

ABSTRACT

THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMATIQUE: CRISIS OF CULTURE AND VALUES

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The thesis seeks to prove the hypothesis that behaviour that has had a deleterious and degrading effect on nature and the environment, is based largely on Western culture and Western economic values specifically. To prove this, Western culture and Western economic thinking are juxtaposed and examined for environmentally destructive values, within the context and quest for modernity. The evolution of economic thinking is also examined commensurate with the evolution of environmentalism, with special attention directed to the capitalist ethic. While the thesis outlines the very direct political economy and structural effects, it places tremendous emphasis on the indirect effects of western economic values, especially those emanating out of the evolutionary phases of capitalism. It also attempts to draw the linkage between the inculcation of such values and its manifestation in utilitarian, teleological, and irreverent attitudes and behavioural patterns towards nature and the environment. For this reason, the psychological and psychosomatic effects of Western culture, and the Western economic and imperialist drive on non-western cultures, traditions, and values are of critical concern.

As part of a broader and deeper critique, the thesis also examines the concept of modernity itself and how far it has become equated with the dominant

Western worldview and Western culture or, at the very least, as an integral element and subset of the concept of modernity. Focus is directed to its role as a centralizing and universalist drive within the world-system, but, more importantly, its relationship with the environment. This is primarily done so as to provide a more balanced insightful approach, and a greater understanding of the basic elements of Western culture beyond its economic aspect.

While the thesis emphasizes the critical importance of the economic aspect of Western culture, due attention is also placed on other aspects such as dualism, positivism, humanism, and science. It also seeks to explain why environmental degradation defies boundaries, cultures and borders and has a supra-national universalist nature. The concept of globalization in the quest for modernity and progress is therefore examined. In this regard, a broad overview of the major interpretations of modernity is presented so as to enrich the discussion and to gain a greater understanding of why the environmental crisis is persisting. Because of its quest to unravel the hidden root cause and perhaps the more subtle but critical factors, the thesis utilizes world-systems theory, post-colonial theory and the emancipatory element of ecocentrism all of which share the same root, but provide branches of theoretical postulates. Focus was also directed to the role of small states within the World-system in terms of environmental standards and the dictates of (IFIs) and North countries.

The essential themes of the thesis therefore include the epistemological foundations of environmental degradation, the causal linkage of Western economic thinking, the capitalist ethic, the concept of modernity of technology

with environmental destruction and the need for moral, ethical, religious, spiritual and rational dimensions in determining values and behavioural patterns towards the environment - in short a modernity of moderation and liberation.

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