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Global Warming : Its Philosophic Bedrock And Moral Evaluation

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Abstract

Humans, like all other creatures, have, in Darwinian vocab, struggled for existence and have survived, being the fittest in the competition. But despite this humongous victory, man has now confronted the gigantic mal-structure called “Global Warming” that is suffocating human existence to a threatening extent, forcing humans to conceive of a situation where extinction of the human race will be an actuality. The phenomenon of unprecedented warming of the globe has been the result of irrational human activities that aimed at exploiting and dominating Mother Nature, who has sheltered man since his birth. This paper attempts to explore the philosophical foundations that played a crucial role in shaping the moral attitude of the humankind, the consequence of which is the inhuman “killing of Nature”. In this exploration, the philosophy of “Transhumanism” is probed with a view to assessing its role in moulding man’s moral attitude towards the other things and beings of nature. In this paper an attempt has been made to show that this adherence to transhumanistic philosophy has turned man into a Mechanistic Savage who guilt-freely exploits Mother Nature to gratify his selfish desires. It has further been attempted to judge the ethical worthiness of such an attitude by exploring the views of some eminent ethical thinkers, like Peter Singer, Arne Naess, and Taylor. Finally, the paper attempts to suggest a way-out of this trap of “Human-Suffocation through Nature-Killing” by proposing a shift in man’s philosophic and scientific attitude, that would be possible only through an improvement of “man-nature relation”.

Key Words: *Global Warming, Transhumanism, Respect for Nature, Biocentric Egalitarianism, Deep Ecology, Man-Nature Relationship.*

Introduction: “Global Warming” refers to the obnoxious phenomenon of rapid “Climate Change”, which is observed on a century-scale as a process of rise of average temperature of the Earth’s climate. It is but natural that the Earth’s climate will change over time, but what is unnatural is the rate at which the change is taking place, and it is this rate of change that has worried scientists and intellectuals of this era. NASA’s web portal on Global Climate Change contains a feature “Global Temperature Rise” which observes that “The planet’s average surface temperature has risen about 2.0 degrees Fahrenheit (1.1 degree Celsius) since the late 19th century..” (Global Temperature Rise). Though seemingly “minimal”, yet this rise is a matter of great concern because the rate of increase is not,

scientifically speaking, “normal”. It is an unprecedented increase which is no less than an alarm that demands no ignorance. This point of unprecedented increase was highlighted by Spencer R. Weart in his book “The Discovery of Global Warming” when he wrote, “People have talked about the weather, but in the 1930s the talk took an unusual turn. Old folks began to insist that the weather truly wasn’t what it used to be.....Meteorologists scrutinized their records and confirmed it : a warming trend was under way..... As *Time* magazine put it in 1939, “Gaffers who claim that winters were harder when they were boys are quite right... weather men have no doubt that the world at least for the time being is growing warmer””(1). The 1930s mark just the beginning of such climate-change concerns. After that scientists and researchers have extensively explored this phenomenon and have discovered some startling facts that are no good news for the human race. That the average temperature is rising is a fact and what is alarming is the rate of its increase. It is agreed upon by scientists that in between 1960 to 2005, the average surface temperature of Earth has risen by 0.74 to 0.18 degree Celsius. A feature titled “Global Temperature Rise” in NASA’s web portal observes, “Most of the warming occurred in the past 35 years, with 16 of the 17 warmest years on record occurring since 2001. Not only was 2016 the warmest year on record, but eight of the 12 months that make up the year – from January through September, with the exception of June – were the warmest on record for those respective months.”(Global Temperature Rise). These evidences and statements from scientists to common folk establish the fact of GLOBALWARMING as a phenomenon that needs to be addressed immediately.

Given the fact of Global Warming, the next important question that pops up is : what is the reason behind this unprecedented change in Earth’s climate? Who or what is responsible for this? Regarding this issue, there is consensus among scientists that this phenomenon of global warming has been the result of irrational human activities, human exploitation of nature. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in the Synthesis Report (SYR) of its Fifth Assessment Report states that, “The SRY confirms that human influence on the climate system is clear and growing, with impacts observed across all continents and oceans. Many of the observed changes since the 1950s are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The IPCC is now 95 percent certain that humans are the main cause of current global warming. In addition, the SYR finds that the more human activities disrupt the climate, the greater the risks of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems, and long-lasting changes in all components of the climate system. The SYR highlights that we have the means to limit climate change and its risks, with many solutions that allow for continued economic and human development” (IPCC, v). The report of IPCC, thus, confirms that human activities are responsible for global warming. It is the non-judicious use of the environment by the humans that has led to an immense environmental crisis in the form of “Global Warming”. Global Warming is, thus, just the name given to the “Wrongs done by men to Mother Nature”. The irrational activities of men have corrupted the holy womb of nature who is now, metaphorically, emitting, the fire of destruction. With the conclusion that global warming has been a result of human activities, the paper now

proceeds to explore the premises that had prompted man to indulge in such irrational activities.

The Philosophy of Trans humanism: Transhumanism is an intellectual movement that has begun in the 20th century with the aim of enhancing human intellect and physiology that would eventually transform the human constitution and thereby his condition. The term “Transhumanism” was coined by Julian Huxley in 1957, who was a champion of “fulfilment society”, a concept that aimed at the full development of the human potential, which he thought would also serve as a replacement model for “welfare society” in which the concern for others subdued the potentiality of the individual. For Huxley, transhumanism refers to the deliberate effort by mankind to “transcend itself – not just sporadically.....but in its entirety, as humanity....Man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature”. (Huxley, 17). In the collection titled “Transhumanism and its Critics”, Hava Tirosh Samuelson, in her Chapter “Engaging Transhumanism”, observes, “Technology is transforming human life at a faster pace than ever before. The convergence of nanotechnology, biotechnology, robotics, information and communication technology, and applied cognate science poses a new situation in which the human has become a design project.....Due to genetic engineering, humans are now able not only to redesign themselves, presumably in order to get rid of various limitations, but also to redesign future generations, thereby affecting the evolutionary process itself. As a result, a new *posthuman* phase in the evolution of human species will emerge, in which humans will live longer, will possess new physical and cognitive abilities, and will be liberated from suffering and pain due to aging and diseases. In the posthuman age, humans will no longer be controlled by nature; instead, they will be the controllers of nature. Those who welcome the posthuman phase are known as transhumanists.”(20). Thus, Transhumanism, in its spirit, is an attempt to transcend the given human nature. It is a revolt against what is natural, and in this sense “limited”, to men. The vision is to “control nature” and create a whole new set of rules of governance that would be man-friendly and not nature-friendly. Some proponents of Transhumanism, like Ray Kurzweil, talk of a point of Singularity which will bring an end to the species of Homo Sapiens and will usher in the era of an autonomous, artificially intelligent species called the Robo Sapiens. With the power of science and technology, Humans, thus Transhumanists believe, will transform themselves into “Posthumans”, who will possess unprecedented physical, intellectual and psychological capacity, and will be self-programming, potentially immortal, unlimited individuals. Transhumanism, thus, aims at attaining a condition of existence where the natural constitution of man will be changed, and he will be programmed to become an enhanced being who can almost play God. And it is this attitude of “playing God” that has been responsible for man’s exploitation of Nature. Transhumanist values are ego-centric and welfare-bereft. There is no scope for “others” in transhumanist valuation. Transhumanists are akin to adopting an oppressor kind of attitude. They discard the notions of “Equality” and “Harmonious Progress”. Technology is the key that would open the vast-land of human possibilities, and would transport man to the next

evolutionary level. The means and the end are set for the transhumanists and in their scheme of operation Nature or the others things and beings of nature do not feature.

It is interesting to observe that the origin of Transhumanism and the global phenomenon of Climate change temporally converge with both being events that took place around late 19th to mid-20th century. From the evidences of temporal concomitance between the phenomenon of Global Warming and the development of the philosophy of Transhumanism, it may be concluded that Transhumanism has influenced, if not effected, the process of Global Warming. This is because, any phenomenon carried out by men is a projection of the philosophy that he adheres. The global phenomenon of climate change caused mainly due to human activities is, thus, a projection of the philosophy or world-view that man has adopted since the beginning of the last century. And I believe the philosophy that has led men to indulge in such gruesome activities is the philosophy of Transhumanism. Global Warming is just an effect, and its causes are not the mechanically explainable scientific reasons, for these are the external manifestations of the thought processes that go on inside the mind and forces man to act accordingly. Every action, more or less, is an external projection of the philosophy that shapes it from within. And I believe the philosophy that has effected this brutal murder of Mother Nature is the Transhumanist Philosophy. It would certainly be an extravagant claim to say that the accelerated climate change has been the result of man's appreciation and acceptance of Transhumanism, but it would equally be no wrong to say that adherence to such an attitude, has in a considerable way, influenced man's consideration of Nature as not the "life-sustenance provider". Instead of being controlled by Nature, man now attempts to control nature and mould it to suit his own purpose. And this attitude of dictating the nature forces man to carry out irrational activities in the form of emitting greenhouse gases, cutting trees, etc. which eventually warm the globe which sustains life. There is also a pattern-similarity between Climate change and Transhumanism – though it is natural in both the cases that there would be change over a period of time in the climate and in human nature, yet in both, the rate of change since the last century has been unusually accelerated; the correlation between the two has consequently been detrimental for the entire human race.

Defects of Trans humanism and Exploration of Alternative Models: The Transhumanist philosophy is defective, because it denies what is natural to man, it attempts to take away the "human" aspect of the "human beings". The advocates of Transhumanism refer to their vision of Humanity as H+ or enhances Humanity. But adherence to transhumanism actually results in forgoing "Humanity", the ideal which cherishes the values of "togetherness" and "well- being of all". A truly enhanced Humanity would have cared for all other things and beings who live at the bosom of Mother Nature. But Transhumanism fails to do so; it is a misguided project that fails to visualise reality. Post-human is an imagination, a fiction. It is sci-fi. Post-human will never really be "human", it will just be a "machine", a body without any soul. The problem arises when it is thought to be real. This adherence to imagination makes man cruel, aggressive and irrational. He no longer considers himself a part of Nature, as such he loses all respect for Nature. But what he fails to realise is that by suffocating

nature, he is unknowingly, suffocating himself. If nature dies, man will also die. The Robo Sapien can never feel the same connect with Nature, as does man, the Homo Sapien, for it cannot identify itself as an integral part of nature. It is an “Artificial” product, which is bereft of any natural connections. So, the age of Robo Sapiens will be one in which the attitude of “respect for nature” will be the remotest possibility. And the preparatory stages of such an era has been witnessed since the past century when the scientific community began to almost realise their visions of AI, genetic engineering, space colonization, etc.. But the Transhumanists have failed miserably in realising that by cutting all ties with Nature, they are minimising man’s chances of survival as a species to a considerable extent. If this kind of ideological advancement continues, the human species is sure to breathe his last.

As against this kind of attitude, many eminent ethical thinkers have voiced their concerns and have come up with solutions that can check, if not solve, the issue of Environmental degradation. Transhumanism is barren of any moral worth. It lacks ethical essence; so the ethically conscious intellectuals of this era have forwarded their views that might serve as an alternative way to realise the worthiness of nature. In this connection, the views of Paul Taylor, Peter Singer and Arne Naess requires special mention. Taylor in his paper “The Ethics of Respect for Nature” emphasises on adopting a certain ultimate moral attitude towards the natural world, which he calls attitude of “respect for nature”. Taylor’s proposed attitude will be diametrically opposed to the one adhered by the Transhumanists. The adheres of “respect for nature” will realise the intrinsic worth or inherent value of Mother Nature and will, therefore, not engage in any such activities that would congest the smooth functioning of Nature. Peter Singer, in his book *Practical Ethics*, has highlighted the notion of “biocentric egalitarianism” which states that, “the intuition of biocentric equality is that all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realisation within the larger Self-realisation. The basic intuition is that all organisms and entities in the ecosphere, as parts of the interrelated whole, are equal intrinsic worth”(252). Transhumanism had failed to realise this part-whole connect without which “self-realisation” is not really possible. The fulfilment of the parts are attained only after the whole is fulfilled. So, man cannot and should not think of enhancement without considering his connection with Nature. The key to self-realisation would be maintaining a harmonious relation with nature. Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher, coined the term “Deep Ecology”, that specifies a “non-anthropocentric” moral attitude which regards humans as part and parcel of the organic whole. Y.V Satyanarayana, in his book “Ethics: theory and practice”, writes, “Deep ecologists want to preserve the integrity of the biosphere for its own sake, irrespective of the possible benefits to humans. It rejects the view of the anthropocentric morality that the human community is superior to, and in charge of the rest of Nature” (109). Satyanarayan beautifully explicates the main thesis of Deep Ecology when he writes, “In the realm of biocentric equality there is no hierarchical order of species with humans at the top. Since it is intimately related to the all-inclusive self-realisation, if we harm anything in nature then we are harming ourselves” (109). It is this lack of wisdom that makes man do things which are detrimental to his own existence. Once this be realised, man’s urge to control, exploit and degrade Nature will

cease to be, and that would mark the beginning of environment friendly attitude resolving the issues like Global Warming.

Conclusion: Hence, as has been observed, what is important for effecting a control on the unprecedented climate change is the change in our attitude towards nature. This requires an improvement of the man-nature relationship in which man will value nature as he values himself. This requires, in Kantian terminology, treating Nature as an end and never as a means only. Once this realisation dawns upon man, he will be able to appreciate the values embedded in Nature and will stop all those activities that result in gruesome exploitation of the environment. He will then aim at positive enhancements, progresses that will benefit both him and the environment that nurtures him. It will be a win-win situation for both. Thus, philosophically speaking, only a “Man with Nature” ethical attitude can save us from the crisis of Global Warming.

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