

Environmental Ethics and the Effect of Climate Change

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1. Introduction

Environmental ethics is an area of ethical principles which relates to human beings interacting with the environment. During the early 1970s, the concept of environmental ethics came to life as the environmentalists encouraged the philosophers to shed some light on the multifaceted field of environments and present a fresh prospect on this matter [1]. In the academia, there were a few journal publications at that time which drove the ideology of environmental ethics to move forward [2].

There are several critical ethical choices relating to the environment that we humans have to make frequently. Such as, is it really necessary to keep on cutting down the trees to meet the increasing demand for human consumptions? Is it not time yet to look for a sustainable solution instead of running gasoline-powered cars? Should not the current generation take the responsibilities of their daily deeds for shaping the future? We human beings are highly dependable on the environment that provides us with breathable air, food, water, shelter, medicine, clothing, fuel, and many other natural resources. We often forget that how the environment plays an important role in our livelihood and the quality of life. The ecological balance has to be relatively stable in a dynamic equilibrium and be maintained. Along with the advancement of modern science and technology, the exploitation of the environment surged exponentially. Climate change is inevitable. The only way to deal with this crisis is to acknowledge it to the fullest and cut the emission as early as possible to reduce the intensity of the damage that's already done.

The purpose of this research is to provide an insight into the effects of climate change along with discussing various environmental ethical principles with proper reasoning and patterns from current and previous incidents and how can we prevent the damage by utilizing sustainable development without bringing more destruction to the Mother Earth. Health crisis, impacts of deforestation and the exploitation of natural resources, agriculture and ecology, natural disasters, transportation sector, economy and sustainability, all will be discussed in the following sections of this article.

2. Health Crisis

The environment plays a crucial role in human health through the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we consume daily. Living healthy should be the utmost priority and core part of the everyday lifestyle. Nothing can replace the satisfaction of living a healthy life. Regular exercise and maintaining a balanced diet full of nutritious foods can be highly beneficial momentarily and also in the long run. Nowadays, people are being health conscious and investing in many expensive dietary plans, gymnasium membership, equipment, and many more. Despite maintaining a healthy lifestyle, still there are many complications. The environment we live in must remain in a pleasant condition for us to function properly. Various respiratory diseases like emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, lung cancer, and also cardiovascular diseases can occur due to exposure to air pollution for a longer period. The global average temperature is rising. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's 2020 Global Climate Report, since 1880, the land and ocean temperature combined has risen at an average rate of 0.08 degrees Celsius (0.13 degrees Fahrenheit) per decade [3]. However, doing laborious works for a longer period in warm unhealthy condition, heat-related mortality is rising. The drinking water sources are getting polluted every day. In many areas, people are left with no choice but to use contaminated water. Also, they are drinking from these unhygienic sources. As a result, water-related diseases like dysentery, cholera, typhoid, hepatitis A or E, and many more are spreading at a very fast pace.

Along with physical health, mental health is also very important at every stage of life. In many first-world countries, they consider mental health problems very seriously and invest a lot of money into medications, treatments, and researches to overcome this very sensitive issue. In recent days, the COVID-19 crisis took a toll on human livelihood. The damage done by the virus itself is beyond imagination as it left millions of people's physical health very vulnerable. Also, this entire situation affected the mental health condition brutally. Children are not getting out to play with their friends, the schools are closed in many countries for more than a year. People are not being able to interact with others like before as the skepticism is growing more and more. The crimes like school shootings have turned into a common phenomenon in many countries and it is getting out of control now. Due to having a lack of social and family bonding, the problems are increasing day by day. Along with focusing on these physical and psychological health related issues, the environmental pollutions should be addressed too in an urgent manner.

3. Deforestation and Exploitation of Natural Resources

As the world population continues to increase at a rapid rate, the growing need for land is becoming a matter of concern. Due to the excessive requirement for industrial expansion, farmland, urbanization, mining, and many more activities, 2.47 million trees are cut down every day and 900 million annually [4]. However, this massive scale of deforestation has devastating consequences on our livelihood. The release of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is increasing every day. In densely forested areas, the trees can absorb more carbon dioxide while in the deforested areas the carbon emission rate automatically increases by many folds. Natural rain cycle is also changing due to the deforestation as there are less water in the deforested areas. As a result, the lands are becoming dryer to produce crops.

Many people directly depend on the forest as a source of food. While the forests are gone, the native people now have to look for outside sources for food to meet their demand. The overall nutrition level in their diet is going down rapidly which results in a degradation of health quality.

The mining industry is very well-known for the environmental damage from an earlier period of time. In the beginning, there was not that much of a significance in mining until the industrial revolution took place and the modern civilization developed. In oil and coal mining industry, it is very likely that a plenty of forest land will be needed. Also, for these mining establishments, new roads and highways are required for smooth operation. The waste produced by mining, contaminates the nearby environment and affects the livelihood of humans and other species. The tobacco industry is also associated with the cause of deforestation. For tobacco plantation and to produce tobacco crops, more areas getting cleared. In the tobacco curation process, a lot of woods are getting burned. Deforestation, soil erosion, water pollution, rise of carbon dioxide in the environment, extraction of minerals via mining all are directly connected to the climate change.

4. Agriculture

The agricultural sector is highly sensitive to the climate change. Climate change can create disruption in the food supply chain and affect the overall quality of the crops that are being produced. The overall production can be hampered due to the change in temperature, precipitation, water level decrease, unavailability of decent quality water for irrigation, and extreme weather. According to the geographic location, many countries will face dreadful consequences. Some crops will be severely affected than others due to the soil erosion. As a result, the food shortage will be very likely in the near future.

5. Ecology

Climate change has the potential to disrupt the natural habitat of many species. Due to the extreme temperature change, many species will be unable to find another suitable place to live which will result in an inevitable extinction. A lot of animals and species like the polar bear, staghorn coral, and adélie penguin have already gone extinct due to climate change. If we fail to consider climate change with utmost sincerity, then we will not be able to save the remaining species from going extinct.

6. Natural Disasters

Natural disasters are the by-product of climate change. The global temperature is rising day by day and the precipitation patterns are also changing due to climate change. All of the changes are happening right in front of us but still many are in complete denial of the fact that climate change is responsible for these extreme events like hurricanes, flooding, wildfires, heatwaves, droughts, and many more. Around the world due to these frequent extreme natural calamities, many people have lost their home, livelihood and their loved ones already. Every year due to cyclones and heavy flooding millions of people dies. On the other hand, due to heavy droughts and extreme weather, the production of crops is falling significantly.

7. Transportation

The inputs from modern-day transportation to accelerate climate change are undeniable. The world is connected through various transportation mediums. Railways, airways, roads and highways, waterways, and pipelines are the most common ones. People are highly dependent on these mediums for day-to-day activities but suitable alternatives must be considered that will help to decrease the rate of carbon emission. Diesel and gasoline-powered vehicles release a lot of greenhouse gases in the environment that is causing the Earth's temperature to rise. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, 29 percent greenhouse gas emission was caused by the transportation sector in 2019 [5]. Mostly, over 90 percent of transportation is dependent on gasoline and diesel. The aviation industry is also responsible for contributing to global carbon dioxide emissions.

8. Economy

The economy is also highly reliant on climate change occurrences. Many viable industries are getting directly affected by climate change and some are being partially affected. The infrastructures relating to these industries can be destroyed by extreme natural calamities that can disrupt the entire supply chain as production facilities, merchants, warehouses, shipping corporations, delivery hubs, and retailers are all connected in a network. Any short-term or long-term disruption can cause a severe price hike. As a result, in many countries around the world, basic groceries can get beyond the purchasing power of the mass people. It is suggested that due to failing in handling the climate change crisis tactically, many big corporations and industries will go bankrupt and eventually be destroyed [6]. Climate change can also affect delicate sectors like tourism and exploration. People often tend to avoid destinations that are very vulnerable to climate change and remote because in case of any severe disasters those places will not have enough infrastructural support to handle the crisis. As a result, the local economy associated with the tourism sector shrunk significantly. Due to the rise of extreme climate-related disasters, the insurance industry is also getting affected. The intensity of these calamities increasing and the insurance coverage is also becoming expensive relating to the areas that are very prone to hazards.

9. Concluding Remarks

Climate change has become one of the greatest threats to modern civilization. The severity of this problem should be addressed as soon as possible with utmost priority. Producing clean energy, urbanization in a more rational way, designing more effective water management systems, propose sustainable farming methods, decrease the rate of deforestation and introduce policies to increase reforestation, eco-friendly vehicles, utilizing solar, wind and other renewable energies, all are the demand of the time. Both the public and private sectors should collaborate to overcome the climate crisis. The government should be very strategic in terms of handling climate change issues. More incentives should be offered to the industries so that they become encouraged to move their business towards a greener option. Nowadays, many industries are taking advantage of climate change. They are merchandising and selling products by tagging “eco-friendly” and charging extra from the customers to make a huge profit. It is not ethically right and should not be allowed in the business too. In many countries, along with using fossil fuels to produce electricity, nuclear energy is getting utilized as a viable alternative. But multiple countries are being accused of using nuclear technology to create weapons of mass destruction which raises many questions relating to ethical values. Also, many people are still unaware about the impacts of climate change. It is high time to arrange different awareness programs and take initiatives to reach people and let them objectively realize the facts. New interactive proposals should be introduced to accelerate the movement going towards the zero-emission goal. In addition, substantial punishments should be introduced and imposed to discourage environmental crimes. In conclusion, to ensure a better future for us and our forthcoming generation we must take action immediately to tactically control the climate change crisis before it becomes too late and reaches a point of no return.

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