

HORIZONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IN COLOMBIA

From anthropocentric environmental ethics to complex environmental ethics

Ana Patricia Noguera de Echeverri^{1*}

The intention of this article is to give an account of some tendencies of Colombian Environmental philosophic-ethical thought, and their importance in the school of environmental thought that is being developed at the National University of Colombia Sede Manizales thanks to the contributions of thinkers - who have undertaken the task of thinking what has been thought, as Heidegger reminded us - in these times that give us cause to think. The voices that we will present very briefly in this essay are those that have opened ways towards reflection on emerging values of the relationships between humans and web of life, the values that we all must construct if we want an “environmental society”² and the values that are necessary to overcome by inaugurating new educational, political, economic and cultural practices, as much in our region as in other areas of the world. In the voices of Augusto Angel, Jose Maria Borrero, Julio Carrizosa, Arturo Escobar, Guillermo Holes, Rubiel Ramirez and Patricia Noguera, who has been granted the honor to write this essay, we find creative powers of an alternative environmental vision that is crystallizing not only in Colombia, but in all of Latin America.

Environmental ethics on the way towards the enjoyment of life

Doubtlessly, Carlos Augusto Angel Maya³, professor of the National University of Colombia, founder of the Institute of Environmental Studies (IDEA) of the university in 1991, is the one who initiated in Colombia the marvelous adventure of investigating which ideas, thinkers and philosophical proposals of the West -- from Greece to the dawn of philosophical postmodernity that emerges from Nietzsche -- contribute to the construction of environmental philosophy and, specifically, of environmental ethics.

Augusto Angel Maya begins his historic philosophical journey, asking himself which concepts, images or ideas of nature, life, culture, humanity and the gods are present in the pre-Socratics, the Ionians, Plato, Aristotle, Christian thought, and modern philosophy. Which of them laid the foundations of the division between the world and nature, and man and the gods, in two opposite and irreconcilable directions, and which of them maintained the connection between the soul and body-culture-nature and earth-man-gods.

According to Augusto Angel, with the emergence of human beings in nature, transformations of the average ecosystem begin that are not in the human genes, but in the free will the human characterizes. The capacity to make decisions, which Angel indicates as inherent to human nature, leads cultures to construct their adaptive forms in diverse ways. Some are environmental societies and others are not. This depends on the greater or lesser understanding that each culture has of the ways of being of the web of life. Augusto Angel states that if environmental problems have emerged from cultural practices, it will have to be in the framework of the culture, and in it, the network of ethical values, where ecological, economic, scientific, aesthetic and technological solutions are constructed that necessarily include a place in environmental dialogue for political, ecological, economic, scientific, aesthetic and technological aspects.

¹Ph.D. Philosophy of Education, Masters in Philosophy, Distinguished Professor of the National University of Colombia Campus Manizales; co-founder, investigator and coordinator of the Group of Environmental Thinking of the Department of Human Sciences and of the Institute of Environmental Studies IDEA of the same University.

* Translated by Charmayne Staloff and Ricardo Rozzi.

² In his book “Hacia una Sociedad Ambiental” (Towards an Environmental Society) (1990, Bogotá: Editorial Labrador), Augusto Ángel proposes that an environmental society will be a society that is constructed from ethical-environmental values, which implies a decentralization of the problem of life from human life, and which introduces in its ethics, respect and responsibility to all life forms and to that which sustains it, within a systemic, ecological, and integral perspective. (cfr. pp. 25, 26 y 27).

³(2002) El retorno de Icaro (The Return of Icarus). 2nd Edition. Bogotá - México: PNUD, PNUMA, IDEA ASOCARS; (2001a) La Razón de la Vida (The Purpose of Life), 9 volumes on environmental ethics. Manizales - Medellín: IDEA National University Sedes

Angel Maya advocates for the recovery of the enjoyment of life, from the beauty that is in the design of a flower, an animal, or ourselves, to the thoughtful enjoyment that we can feel with a setting sun, a full moon or a dawn, or erotic enjoyment, that is to say, the enjoyment of the love dance of the animated bodies, giving and expressing life. The environmental ethics of Augusto Angel is an integral ethics that proposes a suture between the ethical, the aesthetic and the political. For Angel Maya the ethical emerges from life; it is a moral rationality that unites the human with the ecosystems in nature.

Communicative Ethics: Toward an Environmental Ethics Dialogue

The philosopher Guillermo Hoyos Vázquez⁴ shows the necessity of a public ethic and a communicative rationality that bears in mind nature, and makes a deep criticism of the "Pyrrhic victory" of positivist rationalism. Hoyos gathers elements contributed by phenomenology, which in its ecological origins is fed by three important philosophers: Martin Heidegger, Hans Jonas and Wolfgang Janke. For the communicative proposal in environmental ethics, Hoyos gathers and re-signifies the thought of Jürgen Habermas.

From the first three, he recovers a strong criticism of positivism, reductionism, and the idea of dominating the Earth with the rationality that calculates and orders the world for aims of manipulation and control. He emphasizes in a simple and profound way, Janke's idea that "... the impoverishment of the world for man, and with this, the reduction of the understanding of his existence, begins immediately at the moment at which physics and natural philosophy conquer myth in Antiquity" (Janke, 1988, p. 12). Guillermo Hoyos shows that in Janke there is already the idea that the split between sacred and profane in the West produces a profound crisis: the crisis of a culture that has lost its balance, sense and horizon, and the capacity to be grateful for its own existence to the beneficent forces of the sky.

The invitation to a communicative environmental ethics that emerges from the thinking of Hoyos consists of listening, understanding and respecting the "micro-narratives," the emergent stories of a context, region, minority social group, species in extinction, landscape, of smaller voices. The universality of communicative ethics is not in the content of the stories, but in the attitude of listening. This is the universal of communicative ethics: the practice of listening respectfully, of dialogue. The reconciliation of what has been segregated has to do with this ethics, which is an ethics of the senses and not of regulations. The universal rule was specificity, diversity, difference. The communicative ethics in environmental ethics reminds us of the documents of the poets in the present times of misery, as well as those of the philosophers in these times that give us cause to think.

Complex environmental ethics aesthetic as a way to peace

Without a doubt, Julio Carrizosa Umaña⁵ is the Colombian thinker who has contributed to environmental studies a socio-political character, He has specifically addressed the problem of violence, and has proposed a concept of peace that includes the ecosystemic environment. Carrizosa contributes to the construction of a Colombian environmental thought by addressing the relationships between sustainable development and peace. In territories of war, a healthy environment is not possible; humans and other species must abandon their native lands. Also, peace is not possible in societies in which the relationship with the ecosystemic environment is that of inappropriate exploitation. Peace is a political construction in that all the involved actors must participate, including the forests, the rivers, the mines, the fauna and flora, and the cultural practices that emerge from the relations between the societies and those other non-humans.

⁴(1989) *Elementos Filosóficos para la Construcción de una ética ambiental* (Philosophical elements for the construction of an environmental ethic). In: *Memorias Seminario Nacional sobre Ciencias Sociales y Medio Ambiente*. Bogotá: ICFES

⁵(2003) *Colombia de lo imaginario a lo complejo* (Colombia: from the imaginary to the complex). Bogotá: IDEA National University of Colombia; (2006) *Desequilibrios territoriales y sostenibilidad local* (Territorial imbalances and local sustainability). Bogotá: National University of Colombia

South American Environmental Philosophy Section

Carrizosa Umaña proposes to see the environment "in reference to ethical and aesthetical duties". This means to recognize that every act, every decision, every concept, every idea, and every image of the environment already contains an ethical and aesthetic dimension from which it is not possible to separate ourselves. Carrizosa emphasizes the Principle of Responsibility raised by Hans Jonas (1990 and 2004), which opens an immense door to the reflection on the emergence and presence of the human being *of and on* the Earth. The ecological responsibility is not an instrumental principle, but a form of conscience that humanity has. However, our culture – in which the logic of economic success is prime - has been unable to adopt this principle of responsibility. Responsibility is a main principle, which gives meaning to the Principle of Hope, as developed principally by Marc Bloch, for contemporary humanity.

Julio Carrizosa emphasizes the necessity of an anthropocentric ethics, which is not anthropocentric, and is governed by Jonas' Principle of Responsibility: "man is the only being known by us who can have responsibility. And by being able to have responsibility, man has it "(Jonas in Carrizosa, 2001, p.52), This means that whatever we do, however and wherever we do it, we are responsible. We cannot escape this principle. It is an ethical anthropocentrism that places the human being as the only one in charge of what happens to nature, and that emerges not out of the thought that man is outside of nature, but on the contrary, to accept that he *is* nature. For that reason it is his responsibility.

Environmental Ethics based on an anthropology of places: ecocultural territories

Arturo Escobar⁶ finds in the black communities of the Colombian Pacific (2002) powerful elements of an ecological sustainability, beginning with the reinterpretation of anthropological practices related to mythical and symbolic traditions and specific ecosystemic contexts. Escobar proposes this reinterpretation as a possibility of an autonomous design of the essential world of the life of these cultures. In the cultures studied by Escobar, the rituals and the ways of relation of the cultures with their ecosystemic surroundings are not reduced to utilitarian relations, in which the ecosystems with their tutelary mountains, rivers, plants and animals would be valued solely as resources available for man. In our black cultures that arrived in the Colombian Pacific in 1520, Escobar has found fundamental cultural elements in the construction of an environmental ethical-aesthetic: the relations of these cultures with their gods - that have been hidden under names of Christianity imposed by the discovery of America - are relations of great importance in the cultural identity of these towns. The symbols and the plots of imaginaries that maintain these cultures constitute an alternative ecological vision as well. The traditional ways to hunt, to fish, to construct their houses, to cultivate their earth, are models of alternative sustainability. Escobar suggests that those are the proposals of development and participative planning for that region of the Pacific in Colombia and, eventually, in other regions as well.

From his anthropological eco-cultural proposal arises the "Difference" as an environmental ethno-ethical-aesthetic value. The cultural diversity is an expression of the biodiversity. The evolution of life does not end with the human being: on the contrary, it continues transforming the world, generating a biodiversity of a new order: cultural. The different forms to be expressed in different ways of naming the things in the world, different aesthetic manifestations in search of a contemplative-expressive pleasure, different rituals and names for the Gods that are similar in each culture shows that value on which respect, responsibility, solidarity, cooperation are grounded is the Difference. This it is the departure point of the ecocultural alterity, so important in the Escobar's work.

⁶(1996) *La invención del Tercer Mundo* (The invention of the third world). Bogotá: Norma; (2000) *El lugar de la naturaleza y naturaleza del lugar: Globalización o postdesarrollo?* (The place of nature and the nature of place. ¿Globalization or post-development?) In: <http://www.clacso.org/wwwclacso/espanol/html/libros/lander/6.pdf>. Checked on May 29, 2006

Environmental Ethics, Rights, and the City

José María Borrero Navia⁷ reflects about the environmental crisis from the law and from the theme of the city and the urban. In his books, (1994 and 2003) there is a strong presence and concern with the construction of an ethic that surpasses the reductionist anthropocentrism of the modern law.

Borrero proposes an urban environmental ethics based on participation, dialogue and the respect of differences, just like the aforementioned authors. The contribution of Borrero consists of his reflection on environmental rights. Since the 1991 Constitution, it was clear in Colombia that one of the fundamental rights of human beings is the right to a healthy atmosphere. But do animals, plants, and life in general have rights?

Humanity, in its race towards the conquest of rights, towards a total democratization of rights in which no one is excluded, will have to accept that it is not alone on the Earth. Just as humanity has the right to inhabit the Earth, prepared during millions of millions years for the emergence of human beings, likewise is the Earth the one that grants rights to the human being, and not vice versa. While we are centered solely on human rights, others will be seriously injured because the construction of humans overlooks the recognition of the rights of others and of the other. Rights are the result of alterity. It is alterity which permits us to recognize ourselves, and to recognize others as such. Moderation, frugality, modesty, responsibility, respect, love and care, come from an emerging ethics of natural education.

Themes for an environmental ethics

Rubiel Ramírez Restrepo⁸ approaches a series of emerging themes derived from the undeniable planetary environmental crisis, and solicits for the urgent necessity to construct an ethics that responds to the environmental problems that, according to Ramírez, have emerged from the relationship of dominion between Man and Nature. In order to contribute to the construction of that ethics, the author makes a prudent revision of the ethical-environmental proposals elaborated on by Guillermo Hoyos, Nicolás Sosa, Peter Singer, Maria Julia Bertomeu, José Ferrater and Priscila Cohn.

Rubiel Ramírez proposes three key elements, which constitute the bases of an environmental ethics: freedom, responsibility and solidarity.

What is the freedom in the environmental sense? The author suggests that freedom is only possible if there exists a minimum of respect for the common ground, that is nature, which makes the free actions of men possible. Freedom is the basis of responsibility and solidarity; freedom is only possible if there is an understanding of nature.

Responsibility, the common denominator of all the environmental thinkers, is the second principle that Rubiel Ramírez raises, illuminated by the Jonas' principle in regard to the idea that man must be responsible for his acts to life itself.

Solidarity is the third principle for the construction of an environmental ethic. It consists of accepting that other living beings, human and non-human, have the same right to live as I, which is why to squander, waste or to misuse the patrimony of the Earth, expresses ingratitude in front of nature and an arrogance without limits of a rationalist and narcissistic human.

⁷(1994) Los derechos ambientales: una vision desde el Sur (Environmental Rights: a vision from the South) Cali.: FIPMA/CELA; (2002) Imaginacion Abolicionista. Ensayos de Ecologia Politica (Abolitionist Imagination. Essays on Political Ecology). México : PNUMA / ORPALC. Serie de Pensamiento Ambiental Latinoamericano (Latin American Environmental Thought Series No 4 – Cali : CELA

⁸(1998) Etica ambiental: Parametros para una discusión (Environmental Ethics. Parameters for a discussion). Armenia, Universidad del Quindío

From anthropocentric ethics to environmental ethics: The body as a suture between nature and culture⁹

With the contributions of the authors presented in this text, who have constituted my teachers, navigators of the same sea, I present my proposal of environmental ethics, which also emerges from the readings and discussions that we have developed in our group of Environmental Thought. With a strong presence of Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology, I consider, however, that environmental ethics in the scope of philosophy will only be able to take place when it can dissolve the modern distinction subject and object, *sensu stricto*.

Environmental ethics propels us toward the reflection, then, of the experience of being human in the world; being as existing, that is to say, going towards outside ourselves, in order to be able to be. The figure of the other and of the other that shapes my "I", who is no longer the center, but connection, correlation, body-rizom, body-world-of-the-life-symbolic-biotic, web of life, network of life, which emerges solely from the folds - it unfolds from existence. The figure of other and the other, is that *multi-whole* or all manifold, which is the I, is not more than momentum of the fold-refold of life.

If environmental ethics needs a progressive blurring of the subject, it is because it also needs an exhaustive blurring of the quantifying objectifying. The subject-object relation, so basic and fundamental in all modern epistemology, becomes in my proposal of environmental ethics, the main obstacle. Husserl in his *Crisis* (1991) already showed this profoundly and painfully. The ocean-concept of the world of life is a wonderful inheritance from phenomenology, which debilitates the force of subjectivity in all its forms to construct a weak ethics, that is to say without foundations, that thanks to the aesthetic character of the body and the skin, as places of sutures between nature and culture, flesh and spirit, material and idea, allow the understanding of the web of life, the theme or weave of life, that constitutes the environmental.

Nature, conceived of not as mechanistic, not linear nor causal, but pure power of being of being, is not a static, finished, completed, or teleological nature. It is pure potentiality, permanent diversity. From her emanates all the forms, which correlated express intentionalities of the conscience, but not of a conscience outside of her, but emergent from her. A conscience that emerges from complex relations produces complex valuations.

The linear hierarchies of dominion that prevail in anthropocentric ethics, dissolve themselves in the environmental ethics that we propose. Nothing is either more or less important in the weave of the life. Then

⁹NOGUERA Patricia (1989) *Arquitectura, Etica y Medio Ambiente* (Architecture, Ethics, and the Environment). In: *Memorias Primer Seminario Nacional sobre Hábitat Urbano y Problemática Ambiental*. Bogotá: ICFES; (1991) *The Environmental Crisis in Modernity: urgency of a new ethics*. In: *Memorias del Primer Seminario Latinoamericano sobre Hábitat Urbano y Medio Ambiente*, Bogotá: ICFES. p.p.53-58; (1999) *The body and the World of life in aesthetic-environmental education*. In: FRANCISCANUM. Newsletter of the Sciences of the spirit. Phenomenology in Latin America. Año XLI, n° 122- 123. Bogotá: University of San Buenaventura; (2000) *Aesthetic education y environmental complexity*. Manizales: Centro Editorial Universidad Nacional Sede; (2000a) *El Cuerpo y el Mundo de la Vida en la Dimensión Ambiental* (The body and the world from an environmental dimension). In: *Revista Gestión y Ambiente* No 4, IDEA, Universidad Nacional de Colombia Sedes Medellín, Manizales, Bogotá and Palmira; with ECHEVERRI Jorge (2000) *Etica, ciudad y vida* (Ethics, city and life). In: *Risaralda Educadora*. Pereira: Editorial Gobernación del Departamento de Risaralda; NOGUERA Patricia (2004) *El Reencatamiento del Mundo: Ideas para etica-estetica desde la dimension ambiental* (The Re-enchantment of the world: Ideas for an aesthetic-ethical from an environmental dimension). In: *Etica Ecologica* (Ecological Ethics). Madrid/ Montevideo: Nordan and Nordan; (2004) *El reencatamiento del mundo: ideas filosoficas para la construccion de un pensamiento ambiental contemporaneo* (The Re-enchantment of the world: philosophical ideas for the construction of a contemporary environmental thinking). México: United Nations Program for the Environment/Regional Office for Latin America and the Carribbean PNUMA/ORPALC – National University of Colombia Sede Manizales.

South American Environmental Philosophy Section

inclusive values such as the one of solidarity and of cooperation are formed, as opposed to the values instituted by the relationship of dominion, we propose as they are the value of competitiveness and individualism. One thinks about the multiple-whole that constitutes community, collectivity. From subject-object relations of dominion, we propose the step towards respect-network and responsibility-knitting, that can only be exerted in realms where there are no mono-directional hierarchies.