

SHOULD A DISCUSSION AROUND THE ATTRIBUTION OF RIGHTS TO WHAT IS NOT HUMAN, BE AN ISSUE FOR POLITICAL ECOLOGY?



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1. SCOPE

Can we claim rights for things and animals? The mainstream of current ecological thinking, globally, is to encourage all initiatives throughout the world that consist in protecting the environment, meaning, in the broad sense, everything that is natural and that man has not created by himself. Deep ecology intends to extend its political discourse to the point of claiming rights to animals and natural entities, in the same way that man has rights. Our idea is not to oppose the defense of the environment but to show that there is no sense in talking about rights for natural entities and animals.

2. METHODOLOGY

We suggest to go back to the roots of the concept of “right”, and ask the following question: how did the idea of “right” enter the world? Our approach is not historical and factual, but hypothetical and conceptual, in order to explain how the concept of “right” or “what is right to do” emerges in the human mind. The argumentation consists in relying on the thought of a great 18th century philosopher, Immanuel Kant. The core of the Kantian argument is as follows: human mind, structurally and systematically, produces fundamental ideas, enabling man to establish himself in the world. What we conceive as right – the concept of “right” –, is one of the fundamental ideas that human mind produces in order to regulate human coexistence. Every man, deep inside his mind, grasps himself as potential freedom, living with other potential freedoms, sharing the same world. Systematically, human mind sets out the imperative ideas that would enable the regulation of this inter-subjectivity, of these inter-freedoms. “Right”, as an idea, arises from this: it is an injunction of human reason that determines the conditions of possibility of man's external freedom, i.e. an injunction that reason itself conceives and understands, and that indicates the way to behave with others, so that all can be free and free together.

3. RESULTS

The concept of “right” is linked to that of “freedom”. In short, “right” can only be thought of by “freedoms” which seek to pose themselves in the world as “freedoms”. Only men are free or called to be free. “Right”, as a concept, is the matter of “freedoms” which relate to each other, and which pose “what is right” as an inner rational obligation, then as legal institutions, in order to live together in peace.

As a result, the idea of granting rights to natural entities and animals is problematic and it monopolizes incoherent representations of man and nature.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Political ecology, through its different currents, is today a main actor of our political universe. Nevertheless, deep ecology, when it seeks to grant rights to what is not human, leads to a radical anti-humanism; certainly this anti-humanism can in itself constitute a counter-argument to the discourse of deep ecology. Our purpose in our present reflection, and relying on Kant's argumentation, has been to point out that human thought should not be misled into claims – such as that of attributing rights to what is not human –, claims which, strictly speaking, do not make sense and can lead to discredit the ecological cause and to weaken it intellectually.

5. REFERENCES

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