Concept of Environment in the Early Modern Western Philosophy

"Nature" and "Environmental thought" in early modern philosophy are mainly related with western thinkers who developed a 'critique' on Medieval Religious thoughts. There were different developments in these critiques by different philosophers. One important development in early Modern period is to "move out" knowledge from authoritative religious ideology. It aims to open and to create a new worldview, which has "human controllability" over their divine powers. This move also raises the basic epistemological questions such as "how we understand our self", "whether human being is an autonomous being"⁴.

Francis Bacon developed an argument that "the objective of human knowledge should be a practical important instead of spiritual engagements". Therefore, he argues that human being should abandon the assumptions through religious ideology and should develop "practical knowledge" through new methodology of learning. His main interests were to create a new knowledge for "humans needs". For this new knowledge, Bacon assumes that the nature is there as a substance which we could make use of by developing new methods of "observations" and "experiments". The important issue that he suggested was to change the then existing understanding on nature and environment and to focus "using the nature" not for itself but for the sake of human being. Bacon uses a new concept "Philanthropia" (Bacon, 2000: 1605), which means, "love of humanity" to explain this human centered new worldview.

Bacon argues that the mean to overcome the "necessities and miseries of humanity" is to "use nature" by gaining knowledge of it through observations and experiences. This was one filler, which helps to form a later developed concept of "anthropocentrism".

³ Christine E. Gudorf, & James E Huchingson, *Boundaries A Casebook in Environmental Ethics*. (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010) p.3

⁴ Frodeman, Robert & Callicott, J Baird "Introduction" *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*. Ed. J. Baird Collicott and Robert Frodeman. (USA: Macmillan Reference, 2009)

Rene Descartes (1596 – 1650) developed a new understanding on the relationship between mind and matter (Descartes 1981 [1637]). In his famous serious of texts, Descartes outlines the new understanding on the world and Nature. He theorizes that the “nature” as we see is a “fiction” which is “created” by our mind. So mental substance is primarily a force in human understanding by which the material substance is ‘created’. Therefore, Descartes argues that the environment (animals or plants) can be “treated as an instrument to be exploited for human ends and human goals”.⁵

Thus basic understanding on Nature and its relations to human subject by Bacon and Descartes turned historical understanding on the way we engage with environment. This worldview, scientifically backed by Bacon and philosophically by Descartes leads to late – Modern Philosophical and scientific developments of the world. For an example, Empiricist Philosophy of John Lock (1632-1704), and George Berkeley (1685 – 1753) followed the same way of treating the nature. Rationalist Philosophy advocated by Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) and Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 – 1716) developed system ‘reason’ (mind) is more fundamental than that of matter.

On the other hand, empiricist such as Hobbes develops the concept of human being as material and part of nature. He says “the world ...is corporeal, that is, that whole mass of all things that are, is corporeal”.⁶ This material way of thinking was further developed by John Lock by introducing the concept of property, “human a private ownership of the nature”. Lock writes “Every man has a property in his own person: this nobody has any right to but himself”⁷.

Like the empiricist approach on nature mentioned above, rationalist such as Spinoza and Leibniz influences on understanding the human-nature relationship was also very vital. It is important to see that the conceptual frame that Spinoza developed in order to “unifying” human-natural relationship later helps to Deep Ecologist like Aren Naess’s philosophy of nature.⁸

Environment in Modern Western Philosophy

Modern Western Philosophy is the philosophy developed around the Europe in late 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Many philosophers in nineteenth century including Georg Wilhelm Hegel, Arthur Schopenhauer, John Stuart Mill, and Friedrich Nietzsche explain the views on nature- environment through their philosophical writings. They focused on two main areas,

1. Nature of human being
2. The role of human consciousness.

⁵ Rene Descartes, *A Discourse on Method*. (Indianapolis: IN: Bobbs – Merrill Educational Publishing, 1981 [1637])

⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* ed M. Oakeshott (New York: Macmillan, 1962)

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Naess, A. *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: An Outline of an Ecosophy*, trans. David Rothenberg (Cambridge, US: 1989)

It is widely accepted that the nature of human being and the role of human consciousness cannot be considered and studied separately. German Ideology was having a belief that "human being" is free and autonomous subject who has ability to act and think independently of divine or causal determination. Accordingly, they argue that the human being as an autonomous agent powered with rationality, has capability to 'break' causal determinism to form his own "values" and "thoughts". Immanuel Kant endorsed this position on nature in his famous three books on *Critiques*. Kant's intervention into subject of ethics and epistemology was considered as foundational work of the development of the subject of Environmental Ethics. In his second *Critique*, Kant proposes new form of ethical structure, which is called Deontological Ethics. According to this theory, ethical justification of an action should not depend on the consequences of such action and *action itself* should be ethical. Deontological theory contrasts with the teleological position on ethics, which argues that the actions should be judged on the consequences that the actions generate. In relation to environment, teleological position on ethics would support the ideas of utilitarianism and anthropocentrism. Further, Kant says that when we take decisions in ethics action should be based on not for the sake of results but action itself. Kant draws attention to the way in which the nature works its own and the way that nature can be awe-inspiring⁹. In his *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant discusses nature of aesthetic values argued that fear developed by the power of nature challenges our power of reason to master the nature.¹⁰

Hegel in his *Philosophy of Nature* (1970 [1800]) argues that "nature more rational than productive".¹¹ Following Shelling, Hegel developed an understanding that the Nature is partly a priori which will be based on rationality and partly on empirical base. Therefore, he argues that the human rationality should be based on natural rationality. He identifies the nature is not a mechanical but a rational process. More importantly the dialectical method that Hegel develops shows that "the relationship of 'humanity' to 'nature' is to be understood as a totality: the world is what is as a result of its being lived in and transformed by humanity"¹².

J.S. Mill and Jeremy Bentham suggested that the idea nature is related with the concept of Utilitarianism. This principle of utilitarianism was based for later development of Liberal Democratic principles. Mill argues that the "relationship" between Nature and Human being is an important sector in the human history. People positively ought to act against nature for an utilitarian reason that the "nature itself" is deliberately destructive. Nietzsche in his *The Will to Power* claimed that "natural settings and human will" have their struggle for existence and the way that the human being focused for their will, leads

⁹ A Brennan. 2001 "Nineteenth- and Twentieth – century philosophy" in *Companion to Environmental Philosophy* ed, (Dale: Jamieson Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), p.146

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgment* trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Publishing, 1951)

¹¹ George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, 3rd Edition, Trans. A.V. Miller. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p.1830

¹² Kate Soper. *Humanism and Anti-Humanism*. (London: Hutchinson,1986), p.24

to domination on the Nature. He, however, agreed on the claim that “nature is a self-regulated living process”¹³.

Environmental Ethics and Environmental Philosophy in the modern form developed in middle of the twentieth century. It shows the roots as a sense of crises occurred due to our way of life in the contemporary social and political setting. It alarms global threats to the very existence of human being. This Environmental problem in modern form relates with the continuation of “human understanding” and “history of ideas”, it is more appropriate to examine it from the philosophical base.

As a summary we could see that the main question that the Modern philosophers raise on the environment aims to discuss “relationship between human subjects and the nature / structure that they live”¹⁴.

Analytical and Continental Philosophical Positions on Environment

When considering the overall philosophical thoughts in Contemporary Western Philosophy in early 20th century, it can be seen that two main philosophical traditions had emerged. They are Analytical and Continental traditions. These two traditions had paid considerable attentions to unveiling the philosophical base of nature and environment.

Analytical Philosophical Position of Environment

Common feature of Analytic Philosophical tradition relates with Modern Age’s Philosophical foundations. Firstly, Analytic tradition considers the ‘world view’, which is based on the classical Cartesian dualistic approach on substance. This dualistic form suggests that the world is consistence of physical and mental substance. Secondly the Analytic tradition depends on anthropocentrism. Assumptions in n anthropocentrism is that the consideration of the existence of all other beings that they are for “the consumption of human beings”. Thirdly, the Utilitarianism in economic and ethical ground is also a theoretical foundation of Analytic tradition. Fourthly this tradition approves the modern scientific method, which was developed in the West with the reductionist approach toward human beings from the Nature.

Large number of concepts, theories and field of studies relating to environment has been developed within Analytical Philosophy. These developments in Analytical Philosophy have paid attention into four important areas of environment;

1. Nature of environment
2. Environmental problems
3. Environmental conservation
4. Sustainable use of natural resources

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. (New York: Random House, 1967, [1901])

¹⁴ Kate Soper, 1986. *Humanism and Anti-Humanism*. (London: Hutchinson, 1986), p.146

Overall objective of these four areas are either highlighting the importance of environment or to urge people to consider about the environment before committing any act that leads to destruction the equilibrium of the environment.

Continental Philosophical Tradition of Environment

Though, there is a great history for the doctrine of "Continental Philosophy" which has dealt with the issues of environment yet Continental Philosophy before 1950s was not popular as the environmental problems did not affect people as at present. However, as the environmental problems created several predicaments to the overall development process of the world, the "environmental conservation", "environmental ethics" and "environmental protection" were inquired within the field of Philosophy.

Continental Philosophy provides more 'critical' and 'synthesis' arguments on knowledge and the way knowledge is gained. It analyses concepts and the statements in the light of human experience and the context in which it presents. They argue that the *meaning* of a philosophical-claim is different from what Analytical tradition suggests. Continental philosophy maintains that the knowledge is something which 'constructs' meaning mainly dealing with the 'textual and contextual' reading of a given thing, focusing its context, space, time, language, culture and history.

In contrast to positivistic epistemological position, European philosophers develop more 'critical' and 'synthesis' arguments. They also develop a critical way to understand how we gain knowledge. Secondly, Continental Philosophy¹⁵ is involving more 'inclusive' process of making 'meaning' in the knowledge seeking excises. The Continental thoughts contrast with the Analytical epistemological position on *meaning* and the *meaningful statements*. More precisely, Continental philosopher Critchley Simon suggests that the "philosophical arguments cannot be divorced from the textual and contextual conditions of its historical emergence".¹⁶

Irene J Klaver claims that the subject of *environmental ethics* was developed in the context of Anglo-American philosophical traditions in later twentieth century and "remained mainly based in the analytical tradition while the areas of *environmental philosophy* mainly deals with the areas that the continental traditions suggested."¹⁷

The understanding the natural sciences by these two traditions gives a clear picture of what is Analytical and what is Continental? As Iren J Klaver points out "A different relationship to the natural sciences is often seen as the most significant difference between the two traditions."¹⁸ In this view analytical philosophy provides a philosophical

¹⁵Simon Glendinning, "Introduction: what is Continental Philosophy?" in *The Edinburgh Encyclopedia of Continental Philosophy* edited by Simon Glendinning, (Edinburgh: UK Edinburgh University Press,1999), pp.3-20

¹⁶ Simon Critchley; Schroder William. "Introduction: what is continental philosophy?" in *A Companion to Continental Philosophy*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Companions to Philosophy, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1998), p.4

¹⁷ Irene J. Klaver. "Continental Environmental Philosophy" in *the Environmental Philosophy, From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*. Ed Michael E. Zimmerman, (NJ: Upper Saddle River, 2005)

¹⁸ *Ibid*

defense of scientific truth and scientific methods via positivistic epistemology, while Continental philosophy is seen as more skeptical of sciences, especially in so far as they replace the world of everyday life experience with a skein of theoretical abstractions.

Major continental philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger, Jean – Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze have developed theoretical explanations on the world, contra to the one dimensional, positivistic view of the world by Analytic philosophy, which submits a picture of the world as ‘an observations disconnected from the observer’. In the continental tradition, it is said that the world is something which is created by our engagements in to it¹⁹.

Michael E. Zimmerman sees the significance of the continental philosophical traditions readings on Environmentalism. He argues that within the continental tradition there are two approaches that we could use for ‘theorizing’ environmentalism. In the first approach, he says, “which has had mixed results, involves showing how the work of some leading thinkers – such as Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, or Heidegger – may be read as in consistent with environmental practice and theory. The second approach applies to the contemporary continental theories, such as postmodernist theory to environmental practice and theory²⁰.”

Contemporary Environmental Philosophy

Environmental philosophy in contemporary form is developed in late 1960s as a process of (a) understanding the environmental issues (b) as a response to concerning diverse queries and questions arises from naturalist, scientist, specialist in technological field and policy makers²¹. In 1962 Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, a book that documented issues and nature of the accumulation of dangerous pesticides and chemical in the food processing systems. This influential works raised fundamentally important issues regarding environment and analyze the nature of such issues in order to find solutions. This discussion was supported by the Paul Ehrlich work, *Population Bomb* which was published in 1968²². This discussion turned into a new area of subject with the Historian Lynn White Jr. published an essay on “The Historical Roots of our ecological crisis” in the Science magazine in 1967. He argued that the Judo-Christian thought is responsible in forming a worldview, which destroy the environment²³. Richard Routley claimed that the narrow focusing on human as only morally valuable thing on the earth is unjustifiable.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Order of Things: An Archeology of Human Sciences*, (London: Rutledge, 1966).

²⁰ Michael Zimmerman, *Environmental Philosophy from Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, (N.J: Upper Saddle River, 2005)

²¹ A Brennan. A 2001 “Nineteenth- and Twentieth – century philosophy” in *Companion to Environmental Philosophy* ed, Dale Jamieson (Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), p.372

²² P R Ehrlich.1968 *The Population Bomb* (Cutchogue, NY: Buccaneer Books,1968)

²³ Lynn White. “*The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crises*” *Science* 155 p 1203-1207; reprinted in Ian G Barbour, ed. 1973. *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Towards Nature and Technology Ontario*: (Addison: Wesley Publishing Company, 1967), pp.27-28

According to him this narrow focus is a discrimination which can be called as “human Chauvinism”²⁴.

Philosophers who study more broad areas of the human-natural relationship focused on roots of environmental studies. Many different theorists in philosophical and ethical domains enhanced this move. These trends spread between North American and European academia. As Andrew Brennan contends, “environmental philosophy has explored new criteria of such considerability, including “being alive”²⁵; “being a community or holistic entity of a certain kind”²⁶; “being an entity or organism that has an end (or telos) in itself”²⁷; “lacking intrinsic function”²⁸; “being a product of natural process”²⁹; or “being naturally autonomous”³⁰. Beside these developments there is another philosophical intervention by Norwegian thinker Arne Naess who took a different path by introducing the idea of Deep Ecology³¹.

The discussion on these philosophical ideas later influences developing research on the subject, conference in academic level and policy level, and the dialogue on environmental ethics. *The Journal of Environmental Ethics*, which was launched in 1977 under the editorship of Eugene Hargrove was instrumental in making new concepts and ideas in Environmental ethics and Philosophy³².

Early 1990, the field of environmental philosophy was more clearly established with the new serious of research under the leadership of Holmes Rolston III. An Initiative was formed under the name of International Society for Environmental Ethics (ISEE) and International Associations for Environmental Philosophy (IAEP). Philosophical journals such as *Organization and Environment* (1980), *Environmental Politics* (1990), and *Environmental Value* (1992) were launched.

Epistemological Explanations on Environment

Epistemology is a main branch of philosophy, which focuses on the “area of knowledge” and “how human being acquires knowledge”³³. Since discussing the nature of knowledge, and the ways that human beings acquire that knowledge is vital in understanding the

²⁴ Richard Routley. 1973 “Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethics?” in *Proceedings, 15th World Congress of Philosophy I* – 2-5-210

²⁵ A Brennan. “Nineteenth- and Twentieth – century philosophy” in *Companion to Environmental Philosophy* ed, Dale Jamieson (Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001)

²⁶ J. B. Callicott. *Thinking Like a Planet: The Land Ethic and Earth Ethic*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) H Rolston III, “Environmental ethics: Values and Duties to the Natural World” in *Ecology, Economics, Ethics: The Broken Circle*. Herbert Bormann and Stephen R. Keller, (New Haven CT: Yale University, 1991).

²⁷ P Taylor. 1986. *Respect for Nature*, (Princeton: Princeton University, 1986)

²⁸ A Brennan. ‘The Moral Standing of Natural Objects’, *Environmental Ethics*, (1984) 6: 35–56

²⁹ Robert Elliot. “Environmental Ethics” (reprinted in Callicott, 1989), pp.157–74.

³⁰ A Brennan. “Nineteenth- and Twentieth – century philosophy” in *Companion to Environmental Philosophy* ed, Dale Jamieson (Blackwell Publishers Ltd,2001), p.374

³¹ A Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement”, (Inquiry, 16, reprinted in Sessions, 1995), pp.151–5.

³² Eugene Hargrove. 1989 *Foundations of Environmental Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989)

³³ Bertrand Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, (Routledge: London, 1972)

world. Therefore, it is important to discuss epistemological roots in the Nature and Environment. Such discussion helps to examine the human-nature relationship by elaborating questions like “how we create our epistemic system on the nature” and “what is the way that we value the non-human substances in the environment”.

Even though, Epistemology mainly deals areas of defining knowledge and outlining the ways and means how we gain that knowledge, in the history of philosophy, it shows that this section of philosophy also engages in developing the ‘meaning criteria’ for logical thinking and the truths. Further, it defines philosophical concepts related to *meanings* and application of those in the *historical contexts* that use for justifying the knowledge. The broad objective of this paragraph therefore, is to discuss the Epistemological Explanations on Environment and to see the relationship between human epistemic process and the nature.

Popular epistemological inquiries in environment can be identified as follows;

- i. Meaning of the concept of environment
- ii. *Crisis of the Meanings* in the context of environment
- iii. *Order of things* in the modern world.
- iv. Environmental crisis: Epistemological understanding

Meaning of the Concept of Environment

There are varying meanings which have been deployed to explain the concept of environment by different thinkers in the history of philosophy. Searching the ‘meaning’ for the concept of environment therefore is one of the main topics in the epistemological discussion. This background paves the way to emerging of different meanings for the said concept. Among them “the nature as totality”, “Dualistic World”, ‘Anthropocentric Ideology’ and “Bacons Scientific Methods” are widely discussed meanings.

The concept of “the nature as totality” based on the answers for the questions such as whether the term “environment” represents human and non-human entity as whole or whether it represents only the non-human section of the world leaving the ‘human factor’ out of this domain. However, the central discussion of the concept of “the nature as totality” is to discuss about the factor that how to place “the human being” into environmental totality or “the natural whole”. On the other hand, this concept argues that whether, the human being and environment are in the same domain that is called environment or not. The answer for these questions relates with the concept of Cartesian Dualism and later developed concept of anthropocentrism which aggregates with the industrialization and market economy.

Due to the epistemological influences of the Cartesian Dualism, the process of conceptualizing the nature that differentiates the human from the non-human entities intensified significantly. This theoretical background helps to create new social meaning given to the natural environment based on human centric principle, which is called “Anthropocentric World view”. This naval meaning leads to “reduce” human being to a super level in the hierarchy of the world. The development of this kind directs to consider

the environment as an entity which is “isolated” from the human. This imagination is a central and can be identified as one of the main epistemological based to create another meaning for the environment.

Another important issue with regard to the meaning of environment is to inquire whether the “value” in environment is intrinsic or conditional. It means to examine whether the environment has intrinsic “value in its own or whether the value is being conditional to the human interest. The issue of “intrinsic value of environment” verses “human centered value on environment” is a main debate in Environmental Ethics. According to some critics deviating the environment into commodities which have just “exchange value” is the logical result of human centered value system on environment.

After introducing the “Bacon’s Scientific Methods” into the epistemological world, the picture of science has been changed significantly. Accordingly, the meaning given to the environment so far is also change revolutionary. Francis Bacon criticized the “Metaphysical world view” accepted by the medieval philosophers³⁴ and argued that human knowledge and interpretations given by the human on environment encompass more functions than the medieval interpretation. According to Bacon, the observation based understanding on the world develops ‘new epistemological universe’ which has two important features:

- (a). Human sense as a means to gather knowledge
- (b). Physical environment as the base for such knowledge.

When taking above two factors into account, knowledge should only be developed with the help of human sense and that sense should be based only in the physical environment. With Bacons’ interpretation, the concept of environment gets new interpretation. This interpretation on environment led to consider that the environment is source for human consumption.

The next important epistemological issue is to inquire how the concept of environment was related in and influence on to the other theoretical positions of the philosophy. Since the meaning of the concept of environment was not taken as it is today in the theoretical discussion in early twentieth century, it was not taken as an important area in which the policy-making bodies should be engaged in. No tools were created to measure the impact on nature by the human activities in middle of the twentieth century. Even the Marxism, which takes classical alternative position to Capitalism, did not focus on the environment as an area of prominence of their interventions. Environment was just taken as a marginalize position in their theoretical literature. Therefore understanding the conceptual and theoretical influence of the concept of environment into other philosophical issues and positions became an important area of research.

³⁴ Francis Bacon, 1605 *Advancement of Learning*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.1605

Crisis of Meanings in the context of environment

Sometime, different group of people within the different contexts can give different interpretation for a single incident or a thing. This background or “crisis of meanings” in general creates problems among philosophers and among general public when understanding the social and environmental phenomenon and issues.

It is widely accepted fact that, there is not any fixed meaning in any concept in the subjects related to social sciences and humanities. However, when it comes to the context of environment and discussion of the environment, there are two positions in creating meanings that can be identified. They are;

a. Universalistic Meanings in Environment

Universalistic meanings in environment can be identified in the Positivistic Philosophy in Analytic Tradition and contextual meanings of environment can be traced in the Phenomenological and Deconstructive methods in Continental Philosophy. This section would pay attention only on these two positions, namely, universalistic meaning and contextual meaning.

The “Meaning” has become the important area of study in the Western Philosophy particularly within the Contemporary Analytical Philosophy in 20th century. Positivistic Philosophers in Analytical traditions who developed the “meaning criterion” for searching knowledge claim that the meaning would develop only within the domain of “language”. Further, they argue that the language represents the “reality”. According to the Analytical traditions, meaning of given things can be objectified and established with the physical domain. Fixed meanings for anything in the world were given by this tradition. Such trends of making meaning pave the way to emerge universal meaning related to socio-economic and environmental issues. This position helps to create universalistic meanings in the context of environment. Therefore, universally accepted meanings were developed in relation to environment and environmental issues such as,

- a. Defining environmental crisis
- b. Identifying the root causes of environmental problems
- c. Developing strategies for environmental conservations
- d. Designing mitigation measures for environmental problems
- e. Formulating environmental management tools.

b. Contextual Meanings of Environment

On the contrary, the contextual meanings of environment are centered within the several traditions of the Contemporary Continental Philosophy. It mainly argues against the epistemological foundation of Contemporary Analytical Philosophy. Meanings, according to the Continental Philosophy are based on the context. Generally, contexts vary temporally and spatially. Therefore, the meanings in the discussions of the traditions of the Continental Philosophy also vary accordingly. For example, Phenomenological philosophy suggests that meaning is “intentional” into the given situation. Therefore,

phenomenologist argues that the universalistic interpretations for any given meaning would not match with the respective “meaning” given by the Analytical Traditions.

The phenomenon, process and states of being related to the studies of environment have been developed within complex contexts. Similarly, the meanings of the context of environment too have gone into a problematic situation. This leads to a crisis among environmentalist and philosophers within same school of philosophers and among different schools such as Contemporary Continental Philosophy and Contemporary Analytical Philosophy. Therefore, it is difficult to find fixed or unique definitions or meaning for any technical terms or concepts that are discussed within the subject of environment.

However, the Environmental Philosophers claim that it is a fundamental requirement to use fixed definitions to solve environmental problems and conserve the environment within the given context.

Order of Things in the Modern World

Philosophers who discuss on modernity and the modern culture had paid attention to the foundation of the modernity. Main feature of this development was to search a systematic arrangement to keep “things in order”. That means, the modern philosophers argued that there is a logical sequence for anything to happen, exist or emerge. This is common for any phenomenon in natural or artificial world, physical or metaphysical world and living and non-living things that exists in the earth. This argument relates with the rational thinking and rationalization process. That means the concept of the order of the things in modernity has the direct relationship with the history of ideas and social structure of power. However, the simple meaning of the concept of “Order or things” is identifying the structure of social formation of modernization projects. For instance, relationship between man and environment describes the concept of order of things “nature” considered as a passive agent and “human being” as an active agent.

This discussion has a relationship with many schools of the Continental tradition that challenged the argument raised by Analytical philosophers on the nature of knowledge³⁵. Paul Rutherford argues that modernization projects led by Analytical argument of ‘objective reality’ creates ecological and environmental risks in the modernization project³⁶. Michael Foucault in his ground breaking work *Order of Things* argues that knowledge is not “absolute” as Analytical Philosophy suggests and it is “contextual” which mainly includes the “observers interventions in to the observation”³⁷. According to Foucault there is a clear brake in the theory of knowledge in the sixteenth century between the knowledge of Classical Ages and modernity. As a result of this division, he argues that there are three areas of knowledge that we could identify in the history of ideas of human being. Those are (a) linguistic (b) economic and (c) biological areas of

³⁵ Eric Darier (ed) *Discourse of the Environment*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p.17

³⁶ Paul Rutherford. “Ecological Modernization and Environmental Risk” in Sagoff, M., 1988. *The Economy of the Earth*, (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1999)

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *Order of Things: An Archeology of Human Sciences*, (London: Rutledge, 1966)

knowledge. These three areas have contributed in to the development of modernity and the modern world that we experience today.

The biological areas of knowledge in modernity, Foucault interprets, directly relates with the discussion of environmental domains. The knowledge which dominate the modern world putting ‘things in order’ by producing hierarchical structure where the economical and used values of things get priorities and the rest (including resources and beings in the environment) treats as secondary stages.

Environmental Crisis: Epistemological Understanding

As explained above, one of the main conceptual bases of understanding the environmental crisis deals with the epistemological issues started from the “idea of nature” and the later forms of development in different contexts. Eminent expert on Cultural Studies, Raymond Williams, in his book named *Problems in Materialism and Culture*³⁸, provides an interesting historical account on coherent changes of the usage of the word “Nature” in western European cultures. The chapter under the name of “idea of Nature” in his book, Williams states that the concept of nature gets its meaning varying from position of “nature – gods” to “nature as a human-instrument”. According to him, the end result of such treatment into the nature in the western civilization paves the way to the new process of “nature became singular, abstract and personified phenomenon”³⁹. Tom Jagtenberg and David McKie in their book named *Eco-Impacts and the Greening of Post Modernity* argue that it was through this epistemological process of the Western civilization, which directs to “the death of nature in scientific positivism”⁴⁰. It can be seen that this process has been continuing throughout the later centuries too. Carolyn Merchant in her book called, *The Death of Nature* claims that the nature was dead due to the “changes in human attitudes and behavior toward the earth” through anthropocentric positivistic world view.⁴¹

Descartes’ approach of “anthropocentrism” and Bacon’s doctrine of “scientific method” were the two philosophical views that created the theoretical foundation for the “new world order” as mentioned above. According to Carolyn Merchant, the new mechanical philosophy of the mid-seventeenth century achieved a reunification of the “cosmos”, “society” and the “self” in terms of a new metaphor- “the machine”⁴².

Conclusions

Environmental Ethics and Environmental Philosophy are two different traditions of the subject of philosophy that deal with the environment and environmental issues. It seems that the “Environmental Ethics” has derived itself from the Contemporary Analytical

³⁸ Williams Raymond *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, (London: Verso 1980)

³⁹ *Ibid* p.69

⁴⁰ Tom Jagtenberg and David McKie *Eco-Impacts and the Greening of Post Modernity*, (London, Sage Publication 1997:6)

⁴¹ Merchant, Carolyn *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row 1980:2)

⁴² *Ibid* p.276

Philosophy and “Environmental Philosophy” has originated from the roots of Continental Philosophy. And also, these two traditions can sometimes be discussed as two sides of the same coin. But, many argue that the “Environmental Ethics and Environmental Philosophy differ from each other significantly. These arguments have paved the way to develop two solid disciplines as named above. It seems that the subject of Environmental Ethics would mainly focus on the relationship between human and non-human (environment) substances and re-tracking this relationship in moral ground. Furthermore, Environmental Ethics pays attention to define the environmental concepts, such as environmental conservation in the context of creating realistic picture on existing world.

As this article reveals, the meaning crisis in the subject of environment has been a central epistemological issue in this field. The dialogue processes on these epistemological issues have paved the way to recent developments of the field of environment ethics. And also, this subject would make a platform for formulating environmental policies. The concept of conservation has been a later development of the discussion of environmental ethics, which means to take care of the atmosphere, eco-systems, bio -systems with humans and cultural development.