

Global Environment and Faith Ethics for Sustainable Development¹

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Abstract

Major faith systems are compared in terms of monotheism, polytheism, and interpretations of afterlife. Reincarnation is interpreted in terms of a material dimension with the concept of DNA vehicles. Faith ethics regarding nature conservation among major religions are compared. The Rio declaration is interpreted in terms of faith ethics. There is no fundamental conflict in principles between the Rio declaration and major faith ethics concerning the environment. It will be necessary to develop the Rio declaration into a new form of global environmental ethics in the future, when environmental scientific society must provide more clear pictures to faith societies that can help sustainable development of Earth.

Key words: Global Environment, Faith Ethics, Rio Declaration, DNA vehicles

Introduction

Humans face enormous challenges in which we have to manage the global environment to pass it on to our descendants who will be able to sustain their living standard as well as their ancestors enjoy. The global environmental challenges are so fundamental that all individuals as well as all nations must take into consideration their deep value systems. Whether or not people have a faith, all individuals should possess a system of ethics that could support his/her actions suitable to friendly co-operation for the sustainable development of Earth.

The Rio declaration is such a system or code that can provide guidance to all humans. Delegates from all nations gathered in Rio de Janeiro on the occasion of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development from 3 to 14 June 1992 and reached an important agreement in spite of their different historical, cultural, and environmental traditions. The agreement was made after long debate and compromises

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of political positions. It is interesting to analyze the ideas that appear in the Rio Declaration in terms of different faith systems rather than political positions and to explore the future of global environmental ethics.

The Declaration itself does not show any specific faith flavor; rather, it tries to be neutral about any specific faith system. However, an undercurrent of ideas show influences of different faith systems, which the authors try to explain in the following parts. Another historically important event occurred in a gathering of leaders of five major religions, which was organized by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in 1986 and issued the Assisi Declaration through which Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and Islamic leaders call to their own faithful. The outcomes of the declaration and subsequent faith gatherings by other leaders were edited and published in the book "Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action, Interfaith Partnership for the Environment," (UNEP, 2000).

I would like to compare the two documents of the "Rio Declaration" and the book "Earth and Faith" in terms of their interrelation.

Classification of Faith Systems

Classification by Number of Deities

There are two major faith groups in which the one is the so-called monotheistic faiths. This group includes Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. The other group is the so-called polytheistic faiths that has a number of deities. Many faith systems have not survived such as the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Indus, Hellenic and Roman religions. The three faith systems of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism are polytheistic and actively practiced in Asian countries. Besides these, Confucianism and Taoism are found in Northeast Asia and Shinto is important in Japan. There are other indigenous faith systems that survive and are influential to throughout these regions.

Classification by Teaching of the Afterlife

Monotheistic faith system shares a basic principle of afterlife in which all believers wait until Judgement Day after death. This principle indicates one way of life, i.e. birth and death, and wait. (Some Christian/islamic sects are expecting afterlife in this life; indeed, working to insure it in this life) Some polytheistic religions follow also the principle of one way of life, but no Judgement Day so that in afterlife souls may go in heaven or hell by way of some mediate or immediate judgment. Among polytheistic faith systems, three faith systems share a similar view through the concept

of reincarnation or the “wheel of life:” Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism.

They foresee endless cycles of birth and death on the earth. The two different principles of afterlife differently influence the interpretation of global environmental problems and solutions. Monotheistic faith systems inherently possess the “one-way principle” so that the idea of Judgement Day influences the interpretation of the future of humankind and the Earth. When the environment of the Earth becomes uninhabitable, either humankind terminates in death, or they try to escape to other planets. If humankind faces death, there will be Judgement Day. If a planetary exodus is possible, humankind may postpone Judgement Day. Pure Land Buddhism teaches that Maitreya Boddhisattava will come to save people after the death of Sakyamni Buddha, in 5 billion 67 million years, when it is imaginable the earth will be not inhabitable to humankind in the planetary evolution. This eschatological view may provide either positive impact on global environmental ethics or a negative impact of giving up of efforts on ethics. Ethics, in principle, should pursue efforts of good management of global environment.

How Faith Systems Manage Other Living Beings

Many living species cohabitate with the human species in the global ecosystem. Monotheistic faith systems share a basic principle of the order of God, human species and other living species, in which firstly God presides as principle and judge of the order, followed by human species with a limited judgmental capacity to serve as a custodian of other living species and inorganic substances. The responsibility of nature conservation is given to human species as a duty. Polytheistic religions share different principles of the order among gods/goddesses, human species and other living species, in which gods/goddesses preside as earlier or future exemplars followed by both the human species and other species in a close relationship. There is no clear message of custodianship from the gods/goddesses for nature conservation, but only a demand to worship nature and abide with other living species. Because the three Indian original faith systems share the basic principle of reincarnation, other living species are possibly former or future beings before and in the afterlife of human species. Jain people do not kill animals, including insects, and their temples often serve as veterinary hospitals. Humane societies in Western countries share the same goal as these Jain practices, but it is not clear that they are motivated by religious beliefs.

How Faith Systems See Other Living Beings as Food

There are different food taboos in faith systems, but two main different groups are the vegetarian and non-vegetarian groups. Hindu, Jain and Buddhist monks are

strict vegetarians, in which they avoid as much as possible killing other animals as food sources. Followers of Hinduism and Jainism are also vegetarians, but they may consume dairy products. The point of the vegetarian diet is to obtain protein sources from vegetable rather than from animal sources. Dairy products contain animal protein in milk, cheese and yoghurt. The faith system originating from the Indus Civilization may have influenced these faith systems because bovine agronomy exploits much more land than any other type of agronomy or agriculture, and in order to conserve resources, cows were invested as a sacred animal messenger from the gods.

Food taboo practices are so important that there are different domesticated animal industries to meet protein demands, which have consequences for agricultural resources and the environmental issues differ according to which animals are most easily domesticated in a particular environment. The pig taboo in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Jain faith systems is very important in agricultural landscapes where there are environmental problems inherent with pig farming, pig manure contamination of water, and pig diseases that easily migrate to the human population.

Influenza A viruses have been causes of pandemic problems, in which there are key players such as migrating water fowl, domesticated ducks, chickens, domestic pigs and finally humans. Among the key players, pigs are a more important vector of human disease. When we see the problem of continuous human population growth and food supply limits in the future, animal protein supply and vegetarian practices will be an issue for solving the problem.

How to Apply Faith Systems to Ecosystem Conservation

All faith systems have ethical stances toward other living beings and nature conservation. We, as the human species, must have environmental ethics that could guide the direction of global environmental policy. The science of ecology is the one that can guide the direction in which both natural and social sciences play important roles; engineering approaches also provide key roles to find solutions. The fundamental principle of ecology is the interdependency of all elements of living and non-living beings as the basis of the ecosystem. Elements in the ecosystem are very diverse and depending on the focal ecosystem, there is a hierarchy of the elements. Essential elements are inorganic elements, such as nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, minerals and water that support agriculture. The management of these elements is an essential issue for ecosystem conservation. The human species is not clever enough to control elements in sustainable ways. We are facing overuse of nitrogen and phosphorus which induces eutrophication problems in water bodies. Phosphorus in the form of phosphate is a limiting resource on the earth. It is predicted that phosphate mines will be

consumed within this century when agriculture will face difficulty in sustaining enough food production for humankind.

In addition to those essential elements, petroleum is another basic element that supports modern society, the depletion of which we will see within this century. We have to clearly see that we have passed the “oil peak,” i.e. the largest yearly oil production, in the year 2005 and no more greater yearly oil production is expected while the yearly oil consumption is expected to rapidly increase due to economic growth in China and India.

How to Harmonize Life Systems between Human Species and Other Living Species on Earth

With a deep understanding of ecosystems on Earth, the human species must harmonize its life system with the life systems of other living species. I would like to examine the basic principle of reincarnation regarding the disposal of human corpses. The Abrahamic religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam recommend burial as a method of disposal because they believe the corpse should be kept intact as much as possible for the Judgement Day. Faith systems such as Taoism, Confucianism and Shinto also recommend burial under the earth, but they may allow cremation. They do not insist on interment. Buddhism recommends cremation, if possible, but Tibetan Buddhism recommends “sky burial,” i.e. offering a dead body to eagles as food. Tibetan Buddhists believe that this method is the best way to speed reincarnation. Cremation requires much wood as fuel that is affordable in Asian countries where forests are kept in sustainable manners, but is not affordable in Tibet where most land is located above the forest line.

Zoroastrianism also teaches “sky burial” but not due to reincarnation; rather it avoids contamination of the sacred fire through cremation and the soil through interment, which is the core concept of this faith system. The souls of dead persons should quickly reach the sky where judgement is practiced by the supreme god. Regardless of the methods of corpse disposal, it can be clearly seen that the atomic elements of a decomposed corpse are circulated. After the quick or slow decomposition of corpses, atoms that organize the bodies will scatter and migrate directly or indirectly into the next living species as atomic transmigration. Because of the closed system of the Earth, all atoms are shared by living species including human species to shape up new forms. In atomic transmigration, the central question is migration of atoms into a new DNA aggregate that forms a new living being. A DNA aggregate is a physically essential part of transmigration, and a new arrangement of DNA that is strictly controlled by a heritable design, could be interpreted as reincarnation. The human

species as well as other living species can be described as DNA vehicles.

What Is the Fundamental Question of Sustainability?

Scientific principles of thermodynamics can provide an answer to the question what is sustainability, in which the principles fundamentally interpret the universe, planets and the earth as ever changing entities in terms of energy dynamics. Sustainability itself is a hard concept to be realized. In Buddhism, the most fundamental understanding of all phenomena is mutable, transient, which is opposite to the concept of sustainability. The concept of development inherently shows change, variation, growth, expansion, progression, growth and improvement. However, we dared to declare sustainable development in the Rio declaration. We need to deeply understand the concept of “sustainable development.”

The Rio Declaration and Its Undercurrent Faith Systems

The Rio declaration starts from the following statement: “Reaffirming the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, adopted at Stockholm on 16 June 1972, and seeking to build upon it, with the goal of establishing a new and equitable global partnership through the creation of new levels of cooperation among States, key sectors of societies and people, working towards international agreements which respect the interests of all and protect the integrity of the global environmental and developmental system. “

In the above statement, “a new and equitable global partnership” means filling the gap between developing and developed countries, which is one of fundamental issues in global society carried from the UN Stockholm Conference 1972. The following sentence: ”Recognizing the integral and interdependent nature of the Earth, our home,” has a deep meaning in terms of Buddhist philosophy in which the most fundamental recognition of the universe, the earth, and all forms is their integrity and interdependency. The Rio declaration consists of 27 principles that cover basic issues of man’s relationship to nature and other humans under new approaches of regulation and economy. The word “sustainable development” is used in 13 Principles, which address the goals of the declaration and the ways to achieve the goals.

The word “sustainability” implies continuity, support, strengthening, or stability, while the word “development” implies conversion, growth, propagation or expansion, where attention is focused on the concept of change in terms of time. The connection of the two concepts of “sustainability” and “development” includes some contradictory meanings, so that the word “sustainable development” invites many ways of

interpretation. However, Buddhism emphasizes the temporary or transitory character of all forms, the earth and universe, because of their interdependency, which is logically opposite to continuity or stability. The interpretation of sustainable development could be a development of a new form rather than a conservative form. However, the reality of global environment management requires us to examine both the ways of change and conservation depending on specific areas and problems.

Principle 1 states, “Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.” This principle implies that anthropocentric value is placed against a theocentric value or a bio-centric value. There is no clear proposition in Principle 1 that indicates the relationship among God, man and nature according to monotheism. Because the United Nations is a political body, it should be neutral regarding any religious influence. Faith societies can interpret Principle 1 in different ways so that the societies promote the concept “sustainable development” according to their own principles. The example of Hinduism places all life forms around God so that human beings may not be the only one at the center of concerns. Sacred flora and fauna such as cows will be also treated as the center.

Principle 2 says, “States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental and developmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.” This principle shows a political message and the limit of activities of global environment conservation that complicates international processes and economical arrangements to implement any good global actions.

Principle 3 states, “The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.” There is a clear message behind this principle that the manner of sustainable development should focus on the happiness of human descendants, which all faith societies affirm and emphasize as a guide for actions. However, depending on different faiths, the concept of happiness may be interpreted in different ways. The monotheistic interpretation emphasizes achievement of happiness in this world along with strong belief in God and Biblical events. Other faith societies interpret happiness as an achievement in this world or the next world, or other world, or underworld. South Asian faiths share a common idea of reincarnation where happiness is achieved through Nirvana which includes certain activities. There are conflicts of environmental needs between present and future generations. How to compromise environmental needs of

the wealth and convenience of the present generation with future generations is a central issue for any faith society that should provide answers about different interpretations.

Principle 4 states, “In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.” There is no conflict among faith societies about how to interpret Principle 4 that addresses a secular warning against short-sighted greed.

Principle 5 says, “All States and all people shall cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world.” This message is important to any faith society and impels them to increase their philanthropic activities.

Principle 6 states, “The special situation and needs of developing countries, particularly the least developed and those most environmentally vulnerable, shall be given special priority. International actions in the field of environment and development should also address the interests and needs of all countries.” This emphasis is unanimously accepted by any faith society.

Principle 7 says, “States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit to sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.” This principle is a great compromise that guides sustainable development of the Earth between “rich and poor” countries. The term “common but different responsibility” should be clarified in the context of activities based upon different faith societies. The monotheistic interpretation emphasizes the “common but different responsibility” in the context of the relationship among God, man and nature, while other faith societies may interpret it in the order of God, nature and man, or just nature and man. Faith societies that are active, especially in developed countries, should work toward an interpretation of “common but different responsibility.”

Principle 8 states, “To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies.” This

principle is a clear message of great compromise between developed and developing countries. Unsustainability might occur when some faith societies do not agree to the application of demographic policies. However, human demographic policy should be discussed. Among Moslem countries there are clear differences in lifestyles in terms of energy, material consumption and an attitude to nature. This also can be found in different Christian societies in the developed and developing countries.

Principle 9 says, “States should cooperate to strengthen endogenous capacity-building for sustainable development by improving scientific understanding through exchanges of scientific and technological knowledge, and by enhancing the development, adaptation, diffusion and transfer of technologies, including new and innovative technologies.” This principle implies that rich scientific and technological insights remain uncovered in endogenous experiences.

Principle 10 states, “Environmental issues are best handled with participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.”

All faith ethics emphasize human equality and democratic governance that protects equality. In order to promote democracy, the disclosure of environmental information possessed by officials, public participation of decision making, and compensation of environmental damage is essential. All secular improvement processes should be strongly promoted by any faith society because of their fundamental ethics.

Principle 11 says, “States shall enact effective environmental legislation. Environmental standards, management objectives and priorities should reflect the environmental and development context to which they apply. Standards applied by some countries may be inappropriate and of unwarranted economic and social cost to other countries, in particular developing countries.” There is another fundamental question concerning how faith societies deal with economy, which is not much talked about by faith societies. The operation of faith societies requires financial contributions from secular society. In this regard, faith ethics provides some interpretations of the relation of economy and other secular matters.

Principle 12 says, “States should cooperate to promote a supportive and open international economic system that would lead to economic growth and sustainable

development in all countries, to better address the problems of environmental degradation. Trade policy measures for environmental purposes should not constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination or a disguised restriction on international trade.” “Unilateral actions to deal with environmental challenges outside the jurisdiction of the importing country should be avoided. Environmental measures addressing transboundary or global environmental problems should, as far as possible, be based on an international consensus.” This principle deals with the most difficult matter of the compromises between local environmental questions and international trade questions, which faith systems have not developed in their ethics.

Principle 13 says, “States shall develop national law regarding liability and compensation for the victims of pollution and other environmental damage.” “States shall also cooperate in an expeditious and more determined manner to develop further international law regarding liability and compensation for adverse effects of environmental damage caused by activities within their jurisdiction or control to areas beyond their jurisdiction.” This principle emphasizes justice under laws, which should coincide with any faith ethics that deal with moral matters between human to human.

Principle 14 says, “States should effectively cooperate to discourage or prevent the relocation and transfer to other States of any activities and substances that cause severe environmental degradation or are found to be harmful to human health.” This principle emphasizes international morality for nation to nation relations based upon damages at the level of human to human relations.

Principle 15 states, “In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.” This principle implies that scientific societies should be encouraged to provide wider, deeper and predictive information to the public, in order to protect the global environment. How to put the principle of the precautionary approach into practice is an important question. In other words, the degree of knowledge and understanding of a new environmental problem depends upon the predictability of environmental science and technology. Under stochastic and uncertain phenomena of environmental problems, we have to predict the worse scenarios of environmental problems and introduce a precautionary approach to avoid any damage or harmful situations.

According to a Buddhism saying, suffering comes from ignorance through complex relationships of causes, conditions and effects. The precautionary approach is the practice of eliminating ignorance, and understanding uncertainty by introducing

scientific and technological capacities to simulate understanding complex relationships of causes, conditions and effects.

Principle 16 says, “National authorities should endeavor to promote the internalization of environmental costs and the use of economic instruments, taking into account the approach that the polluter should, in principle, bear the cost of pollution, with due regard to the public interest and without distorting international trade and investment.” In order to solve the conflicts between protection of the environment and economical conditions, it is necessary to introduce a new economical approach in which an institutional setup could open a new market economy focusing on a practical solutions of economic issues to meet specific environmental problems. One function of environmental ethics interpreted by faith ethics should support the opening of new markets through new regulations or institutional structures.

Principle 17 states, “Environmental impact assessment, as a national instrument, shall be undertaken for proposed activities that are likely to have a significant adverse impact on the environment and are subject to a decision of a competent national authority.” This principle clearly states the importance of a precautionary approach in the name of the “Environmental impact assessment”.

Principle 18 says, “States shall immediately notify other States of any natural disasters or other emergencies that are likely to produce sudden harmful effects on the environment of those States. Every effort shall be made by the international community to help States so afflicted.” This principle implies a new attitude of communications between nations and regions that promote the disclosure of environmental information to others.

Principle 19 says, “States shall provide prior and timely notification and relevant information to potentially affected States on activities that may have a significant adverse trans-boundary environmental effect and shall consult with those States at an early stage and in good faith.” This principle has the same meaning as Principle 18.

Principle 20 says, “Women have a vital role in environmental management and development.” “Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development.” Although all faith systems do not discriminate against women in principle; nevertheless, in social practice, there are many unjustified cases of discrimination.

Principle 21 says, “The creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world

should be mobilized to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all.” There is no conflict between this principle and any faith systems.

Principle 22 states, “Indigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices.” “States should recognize and duly support their identity, culture and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development.” Indigenous people often keep their original faith systems which should be fairly respected the same as any major faith systems. Without respect of their faith system, they cannot maintain sustainable development while preserving their life styles.

Principle 23 says, “The environment and natural resources of people under oppression, domination and occupation shall be protected.” This principle emphasizes the environment and natural resources in addition to the people under oppression.

Principle 24 says, “Warfare is inherently destructive of sustainable development. States shall therefore respect international law providing protection for the environment in times of armed conflict and cooperate in its further development, as necessary.” No objection to this principle, but many disputes tend to seek justifications for different faith systems.

Principle 25 states, “Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible.” Any faith system seeks peace.

Principle 26 says, “States shall resolve all their environmental disputes peacefully and by appropriate means in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.” It is very regrettable that many international and domestic disputes are not solved by peaceful means instead of warfare.

Principle 27 says, “States and people shall cooperate in good faith and in a spirit of partnership in the fulfillment of the principles embodied in this Declaration and in the further development of international law in the field of sustainable development.”

Earth and Faith, a Message from Religious Leaders

There was another historically important event: a gathering of leaders of five major religions, which was organized by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in 1986, and issued the Assisi Declaration that included calls from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu,

Jewish, and Islamic leaders to their own faithful. The outcomes of the declaration and subsequent faith leader gatherings were edited and published in the book "Earth and Faith—a Book of Reflection for Action, Interfaith Partnership for the Environment, UNEP, 2000.

I would like to draw some important messages from the book "Earth and Faith" that support my interpretation of the Rio declaration.

Sacred Words of the Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

It is stated in the book that "The three Abrahamic religions agree that no part of nature is in itself divine, and there is a prohibition against worshiping any part of nature, although God is present in and can be known through nature." "The distinction is between Creator and creation." "Writers of the three religions say belief in the unique place of humans in God's creation—their "dominion" over life on Earth—is not human-centered: it is God-centered and infers responsibility for the protection of creation."

Following the above sentences, it is said, "For Christianity the universe was made and is sustained by the creative word of God, and Christ is the incarnate Word." "God's redeeming love for all creation is a constant reminder that humans have a duty and responsibility to care for the well-being of His creation."

Further, "Islamic teaching offers an opportunity to understand the natural order and human responsibility within its principles of *tawhid* (the unity of creation), *fitra* (humanity's place in creation), *mizan* (moderation and reason), and *Khalifa* (stewardship)." "Allah has imposed a sacred duty—*khalifa*, the role of stewardship, upon the human race."

Sacred Words of the South Asian Religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism

It is stated, "Three ancient religions of South Asia have in common a set of core values that determine their environmental ethics: the continuity of all forms of life, nonviolence, and the ascetic ideal of a simple life." "An important component is the belief in reincarnation, the endless cycling through birth and death in which there is no difference of human, a god, a ghost or a tree—although it is only from a human birth that one can attain liberation." "This fosters a sense of connection to the family of all living beings." "Compassion for all life is a central value. All life is connected every action has a result."

Sacred Words of the East Asian Religions : Confucianism, Taoism and Shinto

It is stated, “The founder of the Confucian tradition was the sage-teacher K’ung Fu-Tzu (551-479 BC), born into a time of rapid social change. Confucius devoted his life to reestablishing order. This involved a program embracing moral, political, and religious components. His principal teaching in the *Analects* emphasize the practice of moral virtues, especially humaneness (*jen*), sincerity (*cheng*), and filialness (*hsiao*).

Confucian thought was further developed in the writings of Mencius (372-289 BC) and Hsun Zu (298-238 BC). The Neo-Confucian revival in 11th and 12th centuries brought a synthesis of the earlier teachings. Chu His (1130-1200 AD) designated four texts as containing the central ideas of Confucian thought: the *Great Learning*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the *Analects*, and Mencius.” “Mencius’ book focuses on innate goodness of humans and emphasizes the seeds of virtue that need to be cultivated through education.” “Mencius was also a strong advocate of humane government that allowed both the people and the land to flourish.” “The Doctrine of the Mean describes that power of sincerity that emanates outward from the human heart the cosmos itself. When people cultivate their authentic nature they are said to affect the rejuvenating forces in natural world. In realizing one’s authentic self a person forms a triad with heaven and earth.”

Lao-tzu (BC 604?-531?) preached the philosophy of “Taoism.” It is said, “Taoism takes its name from “Tao,” which means “the way,” the mother of heaven and earth and wellspring of life and creativity. For 2500 years the Tao has intrigued philosophers, inspired religious movements, and embedded itself in Chinese popular culture. The Tao nourishes life and promotes harmony, the balance of yin and yang, and respect for natural spontaneity.”

It is said, “Shinto was founded on Japanese narratives of the beginning of the world, where kami, or deities, emerged from original chaos and gave birth to Japan—its land, mountains, rivers, trees, and people. For centuries its followers have forged deep bonds to sacred presences and places in the natural world of Japan.” “A consistent symbol of the Japanese spiritual world is the mountain as sacred place. As ancient site and god-dwelling realm and as a place of pilgrimage and renewal, the mountain is central to the experience and expression of Shinto belief.” “In the more ancient phase of Shinto belief, divine presence was associated with sacred places.”

Sacred Words from the Traditions of Indigenous Peoples

There are indigenous peoples in the Western hemisphere, Europe, Africa, and

Pacific areas, where many spiritual heritages are kept which are rooted in the earth.

Points of Religious Agreement in Environmental Ethics

A review of environmental ethics in world religions shows that religious traditions agree, to a greater or lesser extent, on the following points:

a) The natural world has value in itself and does not exist solely to serve human needs.

b) There is a significant continuity of being between human and non-human living beings, even though humans do have a distinctive role. This continuity can be felt and experienced.

c) Non-human living beings are morally significant in the eyes of God and /or in the cosmic order.

d) The dependence of human life on the natural world can and should be acknowledged in ritual and other expressions of appreciation and gratitude.

e) Moral norms such as justice, compassion and reciprocity apply (in appropriate ways) both to human beings and to non-human beings. The well-being of humans and the well-being of non-human beings are inseparably connected.

f) There are legitimate uses of nature.

g) Greed and destructiveness are condemned. Restraint and protection are commended.

h) Human beings are obliged to be aware and responsible in living in harmony with the natural world, and should follow the specific practices for this prescribed by their traditions.

The above points are shared by different faith systems, in which environmental scientific society can contribute to find more shared points. Ecological principles can show better interpretations with the above agreement points such as a, b and e, where interdependency of living beings and non-living beings, and their significant continuity could be scientifically explained. I emphasize here such an explanation by the concept of DNA vehicles of living beings and their material connection with non-living beings. The principles of socio-economic approaches are introduced in the Rio declaration, which can be shared with points of f, g and h.

There is no fundamental conflict in principles between the Rio declaration and major faith systems.

Conclusion

Major faith systems were compared in terms of monotheism, polytheism, and interpretation of the afterlife. Reincarnation was interpreted in terms of the material dimension with the concept of DNA vehicles. Faith ethics on nature conservation among the major religions were compared in which they agree to share the natural world and that it has value in itself and does not exist solely to serve human needs. There is significant continuity between human and non-human living beings, though there is a special role for human beings. The positive approach of vegetarianism was emphasized for its role in ecosystem conservation through controlling animal protein production. How to dispose of human corpses is also an important issue for the practice of religious and environmental ethics. Only human beings comprehend what religion is. Only human beings can control the environment and ecosystems. The Rio declaration was interpreted in terms of these faith ethics. There is no fundamental conflict in principles between the Rio declaration and major faith ethics concerning the environment. It will be necessary to develop the Rio declaration into a new form of global environmental ethics in the future, when environmental scientific society must provide clearer frameworks to faith societies that can help sustainable development of Earth.²

References

The Rio declaration, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992

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