

# HUMAN ECOLOGY AND CIVILIZATION CHANGE: REFLECTIONS ON THE RIGHT TO LIFE

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## ABSTRACT

The effects of climate change are generally thought to have harmful consequences on people's lives, that humans are affected by the environmental impacts caused by the negative effects of Global Climate Change (GCC). However, not all humans are equally responsible for environmental damage; the pollution of ecosystems and resource depletion is not a result of the way of life of the vast majority of humans; thus, more than an Anthropocene, one must speak in economic terms of a Capitalocene. This research uses deductive methodology with exploratory emphasis to investigate the ways in which environmental protection strategies are followed by a legal structure that authorizes the use, appropriation and management of nature's values; ultimately, a change in overall behavior is expected. Thus, environmental preservation strategies are accompanied by a legal framework that legalizes the use, appropriation, and management of natural assets, which should ultimately generate behavioral change. Therefore, the concepts of ecology, environment, justice, as the proposals that arise from questioning the dominant rationality, may constitute strategies

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of social change for the construction of a new mode of production, as well as for the dominant logic. Political ecology, environmental knowledge and environmental justice constitute a social construction, both in symbolic and material terms. It generates the possibility of a new civilizing project, a change of thought, of rationality, of openness to the social sciences to impel us to meet otherness.

**Keywords:** capitalocene; environmental crisis; environmental justice; global climate change; environmental regulation.

*ECOLOGIA HUMANA E MUDANÇA CIVILIZATÓRIA:  
REFLEXÕES SOBRE O DIREITO À VIDA*

*RESUMO*

*Geralmente se pensa que os efeitos da mudança climática têm consequências prejudiciais à vida das pessoas, que os seres humanos são afetados pelos impactos ambientais provocados pelos efeitos negativos da Mudança Climática Global (MCG). No entanto, nem todos os seres humanos são igualmente responsáveis pelos danos ambientais; a poluição dos ecossistemas e esgotamento dos recursos não é resultado do modo de vida da grande maioria dos seres humanos; mais do que um androceno, deve-se falar em termos econômicos de um capitaloceno. É por isso que as estratégias de preservação ambiental são acompanhadas por um marco jurídico que legaliza o uso, apropriação e gestão dos bens naturais, o que, em última instância, deve gerar uma mudança comportamental. Assim, os conceitos de ecologia, meio ambiente, justiça; como as propostas que surgem do questionamento da racionalidade dominante, mesmo contestatória, podem ser estratégias de mudança social para a construção de um modo de produção, bem como para a lógica dominante. A Ecologia política, conhecimento ambiental e justiça ambiental são uma construção social, tanto em termos simbólicos como materiais. Ela gera a possibilidade para um novo projeto civilizatório, de uma mudança de pensamento, de racionalidade, de abertura as ciências sociais para nos impulsionar ao encontro da alteridade..*

**Palavras-chave:** capitaloceno; crise ambiental; justiça ambiental; mudança climática global; regulamentação ambiental.

## INTRODUCTION

It is generally believed that the effects of climate change have harmful consequences on people's lives, and humans are the most affected by the environmental impacts caused by the negative effects of Global Climate Change (GCC); however, it is certain that other animal and plant species also suffer the damage generated by climate change in marine and terrestrial ecosystems. The GCC is not a linear process in which living beings are found by the end of the chain, but rather that the harmful events that relate living beings to climate change present themselves throughout the process and in a cyclical manner.

The GCC has several causes, such as deforestation, industrial cattle raising, change in land use, use of fossil fuels and monocultures, among others; i.e., human handling of plant and animal species and ecosystems in general. The GCC is also directly associated with the modern economy, since the creation of the thermal machine, the engine of industry that generates high consumption of fossil fuels and consequent emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. This is why it is necessary not only to review the links between the economy and the environmental impact, but also to change the culture, the world view and the effects on the environment.

Humans build social systems, institutions, norms, scales of values and customs that regulate our social and individual life. In Mexico, as in most countries in the world today, the Western or Westernized system prevails, which is capitalist and originates in certain European cultures. This implies a dualistic conception of Being and Nature, so that the legal frameworks that derive from the Greco-Roman tradition exclude the nature of rights comparable to those of individuals.

This brief synthesis of globalized society allows us to perceive several things: it was constituted thanks to the domination and exploitation of otherness; put the human at its center; the expression "human" refers to man, white, heterosexual and rich; and the system of values underlying our institutions and activities is based on a juridical-economic agent upon which fall the rights protected by the legal system. The international legal system legitimizes, in one way or another, this scheme of assumptions that allows for the privatization of life in the form of capital (MOORE, 2013).

Contemporary civilization is sustained by the capitalist model of production, whose economic values are uninterrupted and competitive

production. In the predominant production model, both the installed and transportation industry transform fossil fuels into greenhouse gases to increase the rate of capital gains; thus, it is not a matter of preserving life, but of increasing the capital stock at the expense of the deterioration of nature and the related human and environmental costs (MOORE, 2013).

Some environmentalists have suggested that the term Anthropocene should be used to describe the current geological era of our planet. However, this assessment is wrong, as not all humans are equally responsible for environmental damage. The depletion of resources and pollution of ecosystems are not a result of the way of life of the vast majority of humans. More than an Anthropocene, in civilizing and economic terms we must speak of a Capitalocene, since such mode of production is historically and socially determined by manufacture, distribution and consumption. However, what distinguishes capitalism from other modes of production is that it seeks to generate capital as its ultimate goal; not to preserve life or generate a good living. Thus, positive law that as a means of social coexistence seeks to guarantee people access to a full life, through agreements and conventions, differs from the application of the rule that protects the private property and the individual, perpetuating the mode of production to the detriment of the common good.

This research uses a deductive approach and takes an exploratory perspective. We examine the concepts of ecology, environment, and justice in the context of how proposals arising from the questioning of dominant rationality, even the challenging ones, can constitute strategies for social change toward the construction of a mode of production as well as the dominant logics. Therefore, we investigate in this article how political ecology, environmental knowledge and environmental justice are social constructions in symbolic and material terms. This generates the possibility of a new civilizing project, a change of thought and rationality, opening up the social sciences to impel us to meet otherness.

## **1 CRISIS, RISK AND AN OPEN FUTURE (CRISIS, DEVELOPMENT AND DECOLONIAL OPPOSITION)**

We are facing a society in which risks are imminent, are not restricted to geographical or temporal boundaries, perpetuating them, and affecting future generations. The risk paradigm developed by the German author Ulrich Beck shortly after the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in

the Ukraine in 1986, considered the most serious technological disaster of the 20th century, points out the threats and dangers of the model of industrial society against the environment as well as humanity itself.

We have never had such effective and universal instruments to intervene in the world. The powers have changed in scale, we have moved from local to global impact without any conceptual or practical control. In addition to this spatial expansion of powers, it is worth emphasizing that the consequences of such human intervention in the natural order also have another power: the capacity to extend over time. Therefore, the emphasis given to the problem of sustainable development, in this work referred to as sustainability, indicates a certain concern with the extension in time and space of the consequences brought by human intervention in the world, i.e., the extension, territorial and over time, of the effects caused by such actions.

The discourse of “destruction of nature” acts as a legacy left by Modernity, and in view of this, the idea of environmental crisis must be rethought through the paradigm of risk, this is what, in general terms, Beck (2011) suggests.

It is necessary to point out that the capitalist socioeconomic configuration, consolidated throughout the 19th century, broke with the old paradigms of feudal society, moving towards a new way of thinking of man as the subject of the world and nature as an object. Enrique Leff, a Mexican sociologist and environmentalist, reminds us that it was from a paradigm of denial (of nature) and a mechanistic view that modern society grew economically (LEFF, 1999a). Profit maximization acts as the driving force of capitalist logic, and nature, as a source of wealth, added to labor, is intensely exploited to be transformed into merchandise (ANDRIOLI, 2011).

These relationships – in which I interpret value “as a way of organizing nature” – were the first to manifest themselves, and those that did so most spectacularly, in two fields: first, in an extraordinary series of cascading transformations of landscapes and bodies throughout the Atlantic world and beyond; and, second, in an emerging set of ideas and perspectives on reality that allowed European states and capitals to see time as linear, space as flat and homogeneous, and “nature” as external to human relationships (MOORE, 2013, p. 10).

From this configuration, human intervention in nature has reached unprecedented levels. Alongside the idea of progress and scientific advances, harmful effects on the environment and human health have emerged. For some researchers, the damage caused by the capitalist metabolic process is

so violent that it interferes with the natural course of the “planetary biogeochemical cycles,” causing a new geological era classified as Anthropocene (CRUTZEN *et al.*, 2007).

This developmentalist logic driven by the capitalist model of production brings with it environmental impacts and risks that are now considered inevitable steps in promoting development. In this economic dynamic, the “denial of nature,” as suggested by Leff (1999a), has allowed damage and risks to be interpreted throughout history as one-off events and often as natural and non-human disasters. This understanding leads us to several consequences, among them the insufficient disclosure and sharing of the repercussions of risks and damages not only to the environment, but also the direct impacts caused to people’s lives, the so-called human and socio-environmental impacts that in most cases derive from human actions.

In this regard, the environmental issue moves away from the concept of ecological, autonomous and spontaneous catastrophe and addresses the verification that civilization, Western thought, modern rationality, the economic model, the paradigm of detachment that ended up denying the relationships between subject and object, organism and environment, cause and effect, are all in crisis. The challenge then becomes that of rediscovering the place that man must occupy in nature in order to “relocate” the human in the world (ACOSTA, 2016). In this Cartesian process of seeing the world from a double logic, based on binomials, we also find the secular distance between body and mind, following the example of Descartes himself who came to affirm that body and mind were two distinct substances (CHAKRABARTY, 2009, 2012).

Certainly, more problems arise than concrete answers to environmental questions and a solid relationship of the Rights of Nature. At first glance, we might suspect that such critical attitudes would militate against the difficult advances achieved in the normative sphere or against movements and the multiple types of individual and collective agency in total defense of environmental rights. However, what we hope to emphasize with these considerations is that human existence is not limited to its own sensible and ontological experience, i.e., the human moved by universal and coherent ideas that would provide the epistemic comfort that we have absolute control over our lives actions and their consequences. According to Chakrabarty, “The need then is to think the human on multiple scales and registers and as having both ontological and non-ontological modes of existence” (2012, p. 15) which, in the latter case, alludes to existence as a geological force.

This way of thinking connects postcolonial thought with reflections on the human condition in the era of globalization. One of the lessons that postcolonialism has left for critics is the need to transit between contradictory models of humans and their social existence. In these contradictory matrices, the environmental issue is no less problematic, and the implications for the celebrated Rights of Nature must be object of profound reflection. In these terms, scientists who study climate change do not limit themselves to accounting for natural history. In fact, for Chakrabarty (2012, p. 10):

[...] They are also giving us an account of climate change that is neither purely “natural” nor purely “human” history.. [...]According to them, current global (and not regional) climate changes are largely human induced. This implies that humans are now part of the natural history of the planet.

It is necessary, through humanization of natural history, to extend to the future the faculty of understanding that historians confer to humans regarding to the registered past. Thus, the “crisis” scenario requires a non-dualistic analysis capable of interpreting human and non-human elements as a single whole. The interweaving of nature and society needs to be reexamined, and perhaps this is exactly the point in crisis: humanity has been led to rethink non-human elements beyond the categorization of available objects, as well as to think about conditions and forms of life beyond the cure of diseases. We add to this the need to rethink the temporal dimension, as the effects exceed the present and make the future a current problem.

However, as Chakrabarty (2012) warns, these reflections occur today in a context of environmental instability produced by humanity on different scales and reproducing global economic asymmetries. The historian warns that scientists studying climate change “are also giving us an account of climate change that is neither purely ‘natural’ nor purely ‘human’ history” (CHAKRABARTY, 2012, p. 10). Global climate change, when caused by human action, introduces the human as a participant in the natural history of the planet.

There is a sense of rebellion in climate change that challenges the modern pillar of human domination of the environment. The ways in which scientists study the collapse of the climate seem to presuppose another historical picture that has some novelty. If scientists are not simply giving an account of natural history, for Chakrabarty (2012, p. 10),

[...] They are also giving us an account of climate change that is neither purely “natural” nor purely “human”. [...] According to them, current global (and not regional) climate changes are largely human induced. This implies that humans are now part of the natural history of the planet.

Therefore, far from the analysis of the consequences of modernity for human relations with the natural order, we ask ourselves what we often call an environmental crisis: is it a kind of multiplicity of damages, contaminated localities, identified risks, disasters and threats to natural resources? Or, in the words of Ulrich Beck, is the environmental crisis a chapter in the society of risk? We notice that the questions raised by the theoreticians about what the environmental crisis is, often focus on the impacts left in nature by the historical economic dynamics of development.

However, to understand how this logic of socio-environmental impacts transforms the lives of communities, especially in Latin America, it is necessary to rethink the criticism of the industrial paradigm. In other words, questioning the concept of industrial society is the source of our socio-ecological problems, or rather, to reflect on whether large-scale industrialization throughout the 19th century represented only one of the points of transformation in the history of capitalism and not the emergence of a development pattern.

On the one hand, the theory of the society of risk presents us the industrial society as a time frame for human transformations in nature, to the point of the risk that impacts have become part of any economic activity as a predicted phase. On the other hand, other theoretical sources, especially those working on proposals for decolonization of thought, make us think of the 16th century as the emergence of capitalism (MOORE, 2013). The time frame of social and environmental impacts would be the logic of maximum appropriation developed by colonial models implanted mainly in America and Africa and not the industrial society as the Anthropocene theoreticians affirm (CRUTZEN *et al.*, 2007).

The modern world has been presented from a logic born from its own system, leaving the peculiarities of historical and colonial experiences as an appendix to be consulted, depending on contingencies. However, another history can be identified. It is the path of historical capitalism in the “Atlantic World” and its colonial modernities, since they were many and not only a modern construction. Its results emerge from political, economic and cultural domination, and also from the colonization of the imaginary (PALERMO; QUINTERO, 2014).



The idea of modernity proposed by Europeans denies the relevance of peoples who were exploited and colonized during the period of colonial expansion, as well as the logic of maximum appropriation put into practice through the exploitation of resources and slave labor, be it indigenous or African. Thus, based on the concept of “modern,” it intends to adopt a universalist perspective, eliminating the importance of geopolitical location. It is important to say that the intrinsic relationship between modernity and colonization is not recognized, so that the colonized subjects have their history made invisible by modern theory, as well as the socio-environmental devastation practiced by historical capitalism was erased (PALERMO; QUINTERO, 2014).

When humanism emerged, it proved to be sufficiently comprehensive to overcome the predictions of Christians in political action centered on a territory, a government and a people, new outlines of the future that emerged: on the one hand, the rational prognosis and, on the other, the philosophy of history. Whereas the rational prognosis

[...] is a conscious moment of political action [and] is related to events whose unprecedentedness it itself releases [...] in a continuous and unpredictably predictable manner,” but which failed to free itself from the space of experience limited by monarchical absolutism, the philosophy of history would compose a consciousness of time and future that feeds on a daring combination of politics and prophecy (KOSELLECK, 2012, p. 35).

At this point, nothing less than the idea of progress would constitute the key category in the consolidation of modern time and of history, imposing both an acceleration of time and exposure to unpredictability. As the accelerated present is excluded from the possibility of being experienced, “it must be recovered by philosophy and history” (KOSELLECK, 2012, p. 35).

Let us consider how the elaboration of the plot of modern conception of history and time to which Koselleck refers finds an additional foundation in the modern distinction between human history and natural history. Paradigmatically, in three of the key moments of classical historiography – Joseph Herder, Robin Collingwood and the classical French School of the *Annales* – such a distinction would gain definite limits that Anthropocene would destabilize, even without greater appreciation than the aspects of the internal hierarchies that comprise its own narrative.

However, contrary to what might appear, the pattern of development instituted by the capitalist-colonial system in the “Atlantic World” does not

represent an annexed chapter. Colonial relations are historical and current. To sustain their ways of life with the patterns of consumption produced by economic dynamics, the populations of the geopolitical North and the elites of the countries of the South, i.e., a minimal portion of the world's population is committed to having access to the totality of the country's resources, of the planet, whether they be natural goods, increasingly cheap labor, or even waste absorption mechanisms.

In other words, the luxury of some is promoted by the exploitation of so many others, and it is not possible to extend this pattern of consumption to all, as the ideals of development suggest, since such a pattern only became possible after centuries of expansion and at the expense of the destruction of other cultures and ways of life. The developmental colonial posture remains, enduring over time, imposing itself on the quality of life and health of people, now no longer openly as a strategy of resource exploitation and enslavement of peoples and communities, but through other mechanisms, sometimes disguised as great deeds in the name of the public interest.

## **2 PROPOSALS OF THE GREEN ECONOMY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS**

Ecological economics is considered the science of human ecology, understanding as such the preservation of life as well as the elements of nature that are critical to human economics. Ecological economics, inherited from human ecology, offers a critique of classical economics and provides its own tools to explain and evaluate the human impact on the environment. Human development and the preservation of life itself on the planet, therefore, are in accordance with the principle of limits to development, since it is possible to guarantee a good life without exploiting nature (LEFF, 2006).

The model of contemporary civilization is contained by the capitalist mode of production and therefore, more than an Anthropocene as it was geological, it is necessary to speak in economic terms of a Capitalocene (MOORE, 2013). Capitalism is what drives the exhaustion and pollution of natural goods; each mode of production is historically and socially determined by production, distribution and consumption; but what distinguishes capitalism from other modes of production is that it is about generating capital as the ultimate goal of the model; not about preserving life or living well (ACOSTA, 2016).

The ecological economy seeks to incorporate values hitherto not accounted, such as domestic, child, and female labor; the interests of future generations and the non-instrumental value of non-human species; the conservation and valorization of environmental services considered common or public goods; the immensurability of life that cannot be sifted in terms of capital. The ecological economy, unlike the environmental economy or green economy measures, go beyond the internalization of negative economic externalities and aim to calculate such assets in monetary terms, valued in money, in order to identify and define the mechanisms of environmental recovery. It is necessary to emphasize that the updated valuation of externalities does not immediately guarantee that the human economy adjusts to ecosystems, or that productive activity has no environmental cost; this environmental dialectic of human production cannot be resolved by an objective and impartial appeal from scientists of nature or the ritual representation of the word sustainability (ACOSTA, 2016).

The problem of calculating the environmental damage generated in production and industrial development requires once again a scientific and political debate to determine the limit of the burden on ecosystems or the monetary cost of internalizing the environmental costs of production. Ecological economics finds its basis in the theoretical principles of the relationship between economic processes and environmental services, recovering the principles of non-renewable natural goods theory, so that it understands that economic processes have a limit. Thus, the green economy strives to better understand why environmental problems occur and how to deal with them successfully. Examples of environmental problems are pollution and deterioration of natural resources, environmental depletion that directly affects the mode of production, accumulation, distribution of spending and wealth in contemporary society.

The environmental problem implies changing the productive horizon of profit, the social relations it establishes between people and people with the environment. For this reason, human ecology recognizes that it is pertinent to maintain a critical dialogue between economy and ecology, aiming at the construction of an ecological economy, identifying the social actors who intervene in the processes of building the good life of the people. This position implicitly recognizes that the good life of people is related to the preservation of nature and the environmental services that natural goods provide to living beings (LEFF, 2006; ACOSTA, 2016).

The ecological economy renounces the position of the neoclassical

economy, recognizing in the pillars of modernity, technoscience and industrialization, the origin of the contradictions between economy and environment. Moreover, both technoscience and industrial development have become the origin of a highly reductionist economic paradigm that drives the polarization of society and a mode of production and consumption that leads to true planetary agony (MORIN; KERN, 1995).

Indeed, the world economic system reflects an exhaustion of the economic paradigm that can be seen very clearly in the environmental problem, but is certainly not the only problem faced by the hegemonic economic model of the market economy. The large gap between rich and poor that widens as this hegemonic system becomes “sustainable” is a clear indication of the gravity of the global economic crisis and its repercussions on the environmental problem.

The GEO 2000 report recognizes that “... the global ecosystem is threatened by grave imbalances in productivity and in the distribution of goods and services. A significant proportion of humanity still lives in dire poverty, and projected trends are for an increasing divergence between those that benefit from economic and technological development, and those that do not. This unsustainable progression of extremes of wealth and poverty threatens the stability of society as a whole, and with it the global environment” (PNUMA, 2000).

The problem posed by the dialectics between the environment and society is aggravated by the processes of social deterioration that are the same processes that promote the deterioration of ecosystems and natural assets. The economic processes inherent to capitalism focus on increasing production as the central axis of human and social development, conditioning good living to economic growth, considering economic growth synonymous with increasing capital (MOORE, 2013). Thus, the classical economy is incapable of generating good living, the idea of internalizing pollution and the exhaustion of natural goods is outside the liberal economic paradigm. The problem of internalization and ecological incommensurability is not solved by the capitalist economic model that does not consider it among its variables of growth and decline. To overcome the contradiction between economic growth (of capital) and the preservation of natural assets, a political agreement rather than an economic calculation is imperative.

In this sense, it is appropriate to recognize that ecology, from the economic point of view, does not have a common average by which the

value of the environment can be calculated in a univocal and absolute way. Therefore, the externalities can only be analyzed and expressed in a world market system, in which the world economy works in an articulated manner. It is precisely because of this global system that the negative effects of energy consumption, for example, are manifested in equatorial fishing as a result of global climate change.

Faced with the inability of the economic model in self-regulating, i.e., to internalize the externalities of the mode of production, on a local and/or global scale, an international legal system is necessary to impose regulations on the economic processes that degrade life on the planet. It is not a question of limiting human ecology, but of making good living coincide with the preservation of environmental services. Therefore, it is difficult to define who has a right over biological resources, especially those located outside human geography. In the case of biodiversity, it is argued that what is put on the market is not the resource itself, but genetic information. The protection and preservation of biodiversity is the propitious field for the reflection of the ecological economy, since its destruction would have a cost for life on the planet as we currently know it, and the forms of existence and cultural practices would also become extinct.

### **3 THE RIGHT TO LIFE: THE BASIC PRINCIPLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

In addition to the problem of assigning adequate value to nature and its economic importance to society, the value of the environment in ethical-moral and legal terms represents an obstacle in the legal definition of property rights, use and usufruct of environmental assets. This circumstance is due to the difficulty of appropriating something as intangible in commensurate terms as life, nature, its goods and services, among other factors. In many respects, nature is inadequate for a person or group of people, given its intrinsic qualities. An example could be the air, which is necessary for the life of people and land animals, thanks to its abundant amount of oxygen, and that virtually cannot be discarded for profit in current conditions.

The environmental problem gives rise to new conflicts and new social values from the redefinition of the relations between society-nature and society-society. In this reorganization of social relations and of them with nature, contemporary legislation is problematized, recognizing

the limitations of positive right to incorporate environmental rights as: collective, to the revaluation of life, identity, territory and autonomy, among others.

Therefore, environmental rights are beyond individual, social and human rights (ACOSTA, 2016). Environmental rights are established to guarantee the enjoyment, access and defense of collective goods – such as the environment and culture; but implicitly they also involve the right to life of all beings who, in turn, must consider the rights of nature of being. Environmental rights aim to guarantee difference and diversity – both biological and cultural – by defending life in any of its forms, even if biological entities have no way to defend their right to existence. In the defense of life, environmental services, and the territories on which life depends, new political and social struggles arise through which actors claim their rights to difference, self-determination, and new political rights.

Environmental rights that refer to life, identity, difference, self-determination, and autonomy neither be defended – nor defined – on the basis of positive legislation in the liberal legal order. Liberalism, which is based on the distribution of land through vassalage, favors means of domination based on the distribution of land as property and resource. Every living being, like people, has for this simple fact the right to exist, that is: of being. That is why living beings need resources to exist and humanity does not ignore this fact. People specify their need in terms of concrete purposes within the framework of the conditions of possibility of their life as natural beings. Each species requires natural nutrients for its development, in addition to other goods and services provided by nature; the human species does not escape this natural conditioning. What distinguishes humans is their way of appropriating these natural elements and the characteristics of their needs, which are both material and spiritual.

The possibility of exercising the right of being has led to questioning the possibilities of its exercise within a regulatory structure that favors individuality, private property, rational productivity and free competition. The ability to exercise individual and collective rights thus has an impact on the form of organization of the state, which ultimately refers to the political system of a society as a kind of organization.

The individual being is subject to the regulation and form of social organization, whose historical character is not a limitation of being, but a space of control of individuality, through the regulation of the conditions of possibility in society. This framework of possibility must, therefore,

allow the emergence of all forms of being, opening a space for otherness and difference. The right to be, inasmuch as it provokes otherness and difference, becomes a serious questioning of the form of organization of the liberal state characteristic of Western-style nation-state models.

The right of being, even of being different, formulates possibilities of existence that require a legal framework for action, which will only be possible to the extent that the political system is transformed in order to recognize the rights of others to be with their differences and particularities (MAGALHÃES, 2012). The homogeneity of free competition and legal equality before the law prevents the development of social and productive forces that are not part of the dynamics of competitiveness and, on the contrary, recognize solidarity as a kind of community development.

The affirmation of a social reality subject to the rationality of competitiveness denies the value of the use of things, extending to all the values of life, hiding the perversity of its statements. The dominance of the rationality of competitiveness does not admit actions against the destructive effects it produces; what is more, it prevents them from being seen when affirming the rights to individuality and free competition.

The liberal state is incapable of recognizing the forms of community organization that require forms of ownership of collective and not just individual environmental resources. The rights to private property necessary for a social organization of free competition that somehow guarantees a minimum of equality deny the importance of equity in the collective rights needed not in free market competition, but in the need to be, that is, in the need to exist as a person with the right to individual and collective development.

This impossibility of ensuring the right of being different manifests itself in the fact that it only recognizes the economic rationality of the means ends up as the only socially valid factor and, therefore, as the only rational factor that justifies competition as the only way to be and denies the value that nature has in itself. The reproduction of life ceases to be an important value in the competitive societies of the free market, since what matters is to satisfy the market and not the beings (MOORE, 2013). In the face of market criteria, actions are rational to the extent that they satisfy their needs, although in terms of the sustainability of being they are destructive. The economic rationality that makes sense to the legal system of private property and free competition and denies the right of being and the reproduction of life; in the rationality of competitiveness, what matters

is to maintain a dynamic growing market, not life or its different forms of being (LEFF, 1999a; 1999b).

Market-oriented social life denies life oriented productivity, also denying people free access to the resources necessary to reproduce their ways of life, when they escape the logic of the market. Products converted into goods in the scope of competitive rationality are not oriented to the satisfaction of needs, but to the satisfaction of consumers' desires, who recognize their satisfaction based on subjective principles; the objectivity of the reproduction of living conditions is then denied by the logic of the market and the competitiveness of goods (MORIN; KERN, 1995).

Although, ultimately, people's very lives and natural capacity to generate life are put at risk, the rationality of means and ends shows how the value of things depends on the relationship between means and ends and not on their capacity to reproduce social or natural life. In this sense, the criterion of maximum market efficiency is imposed on the right to life. Thus, the juridical regulation that shapes this way of dividing and organizing social production and society itself is liberal law. The positive right of John Locke or David Hume affirms the need for rulers to clearly comply with the law as a condition of equality in free competition, denying the possibility of community development, that is, the rule of law, which is the basis of liberal law, hides the contradictions of social class that are generated in access to the means of reproduction of living conditions. For example, the relationship between indigenous peoples and land, the legal expropriation of land to peoples, and the rule of law guarantee the profound inequality of the liberal system of free competition. If the rights to be ruled by law and the application of the "rule of law" are reduced, then by extension the right to be different is nullified.

The inability of the positive right to incorporate communities that are not in conformity with its political and social ideal of freedom and competition ends up legalizing genocide, as has been documented in history. In terms of the hegemonic class, the rule of law legalizes the expropriation of the most vulnerable, favoring not only free competition, but also the privatization of wealth and the usurpation of collective assets, concentrating power and wealth while generalizing poverty.

The right of being is then excluded from social and political reality, since the right to dispose of elementary resources for subsistence is not guaranteed, so that people are forced to adjust their individual being to the normative standards of the hegemonic legal order. The denial of difference



and otherness, of the possibility of existing as another is reflected in the very basis of the liberal ideal of free competition and of the individual right to appropriate resources and even of being of others. In this sense, the history of the Americas is a clear example of the difficulty of imposing a form of social organization that ignores collective rights, which is the basis of sedentary communities in much of Mesoamerica.

## CONCLUSIONS

Since the Founex, Switzerland meeting was convened in 1971, there has been an increasingly interest in the environment from the social sciences, partly because of the negative effects of human activities on nature and partly because of the necessary critical reflection that the environmental crisis has led to in environmental thinking; the social sciences in general had forgotten that society is materially linked to nature; until the contradictions between society and nature became clear, particularly seen through pollution and/or environmental degradation; which has generated great concern in economic, political and social thinking.

Human ecology started by asking what the environment is, which is a constant question in the analysis of social-nature relations beyond the use and appropriation of “natural resources” that impact the dynamics of social relations; since the environment is, at the same time, the space where human and natural history are written, in which social life transforms itself. Thus, we question what paths the different social sciences have taken in building and defining what the environment is.

The environmental discourse begins at the crossroads of various concerns: both the ecological and economic crises, the impact of pollution on public health, the cost of environmental degradation, economic growth, and the preservation of both culture and life, the serious crisis of civilization. Human ecology drives the ecological economy in the search for an economic model that overcomes the contradictions inherent to the capitalist mode of production. But, at the same time, it also investigates what political positions are implicit in each of the approaches to the environment. What challenges does the environmental crisis represent for the social sciences and how can the social sciences contribute to the environmental crisis? It is because the environmental problem requires action, but the different aspects of social action, besides being divergent, can also be opposed. However, it is also a question of social transformation or assimilation of

the challenges posed by the environmental crisis to traditional mechanisms of social normalization.

For example, the deep ecology that proposes biocentric equality, as well as Bockinn's ontological monism, which strives to show that every expression of life has the right to live regardless of its degree of self-determination. But there are also other ways of being and knowing how to live well /SumaQumaña/ that propose the interconnection between the different elements of the universe through relationships of complementarity, correspondence, and contradiction – among many other forms of action and environmental struggle. Thus, the construction of contemporary environmental discourse, which becomes the environmental political agenda, discourses that encourage political practices within which different positions are taken in relation to the environment, as well as the relations between society and nature. A new economic model will require a different legal order in which the value of life has a higher status on the social scale than that given to private property and capital.

That is why it is necessary to trace different theoretical-philosophical as well as social, economic, legal and political postures that address the contradictions between society and nature, reviewing the different disciplinary genealogies of each, in order to find the origin of environmental discourse; the search for relationships, dialogues or lack of them among the different social sciences that have contributed to the construction of the environmental discourse. In addition, how does power manifests itself in environmental knowledge, and legitimizes or opposes different environmental discourses? What are the socio-political contexts in which the disciplines intertwine in the description, explanation and understanding of what the environment is, as well as the environmental crisis? Thus, the book proposes that the “nature” is a theme proper to sociology and in a broader sense, as it is a theme of social sciences in general.

The limitations of the social sciences in defining nature, as historically left out of the social contract, that the *jusnaturalist* natural state was considered a negative, primary and primitive state; but it is also an exploration of how the social ideas of the world and about nature shape the reality of what they seek to know, explain, understand or transform; how, by building the object, they transform the reality they are trying to explain or transform; thus, they define what the environment is or is not, transforming social-nature relations.

The civilizing project of modernity is questioned by human ecology,

while rationality itself is violated by its lack of knowledge and its inability to recognize that it does not know what it knows. The rationality of modernity that has valued the accumulation of life more than life is incapable of explaining the environmental crisis, understood as a crisis of life. Thus, it is a critique of the civilization model based on rationality that values private property more than collective property, which defends economic growth more than life.

Thus the (positive) science that the instrumental rationality model built defined nature as an object of study separate from society, and other knowledge linking this articulation was forgotten, denied and repressed; mother earth was only thought of as a myth with no practical purpose, incapable of making production, distribution and consumption systems more efficient.

Considering that modernity in many aspects is inaugurated with mercantilism, we can see how the liberal economy with its nomothetic vocation has tried to attribute economic values to immeasurable goods, tries to put a price on environmental services, including life. In creating this model of civilization, positive law has provided the basis that has regulated modern society in its use, appropriation and management of natural assets

Finally, in the field of political ecology, we need a genealogy of how the environmental discourse was constructed, for what purposes, how it has been used, and which disciplines were included or excluded in the construction of the discourse in question. We analyzed power strategies in environmental discourse from a critical perspective of the concept of development and the idea of progress associated with the civilizing project of modernity. We diverge from the idea of sustainability that underlies the internalization of environmental externalities through the foundations of green capitalism and environmental economics.

That is why the polysemy of environmental discourse includes many aspects of a fragmented reality in which power strategies in knowledge, as well as knowledge strategies in power, are confronted. They guide contradictory social practices and there is an enormous diversity of social actors who mobilize from environmental discourse. Therefore, ecology is a new field of political struggle in which the meanings and spaces for society's projects, the preservation of ecosystems, and the valorization and conservation of life are disputed. In short, it is a critical set of the main voices that pronounce the environmental discourse.

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