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Conceptual paper

Climate change, ethics and sustainability: An innovative approach

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ABSTRACT

Our goal in this article is the analysis of the state of affairs, regarding the phenomenon of climate change and its impact in different areas. We synthesize the various approaches available in the scientific debate on this subject, mainly the one that affirms the existence of global warming and the current approach, which denies it. Beyond the controversy, what seems to be evident is that there is a multifactorial causality in a phenomenon that affects anthropogenic factors a well. Since some environmentalisms exclude the human being in their consideration of the ecosystem, and if they do, they accommodate man in their approaches always as a variable that distorts and deteriorates the environment, we believe that a fundamental rethinking of the issue is needed, from the perspective of an integral environmentalism. The environmentalism we propose not only does not exclude the human being from this multifactorial equation, but also considers man as the fundamental, modifiable variable in that process. We thus consider the environmental problem in the broader framework of an integral ecology, where the human being takes a central place, understood as a free person and a moral subject, responsible for his actions and a key element in any consideration and review of the process. In this context, the concept of sustainability emerges as a key concept that must guide human action in all areas, a concept from which it is possible to appeal to the responsibility of man within the framework of an ethics of sustainability. Man is called to do right in all orders. When he does not respect this ethical orientation, so implicitly included in his own conscience, he becomes denatured and suffers the consequences in himself and in the environment in which he lives. We believe that it is a priority to seek the foundations of the existence of God, analyzing the theistic view, the foundations of sustainability for the good of man himself and the planet.

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Introduction to climate change

Climate change is nowadays an unquestionable phenomenon that is well studied and referenced in the main scientific journals, especially in the field of natural sciences. Although we are not going to propose here a specific vision of this phenomenon from the scientific-natural environment that dominates the perspective of scientific consideration; our contribution is rather, *sensu stricto*, in the field of anthropology, which is our specialty. In fact, in the study of this phenomenon, we would like to raise and broaden awareness on the relevance of a conception of sustainability from the viewpoint of ethics; in other words, we aim to present an innovative approach of an ethics of sustainability that we consider necessary in order to address possible solutions that have an impact on the bottom line of this issue.

On the one hand, methodologically speaking, we consider that if we do not reflect in depth, interdisciplinarily, on climate change and on all its dimensions, we will narrow our vision of this phenomenon and thus become impaired, because science does not occur in a sealed compartment, but in the interaction of disciplines and perspectives, in that broad dialog of the sciences of which Benedict XVI¹ speaks. On the other hand, we should also not fail to mention in this article a perspective of relevant reflection that can shed some light for a broader consideration of the phenomenon of climate change from a historical perspective.

Global warming

In the face of evidence of the increase in Earth's average temperatures that science confirms is taking place in different points and latitudes of our planet, and the clear influence of human action in this process, which has been termed *the anthropogenic factor*, we want to stress from the beginning that we must do everything in our power to improve climate and environmental conditions. It is a serious responsibility that we, as administrators of the planet's resources, have; we must pay attention to the consequences of our action on the conditions in which life develops. We are committed to the preservation of life and the natural heritage we have received and for which we feel responsible.

In this sense, we favor the initiatives aimed at the reduction, in as much as possible, or the total elimination of greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), particularly of CO₂, which are known to raise the average temperature of the Earth, as well as the complete eradication of emissions of other gases such as CFCs, which damage the ozone layer and are also fully replaceable by other non-harmful components. We also want to call for the preservation of fauna and flora species, as well as all the biodiversity of our planet, particularly the care for

the oceans and the seas, which also suffer the consequences of global warming with high increases in temperatures, and also with elevation of the sea level, acidification of the environment, and deterioration of ecosystems, amongst other alterations.

We also want to draw the necessary attention to the consideration of human living conditions. Because we cannot lose sight of the fact that man is the main actor that is also part of that ecological environment that we want to preserve. We must keep the human being in mind, and his need for development in any realistic consideration of the environmental problem.

It would be a fallacy for us to think about protecting our environment without allowing the necessary development of the human being at the same time. In fact, we firmly believe that if the preservation of the environment comes into collision with human development, the chain will break at its weakest link, and this is the preservation of the environment. We cannot be naive in this regard, there are many illustrative cases. Another question is what kind of human development should we look for and foster so that man is viable and sustainable in the long term on the planet. This is the question we want to reflect on in this paper.

Climate change: a broader vision

Although it is scientific evidence, particularly meteorological evidence, that we are facing a global warming in the planet that requires decisive action on the part of human beings, we believe that we should exercise the utmost caution when investigating the reasons behind a global climate change we may be witnessing that some qualify as unique and irreversible in the history of our planet. There is some research in other areas of science that we should not disregard as it could shed some light in our consideration of the phenomenon.

Stratigraphy is a branch of geology concerned with the study and interpretation of stratified sedimentary, metamorphic and volcanic rocks found in soils.

Archeological stratigraphy deals with the study of the various layers (strata) of earth that have been deposited in soils and are of archeological interest. Through this science, we learn that the different layers of materials found on the ground are ordered and reveal valuable information. The strata are arranged vertically according to their age, the oldest ones are located deep down while the younger strata are located above. This geological circumstance, this surprising ordering of the strata, allows for stratigraphy to date the time of sedimentation of these materials. Each layer has a different age which can be inferred from the place where it is located. This even allows for archeological stratigraphy to specify the time an archeological artifact belongs to according to the stratum and the depth where it was located. Stratigraphy therefore allows for a *chronological dating* of the soil layers and the objects that are found within them; but not only that.

It is estimated that our planet is about 4600 million years old. In all this time various sediments have been deposited

¹ Tal como enfatizó el Santo Padre BENEDICTO XVI en su Discurso a la Universidad de Ratisbona el 12 de septiembre de 2006. Available from: https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/es/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html.

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