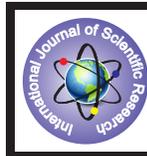


Colonization of Human Reason by Scientific-Instrumental Rationality and Global Environmental Crisis



Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

There has been a fracturing of human-nature relationship in recent civilizational history. Humans have waged a one sided 'war' against nature for 'victory' over it that has resulted in grave environmental crisis. During the second half of last century, when environmental problems were first recognized, they were identified as less important problems having local significance only. But today it cannot be denied that these are global problems and at stake is the future of our planet as well as species. The need is being felt to overcome the victory over nature. The paper argues that this can be done only by resisting the colonization of life-world by the instrumental rationality and inculcating an ecological rationality based on all the three spheres of reason, namely, instrumental, ethical and aesthetical.

The paper aims at exploring the relation between Global environmental crisis and modern rationality in order to sketch a framework for developing environmental consciousness aimed at overcoming the present crisis. It seeks to situate present environmental crisis in the backdrop of colonization of life-world by the scientific-instrumental rationality in the modern times.

Following Habermas, and before him Max Weber and Kant, cultural modernity may be seen as the separation of substantive reason expressed in pre-modern world views based on religion and metaphysics into three autonomous spheres of science, art and morality. Since eighteenth century, problems inherited from older world-views as well as the problems associated with modern developments, have been sought to be rearranged under specific aspects of *valedity* : truth, normative rightness, and beauty. They have been handled as questions of knowledge, or of morality, or of taste. Scientific and technological discourse; theories of morality and jurisprudence; and production and criticism of art have been institutionalized separately. Each domain of culture has been made to correspond to cultural professions in which problems have been dealt by specialist experts. As a result there appeared structures related to cognitive-instrumental rationality, moral-practical rationality, and aesthetic-expressive rationality, each being under the control of specialists.

Thus, the substantive reason has been separated into the autonomous spheres of science, morality and art. This fragmented rationality has been institutionalized in distinct institutional structures. These distinct institutional structures related to technology, ethics and art being under the control of specialists, there appeared a fault line between the culture of experts and the culture of people at large. In this way the threat to life-world -whose traditional substance has already been devalued- increased and it tended to become more and more impoverished.

It has been rightly pointed out by Habermas that the project of modernity formulated by enlightenment thinkers consisted in their efforts to develop above mentioned three spheres in accordance with their inner logic by the experts, but at the same time, the project intended to release the cognitive potentials of each of these domains to set them free from their esoteric form. It was intended that accumulation from the specialised domains would be used for enrichment of life-world as well as for rational organization of social life. It was hoped that arts, science and ethics would cooperate and promote not only the control of nature but also moral progress leading to well being of humans (1996, 45).

Habermas rightly points out that present scenario has shattered this optimism. The differentiation of science, morality and art has come to mean the autonomy of segments treated by the specialists, at the same time letting them split off from the hermeneutics of every-day communication (1981:9).

Not only has the society failed to use achievements of these domains for the enrichment of life-world and rational organization of social life, rather the gap between the three forms of rationality has been widening in last few decades. The situation has been going from bad to worst as instead of complimenting one another; instrumental rationality, ethical rationality and aesthetic rationality have been working in a rather dissonant manner. Instrumental rationality has become more and more dominant at the cost of ethical and aesthetic rationality. This dominance has resulted in vulgar materialistic attitude towards nature and environment. It is this fragmentation of rationality and dominance of instrumental reason which is primarily responsible for the present ecological crisis.

Human reason has become instrumental under the influence of contemporary economies. In contemporary societies even the status, role and position of knowledge has undergone a significant change. Whereas enlightenment thinkers visualised using advances in knowledge for human emancipation and common good, today it (the knowledge) has become a commodity being used for enhancing profit and efficiency. Contemporary economies are driven by knowledge. In such economies technological innovations and ability to access as well as manipulated ideas rapidly is an important means, not only of making and enhancing profits, but of survival itself. Knowledge is seen from a vantage point which is primarily commercial in nature. As a result we become consumers of knowledge that has been transformed into commodity. The perspectives that used to organise knowledge, categories its usefulness for humanity, and direct it towards common good are struggling for their survival. In present circumstances, if anything remains as organising principle, it is the criterion of efficiency and profit that is being propagated, forwarded and supported forcefully by the global market. Instead of seeking to draw knowledge into any benevolent system, global market driven cultures are rather happy with fragmentation of rationality in the form of different and specific domains of information as this gets translated into more and more profit. Thus, all developments are determined by the pragmatic logic of the market rather than the conceptions of human good. The criteria of universalism and emancipation have been replaced by the criteria of profit and efficiency. The dominant criteria of judging a narrative is its effectiveness in making more profit and make the global market work more efficiently. Thus, profit and efficiency divorced from the concern related to human welfare and common good are becoming ends-in-themselves leading to the situation where instrumental rationality is becoming an end-in-itself.

It may be concluded that it is the colonization of life world by instrumental rationality, divorced from ethical and aesthetic concerns, which is responsible for the present ecological crisis. Any effort to develop ecological rationality aimed at overcoming the ecological crisis has to be based on a strong resistance to this colonization of life-world by instrumental rationality. A framework for inculcation of ecological rationality must be

based on an effort that all the three spheres of reason -i.e. instrumental, ethical and asthetical- enrich not only the life of every individual, but also the hermenutics of everyday communication. The enriching of everyday life-world with all the three

spheres of reason, by resisting and overcoming its fragmentation, may be seen as an important step towards developing an effective ecological rationality that may help overcome the 'victory' over nature.

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