

Conceptions of Environment & Coexistence according to the Spanish philosopher Leonardo Polo: Implications for Sustainability Education

ABSTRACT

The functional integrity of the ecology requires balance between the demands of economic development and the preservation of the ecology and balance in satisfying the needs of current versus future generations: work, collaborative sharing and the care of the earth are at the heart of what it is to be human and are constitutive of the order of divine creation (Barrera, 2010).

This presentation describes the Spanish philosopher Leonardo Polo's notions of *co-existence*, *environment*, *freedom*, and *culture* and draws implications for the research and study of paths to long-term prosperity and sustainability education. Polo had proposed four “anthropological transcendentals”, namely: (1) Personal Co-existence, (2) Personal Freedom, (3) Personal Intellection, and (4) Personal Love. ***Co-existence*** is not mere *living with*, *dwelling in* or *coinciding with*, but rather it refers to the personal being's being personally *open* in his intimacy.

The first implication is drawn from his radical conception of the human person as *co-existence* and his definition of *culture* as “continuation of nature”. That is to say, the human person is a being of opportunities, of choices or alternatives, a family and social being, a being who invents, a being capable of unrestricted growth in time. Man's social being belongs to his *manifestative* relationship with the world, also referred to as *intersubjectivity*. Given that the human essence has been created to grow, each person is responsible for rectifying all intersubjective relationships that can inhibit such growth, and nourish those which enable such development. These notions help us to have *hope*—and likewise the strength and the effort—to achieve sustainability.

In addition, from the notion that true wealth is not found in the acquisitive capacity of a country, but rather in the capacity to invest in and produce consumable goods in the future—and therefore is rooted in initiative, creativity, and the human work of the individuals who are the generators of wealth—, we can conclude that the philosopher was insistent on investing heavily in the ***education*** of the people. This points to a more *humanistic* paradigm, i.e., a conception of ecology whose outlook emphasizes common human needs and is oriented to the development of human virtue, in all its forms, to its fullest extent. This human-centered approach factors in the complexity of human nature and emphasizes the human being and its will to protect the species in the long term.

Finally, since it is Polo's belief that God, at creation, left the world unfinished, so that man, the pinnacle of all his creatures, may bring it to completion, the ecological problem is, therefore, none other than the non-fulfillment of this mission, i.e., when one is unfaithful to oneself. Only in this light can we understand the main message of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* when it affirms that the warming of the planet is a symptom of a greater problem: the developed world's indifference to the destruction of the planet as they pursue short-term economic gains. Only when we look upon the ecological issue as primarily an issue about *us* can we be able to take up the ecological challenge of facing up to “the nobility of the human vocation to participate responsibly in God's creative plan”.