

# The Interaction between Human and Environment on the Perspective of Environmental Ethics

Mella Ismelina Farma Rahayu

**Abstract**—Environmental problems could not be separated from unethical human perspectives and behaviors toward the environment. There is a fundamental error in the philosophy of people's perspective about human and nature and their relationship with the environment, which in turn will create an inappropriate behavior in relation to the environment. The aim of this study is to investigate and to understand the ethics of the environment in the context of humans interacting with the environment by using the hermeneutic approach. The related theories and concepts collected from literature review are used as data, which were analyzed by using interpretation, critical evaluation, internal coherence, comparisons, and heuristic techniques. As a result of this study, there will be a picture related to the interaction of human and environment in the perspective of environmental ethics, as well as the problems of the value of ecological justice in the interaction of humans and environment. We suggest that the interaction between humans and environment need to be based on environmental ethics, in a spirit of mutual respect between humans and the natural world.

**Keywords**—The environment, environmental ethics, the interaction, value.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THIS paper discusses the overwhelming anthropocentric paradigm that impacted ecological injustice, because society has disconnected from nature and perceive the natural world as a resource to benefit and fulfillment of their needs. The impact of this mindset can be observed from the increase number of natural disasters and emergence of environmental problems, which is not only happening in local and regional environment, but also in a global level. The changing of paradigm and human lifestyle in the way of production and consumption has exacerbated the ecological crisis. On the other hand, modern law is more directed and encouraged at the fulfillment of human desires that have the potential to exploit nature. Existing law is more oriented to the benefit of the economy while the importance of the environment is not considered as a top priority.

Environmental problems seem not only caused by a technical problem but also cannot be separated from issues human perspective and human behavior which are unethical for the environment [1]. There is a fundamental error in the philosophy of the human perspective on himself and its relation to nature, which is causing a disregard to the environment.

Inappropriate human behavior and the human perspective manifests itself in government policies in favor of industrialization. There is a growing movement in Indonesia characterized by modern technology, unfriendly environmental measures, poor governance, decentralization of institutions due to low commitment and law enforcement. [2]. These perspectives and behavior may be caused by anthropocentrism. Anthropocentric environmental ethics view human beings as the center of the universe. Humans view themselves as part outside and above the universe even humans view themselves as the natural rulers and therefore, humans may exploit nature or the environment according to their wishes in order to meet the needs and desires of their lifestyle.

Every being in the universe is an expression of nature itself and has value and should be treated with respect. The universe and life should be respected by humans' based on moral concerns and responsibility. There is a need to change this human anthropogenic perspective and behavior concerning the natural world. There is a need for cultural change in the humans interact with environment. The political commitment of the State embodied in the formulation of policies related to development and their joint movement both locally and globally in saving the environment is needed as well. It is also necessary to implement the principle of non-interference where is humans can use natural resources and the environment wisely in order to keep the ecosystem and biodiversity sustainable [2]. Ideally, the growth of one's environmental awareness is attached to themselves in conjunction with aspects of wealth, intellectual, aesthetic, moral and spiritual [3].

## II. DISCUSSION

### A. Ethics in the Human Interaction with the Environment

Discussing about humans' behavior certainly cannot be separated from the discussion about other elements of the universe. Environmental factors play a role in the formation of the cultural, social, and human behavior. Human behavior is influenced and determined by the natural habitat where they live. Human's interaction with the environment must be based on an environmental ethic and a moral foundation.

Environmental ethics can be interpreted as the basis of morality which provide guidance for individuals or communities to behave or choose appropriate actions and treat everything related to the environment as a whole supporting the sustainable activities within our lives and welfare of mankind and other living creatures [4]. Environmental ethics is a guideline of how humans behave towards the entire

Mella Ismelina Farma Rahayu is with the Bandung Islamic University, Bandung, Indonesia (phone: +6222-420-3368; e-mail: mellaismelina@yahoo.com)

universe. Attitude or behavior that does not destroy the natural world, does not exploit nature, produce environmental friendly products necessary for humans to live [5], [6].

What do we do while interacting with the environment is a reflection of the ethics that we use in everyday life. When a person's behavior towards environment is friendly and harmonious, it indicates that the person has a good environmental ethic, and vice versa. When the behavior of people tends to be environmental unfriendly, polluting and damaging the environment, his environmental ethic has not yet reflected the goodness within people.

#### *B. Human Interaction with Environment in Sundanese Culture Wisdom Paradigm*

Sundanese Culture Wisdom teaches people to blend with nature in an environmental ethic of mutual respect and mutual need for each other as human beings where the environment is an integral part of the ecosystem [7].

In the concept of Sundanese Culture Wisdom, the universe and human beings have the same substance and they have the same space and time. The only difference is the actualization or symbolization is carried out by the human itself. The natural structure consisting of upstream, downstream and the navel of the earth similarly the human structure consisting of head, body, legs, hands and the navel which has the same function as the one in the structure of nature.[7].

Human structure is similar to the structure of nature, there is no difference. The Sundanese Culture Wisdom provide human interaction patterns in the use of natural resources and environment that takes into account the environmental carrying capacity and environmental capacity as well as the balance and harmony of nature.

Humans' interaction with their environment will produce an experience that eventually will facilitate the development of science. Science can certainly be based in good actions or deeds following the concept of Tri Tangtu as a basis to form balance and harmony within three conditions contained in Codex Siksa Kanda Ng Karesian who explained that the Sunda is a system or knowledge which includes kasaliraan applied to the local community (local/regional), kabalarean as a shared system (national/state) and kabuanaan (international/world/global) [7].

There are harmonious interaction patterns in Sundanese Culture Wisdom, in term of protection and management of the environment which is always based on the determination of the spatial region in the Sundanese Culture Wisdom that consist of larangan area, tutupan area and baladahan area [7].

Larangan area is a conservation area that should not be exploited and harassed but must be left as the original as it is to meet the needs of the inner man. This Larangan area is a conservation area which should not be disturbed because it contains a genetic resource or germplasm. This Larangan area is also known as Sanghyang area (as the identity or Wiwitan). Sanghyang area relates to the inner aspect involving the understanding of the divine, while the Tutupan area is a buffer zone or a protector. This area is a reserve area that may be used on a limited basis for the protection and backup of

Tutupan area and Baladahan area. Baladahan area is the area of cultivation or production areas that may be cultivated by man to meet their physical needs. In this region, human can take its advantage and cultivate it for their needs [7].

The Sundanese Culture Wisdom concept, there is an environmental ethic where people is totally prohibited to touch and exploit. If the area of prohibition (upstream), as the conservation area, is destroyed, it will cause damage to the entire world. Its equivalent as if human brain; if it is damaged, the entire body will be damaged as well. Similarly, when the environmental capacity of Baladahan region decreased, people need to stop its usage until environmental capacity is recovered. Only then humans are allowed to take advantage of the Tutupan area again, that is until Baladahan area fully recovered. Once the Baladahan area is already recovered, the Tutupan area should not be used again [7]. In this pattern, the natural balance should be maintained and respected, because keeping the environment essentially means to maintain life itself. There's a moral message given by the Sundanese Culture Wisdom as saying "Saha nu nyaho ka dirina, nyaho ka gustina" (the one who knows himself, so knows his Lord) then the message "the damage of Larangan area (prohibited/conservation area) will affect the human moral: oblivious to their identity. An environmental ethics becomes important and cherished in the pattern of interaction between humans and the environment [7].

#### *C. Ecological Justice in Human and Environment Interaction*

No one can live alone without depending on each other and the environment, including other living things. It is because the elements of the environment are always interacting with each other, influencing each other, and interconnecting that humans may experience meaning and fulfilment.

If we examined the relationship of human interaction with the environment, the human being is extremely dependent to fulfill their needs. On contrary, the environment does not depend on humans to survive. Basically the environment will adjust naturally (without human) to reach balance.

Based on Biocentrism ethical views, humans can only live and develop as human beings if they can thrive in social community and their ecological communities. In other words, humans as social beings cannot be separated from their role as part of their ecosystem. Human life is not only determined by the social community but they are also part of an ecological communities that depends on each other subsistence in the universe [2].

If not addressed, ecological justice would actually harm mankind in the fulfillment of their livelihood. Therefore, actually ecological justice is essential to protect the interests of the man himself by trying to achieve harmony between ecological justice and social justice.

Ecological justice issues are certainly related to the debate over whether morality shall also be subject to life than human beings. Some philosophers, like Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant, argued that only humans have the moral capacity in the form of common sense and freedom to make a

rational choice, as other species do not have this capability, and in this case, ethics does not apply to them. The same arguments delivered by John Passmore. Passmore argument was based on reciprocity assumption. An assumption which assumes that moral obligation applies only if there is mutual obligations between the parties involved in a moral relationship [2].

The above opinion suggests that living creatures other than humans are not capable of moral reciprocity and consequently do not need to be treated morally by humans as moral actors. Nonhuman creatures have no moral value, so that the universe does not deserve consideration and moral concern. This view was criticized by biocentrism ethics. Biocentrism ethics try to do a revolution and moral movement that demands the biotic and ecological communities to be treated as moral communities. The moral basis of the expansion of the moral treatment is sublime life (in both the human species and other species) to themselves. Based on the biocentrism view, it is not only a human being who has a natural value but also the natural world, so the natural world deserves to have consideration and moral concern. The respect to the rights of every element of the environment is essential to achieve the equilibrium of the environment, preservation of natural resources and the achievement of a better quality of life in its broadest sense and not only based on the point of human greed lust and desire [8].

The focus of biocentrism ethics is the life itself, so that every creature on this earth has the same moral values that are need to be protected and saved. The consequence of this view is that the universe is considered as a moral community, where every creature in this universe, both man and nature are having moral values. Thus, there is the expansion of the ethics and morality that covers all the creatures in the universe -not only applied to the human community [2].

Based on biocentrism, ethics is not limited to humans only but applies to other living creatures as well. Thus, the moral issue does not only apply to the social community but also to ecological communities. In this case, human moral responsibility is not limited to human beings but also to all creatures in the universe.

Consistent with biocentrism point of view, Eugene P. Odum formulate a morality in the context of the environment with philosophical and biological considerations regarding man's relationship to the natural world and all non-human creatures. In a civilized society, human moral demands to consider the ideas of right and wrong about human behavior towards the natural surroundings. In this regard, it should be understood that the quality of individual and social life depends on the condition of the environment [9].

Moral discussion cannot be separated from the distinction between the moral agents and moral subjects. It answers the question of why humans have an obligation and responsibility to other creatures and the universe. According to Paul Taylor, the moral agent is the creature who has common sense, freedom and the willingness to be used to act morally, thus they having obligations and responsibilities to their actions (accountable beings). Through these capabilities, the moral

agent can make a moral judgment before doing something, to avoid actions that are morally wrong. The moral agent can also understand where the good and bad morally [2].

Moral subject is a creature that can be treated better or worse, and the moral agent has an obligation and a moral responsibility for a consistent outcome. The state of moral subjects for better or worse is determined by the attitude and behavior of the moral agent. Based on Biocentrism theory, moral subject include all creatures and organisms, whereas Abiotic objects not included on the moral subject but its presence is also important in interaction with humans and moral subject in achieving life balance so that they should be treated well and ethically by the moral agent [2].

Based on the above discussion and refers to the opinion of Singer and Rachels, all creatures on earth have the same moral status. Therefore, the moral principle of equal treatment among all species must be implemented [2]. In this case, the human views the universe and its contents in a broader perspective. Through such understanding, it is expected that there will be respected and has appreciation to the existence of the elements of the environment when humans interact with the environment there should be an attitude of willingness to preserve the environment. Through such a paradigm, it is expected that ecological justice will be reached where the universe and its contents are not reduced and viewed only by its economic value, but also viewed for its intrinsic value in terms of the cultural, social, and spiritual perspective. In this context, the universe and its elements have broader value, more than just an economic value.

### III. CONCLUSION

Environmental ethic is necessary as the basic guidelines and instructions when humans interact with their environment, so that human life can be sustainable and environmental functions remain stable. The survival of mankind depends on the sustainable practices and quality of the environment. Thus, humans have an interest to preserve the environment for survival and livelihood.

Sundanese Culture Wisdom and biocentrism paradigm has offered an environmental ethic which consider that humans and the environment is an integral and inseparable of the ecosystem. Ethics is not restricted to humans only but also applies to other living creatures. Thus, the moral issue does not only apply to the social community only but also to ecological communities. In line with those issues, human moral responsibility is not limited to human beings but also for all life in the universe.

The aim of the article is to positively contribute in changing the human perspective toward themselves and the natural world. Human behavior should therefore follow the values of ecological justice in interacting with the environment.

### IV. SUGGESTION

Sundanese Culture Wisdom and biocentrism paradigm should be used as a reference for the formulation of policies in the field of development environments, as well as the global

view and the foundation philosophy of Indonesia, Pancasila.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Mohammad Ghufuran, "Teori Perkembangan kepribadian Dalam Perspektif Islam", dalam M.G.Husain (ed), Psikologi Dan Masyarakat Dalam Perspektif Islam, Pustaka, Bandung, 1996, p.150-151.
- [2] A.Sonny Keraf, Etika Lingkungan Hidup, Kompas, Jakarta, 2010, p.78. p.5, p.5-81, p.70-86.
- [3] Komaruddin Hidayat, Psikologi Beragama, Menjadikan Hidup Lebih Ramah Dan Santun, Hikmah, Jakarta, 2010, p.129.
- [4] Benny Ridwan, "Etika Lingkungan Dalam perspektif Islam", dalam Budi Widianarko (ed), Membumikan Etika Lingkungan, Kanisius, Yogyakarta, p.64.
- [5] Marhaeni Ria Siombo, Hukum Lingkungan Dan Pelaksanaan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan di Indonesia, PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, Jakarta, 2012, p.12-13.
- [6] Antonius Atosokhi Gea dan Antonina Panca Yuni Wulandari, Relasi Dengan Dunia (Alam, IPTEK & Kerja), PT. Elex Media Komputindo, 2006, p.12.
- [7] Rahmat Chairman, KPLH Belantara, Bandung, interview February 9, 2013.
- [8] Muh. Aris Marfai, Moralitas Lingkungan, Refleksi Kritis Atas Krisis Lingkungan Berkelanjutan, Wahana Hijau, Yogyakarta, 2005, p.41-42.
- [9] William Chang, OFMCap, Moral Lingkungan Hidup, Kanisius, Yogyakarta, 200, p.34.



**Mella Ismelina Farma Rahayu** was born on February 9<sup>th</sup> 1969 at Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia. She was graduated bachelor degree in Faculty of Law at Bandung Islamic University, Indonesia on 1992. Graduated master degree in master program in Magister Program of Law at Padjadjaran University, Bandung, Indonesia on 1998, and graduated doctoral degree in Doctoral Program of Law at Diponegoro University, Semarang, Indonesia on 2006.

Her job was become the lecture at Faculty of Law and postgraduate, Bandung Islamic University Indonesia on 1992, postgraduate at Tanjungpura University on 2007 and postgraduate at Tarumanagara University on 2015. She has become the accesor of College Accreditation Organization of Indonesia and became the reviewer of directorate of research and people dedication, Ministry of Research, Technology and High Education Indonesia. Her publication is Environmental Law, Paradigm and Sketch Thematically (Bandung, Indonesia: PT Raja Grafindo, 2014). He has conducted research with the title is "The concept of Progressive Environmental Law (Environmental Law Reform theoretical foundation of Positivism to Progressivism Indonesia)" 2014 and "Empowerment Model Environmental Law Religious Cosmic Village Ciomas Subdistrict Panjalu As Ciamis District Environmental Conservation Efforts Function", 2013.

Prof. Mella has become a member of association of Indonesian law college leaders, Indonesian legal professional associations and teachers set of environmental laws.