

Husserl's Notion of the Life-World and its Implication for Ecology

Dr. NIRANKUSH CHAKRABORTY

Assistant Professor in Philosophy

Gazole Mahavidyalaya

Email: nirankush4u@gmail.com

Introduction:

The theme of my work is concerned with the interpretation of the Life-World and its implication for Ecology. The issue of Nature is one of the most important themes for environmental philosophers and educators. The 'Life-World approach' has been adopted by some environmental researchers and educators without a careful examination of the significance of the key concept "Life-World" in Husserl's philosophy. Husserl does not use the term "Life-World" in a very strict and consistent manner, and this latitude on his part may thus have influenced later theorists' interpretation of the concept. Different approaches to 'Life-World' imply somewhat different understandings of the relationship between humans and nature, and thereby bring about different views on learning about nature.

In Husserl's last work, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, the term 'Life-World' is introduced as a pivot for reflections on the "Crisis" in science and the humanities. Husserl says that every theoretical activity presupposes the concept of the Life-World.

Life-world and Ecology:

This project would try to show that the ordinary Life experience and the experience of nature in ordinary life are important for environmental and educational thinking; however, what we doubt ultimately is that the meaning of the life-world has already been determined by the so-called "common" world, be it a physical surrounding world or a cultural world.

The word 'ecology' comes from Greek and was first coined in 1866 by the German scientist Ernst Haeckel. Ecology is the scientific analysis and study of interactions

among organism and their environment. It is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry that includes biology, geography, and the Earth science. Ecology comprehends the study of interactions organisms have with a biotic components of their environment.

Ecosystems are composed of dynamically interacting parts that include organism, the communities they make up and the non-living components of their environment. Ecosystem processes, such as primary production, pedogenesis, nutrient cycling, and various rich construction activities, regulated the flux of energy and matter through an environment.

Ecology is a human science as well. There are many practical applications of ecology in conservation biology, wet land management, natural resources management (agro-ecology, agriculture, fisheries, city, planning (urban ecology), community health, economics, basic and applied science, and human social interaction (human ecology).

The question about the relationship between ecology, the “Science of the household” as the *word’s* etymology suggests, and life-world (*Lebenswelt*), originally Edmund Husserl’s term (in *Crisis in European science and Transcendental Phenomenology*) referring to the phenomenology of human experience, requires that both the concepts be reconsidered for “ecology” is largely a concept based on the metaphysics and “systems” theory of modern science, which the “Life-world”, suggests, functions as a foundation for phenomenology, “The *Lebenswelt* is the object of an immediate experience (intuition), which is a necessary point of departure of phenomenological research”, comments James Edie in *Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Edie, 1987, PP 84-85). Indeed, as Edie points out, Husserl defines Phenomenology as *Rückgang out die Lebenswelt*, “a going-back to the Predicative or prethematic region of experience which is prior to any thought about experience” (84). Both ecology, especially in its evolutionary dimension, and phenomenology, especially in regard to the life-world, share a quest for origins, to answer the basic question, “whence did we and our world come about?” Evolutionary ecology looks at the question “objectively”, phenomenology ‘subjectively’, and this dichotomy, with its metaphysics and discourse communities, has largely come to characterize the rift between the sciences and the humanities, respectively. The poststructuralist critique of structuralist pretensions to objectivity, which applies to the “natural” as well as the “human” sciences, is matched by its undermining of the ‘metaphysics of presence’, which

equally calls into question phenomenology's evocation of originary experience. (Daniel R. White, *SPRIT IN FLAMES, Toward a Postmodern-Ecological Phenomenology*, Universities of Central Florida.)

The question is that how can we experience nature in our Life-World? If the Life-World approach to nature could be reconceived in the bodily subjective orientation; it might be possible for human beings to re-envisage nature from a perspective that is different from the objective one that is stressing the importance of every experience of nature. The experience of nature could be in the wild or in the garden, unique and particular, authentic and meaningful. The approach to nature in the subjective orientation may be more feasible starting point than the objective orientation for us to incite the authentic, personal and intimate relationship between ourselves and nature.

The approach illuminates a new understanding of environmental learning: learning in nature is not only to take nature as a physical and objective surrounding world, but also to engage with it as a personal and private territory.

The idea of the Life-World, as conceived by Husserl in his *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, is seen as a discovery. The celebrated work of Husserl, i.e., *The Crisis* is highly important in contemporary philosophy for its key term, *Lebenswelt*, life-world. Husserl says, "*To always to-live-in-certainty-of-the-world.*" Husserl introduced the idea of the Life-world to meet the challenge of the Crisis of the then science. The Crisis arises because scientific intellectualism loses itself in theories alienated from the world; it excludes precisely the meaning or meaningfulness of human existence. It remains indifferent to the questions, which are decisive for genuine humanity.

According to Husserl, the Life-World is what one has as "the unity of a living organism." (*Crisis*-113, *Krisis*-116). The life-world must appear as alive in order for the transcendental ego to constitute itself as alive. The life-world is the flesh that preserves the other projects of our embodied subjectivity that we deposit there for the time being. The life-world is the flesh that we 'entrust' with our own as human beings.

Therefore, the proposed work aims to find the relation between Life-World and Ecology, and the various problems which arise in our modern life, because human existence is the first and foremost existence in the Life-World.

I have taken up this project *Life-world* and its implication for ecology to meet the challenges of modernity.

As we know the *Crisis* in Husserl's writings to meet the challenges of the then science. If we understand the *Crisis* then we can understand that *Life-world and Ecology* are the basics to meet the problems arising out of the modernization of society. If we have to understand the true relation between the Life-world and Ecology then we have to understand the thinking of sciences (basically modern sciences). We can understand that the *Crisis* raised by Husserl in 20th century is the key term which I think is the linkage which is need to be analyzed properly to meet the challenges of modern society and to discover the integral relation between *Life-world and Ecology* to avoid further degradation of our Ecology.

In *Crisis*, Husserl claim that the natural sciences were originally only branches of the universal science of Philosophy; in their development, they first became independent of philosophy, then they forgot their original role of explaining particular phenomena in the empirical world. These new sciences sought, rather to offer their own universal view of the world, and of man's place in it. In a sense the *Crisis* refers to something far deeper. It refers to the crisis of philosophy in the literal sense of '*Splitting apart*' of philosophy from its authentic source and meaning. The *Crisis of philosophy* is the loss of dream of philosophy as a rigorous science. The theoretical structure of science moves it away from the pail of our lived world. Science, as it were, becomes rootless resulting in a fragmented and fractured view of human existence as this is the '*Crisis of science*' according to Husserl. The Crisis arises because science forgets its original role of explaining particular phenomena in the empirical world. It seeks rather to offer its own universal vision of the world and of man's place in the world. It forgets that as a theoretical, logical superstructure science requires a foundation and that foundation is the *Lebenswelt* or the common world *i.e.* Ecology. By *Life-world* Husserl meant, the world as we encounter it in everyday experience, the world in which we pursue our goals and objectives, the world as the sense of all our human activities, praxes. *Life-world* described as a 'Cultural world'-the basic human world, the communal world, where the community lives. This basic human world is constituted by human praxis or activity, oriented to practical ends and laden with linguistic tradition. Life-world for

Husserl is taken as basic, as foundation and as such there is no question of suspending it.

Indian Thinkers on Life-world and Ecology:

The importance of Gandhi as an environmentalist lies not in his vision and his right understanding of man-nature relationship. He made honest efforts to translate his percepts in actual life. Gandhi fully understood the primordially of man-nature relationship and his theory and philosophy of life, society and politics are in consonance with it, it is these understanding of, and, reverence for, the salience and senility of nature for human existence which makes him and environmentalist per excellence. Gandhi had clearly perceived this solution. His indictment of the modern civilization in the *Hind Swaraj* was intended to caution mankind against this calamity. The permanent care of this dreadful problem lies in a suitable alternative life style in tune with nature.

The literary works of Tagore can be used for raising awareness about the environment. Rabindranath wrote extensively about nature, about the relationship between human beings and nature. The story about '*Balai*' in which Tagore highlighted a young boy's love for a simul tree in front of his house. Through the poem '*The tame bird was in a cage*', Tagore brought out the plight of a tamed bird. One bird is in the cage other in the forest. Both of them meet and fall in love. The caged bird was even forgotten how to sing. But it can imitate its master voice. The free bird knows that the songs of nature can never be taught, they are all part of the system of the birds. They flutter their wings in yearning and sing: come closure, my love! The free bird cries, it cannot be, I fear the closed doors of the cage, the cage bird whispers, Alas, my wings are powerless and dead.

It highlighted the way in which man wants to domesticate nature, which he sees from only his own perspective and clearly refuse to see from nature's perspective.

Human beings are never alone as a species in the Universe. Ecology is the shed of each individual's and each species' or association of species' requirements and their limits of tolerance in relation to environmental factors.

Human beings have been interested in ecology since the beginning of history. Scriptures have included practices and values related with ecological and environmental conservation. The concept of ecological and environmental conservation 'enters in to every form of religion.....It rests on the earliest conceptions of the unity of life in nature, in the sense of communion and fellowship with the divine centre and source of life.....'.

Hinduism teaches that the five great elements (space, air, fire, water and earth) that constitute the environment are all derived from *Prakriti*, the primal energy, each of these elements has its own life and form; together with the elements are interconnected and interdependent.

The *Atharva Veda* says that 'let there be peace in the heavens, the Earth, the atmosphere, the Water, the Herbs, the Vegetation, among the divine beings and in Brahman, the absolute reality. Let everything be at peace and in peace. Only then will we find peace'.

The *Vedic Hymn* to the Earth, the *Prithvi Sukta* in *Atharva Veda*, is unquestionably the oldest and the most evocative environmental invocation. In it, the Vedic seer solemnly declares the enduring filial allegiance of human kind to Mother Earth: '*Mata Bhumi Putroham Prithivyah*'. Earth is my mother, I am her son. 'Mother Earth is celebrated for all her natural bounties and particularly for her gifts of herbs and vegetation.' Her blessings are sought for prosperity in all endeavors and fulfillment of all righteous aspirations.

➤ **Justification of my work:**

The aim of my work would consider the possibilities of working toward sustainable development. Scientific research will be crucial to better understanding how Life-world and Ecology become important aspects for environment. The advanced knowledge of Ecology and its relation with Life-world help us to improve our environment, manage our natural resources, and protect human health. For the project will open a stage to rethink for future like Zero-population energy system based on the single premise that local air-quality issues in the short run, and green house gas emissions in the longer run, mandate the restructuring of the energy system to

eliminate the use of fossil-energy-sourced carbon. It will be possible only when we can set a companionate relationship between Life-world and the Ecology.

However, there is increasing evidence that major changes in the global economic and industrial system may be needed if the world is to achieve a sustainable state before twenty-first century. The broad question is how to shift from a techno-economic trajectory based on exploiting natural resources – soil, water, bio-diversity, climate that, once lost, can never be replaced, to one that could lead to a society that preserves and conserves these resources. To facilitate this search a fresh look and thinking of ecology and Life-world is needed, and secondly we have to resolve the question: how to get from “where we are” to “where we need to be.”

The “Ecological” scientific criterion for sustainability admits the likelihood that some of the important functions of the natural world cannot be replaced within any realistic time frame – if ever – by human technology, however sophisticated. The need for arable land, water and a benign climate for agriculture is an example, the role of reducing bacteria in recycling nutrient elements in the biosphere is another; the ozone layer of the stratosphere is a third.

The project aims at the proper understanding of the main elements of Life-world by ecology for the better future of our future generations.

➤ **A Brief Overview of Extant Literature**

1. Carr, D (1970). Translator’s Introduction. In E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
2. Kandgrebe, L. (1973). The Phenomenological concept of experience, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
3. Merleau Ponty, M. (2003), *Phenomenology of Perception*, (Colin Smith, Trans London: Routledge & Kegan paul.
4. Natsoulas, T. (1994). Gibson’s environment, Husserl’s Lebenswelt, the world of physics, and the rejection of phenomenal objects. *American Journal of Psychology*.
5. Stroker, E. (1997), *Science and Life-world: A problem of cultural change Human Studies*.

6. White, R. Danial, *Sprit In Flames*, Toward a Postmodern – Ecological Phenomenology, University of Central Florida.
7. Edic, James M. *Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology, A critical commentary* (Blomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
8. Smith, Barry 1999; "Truth and the Visual Field", in *Naturalizing Phenomenology. Issues in contemporary phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, edited by J. Petiot, F.J. Varela, B. Pach and, J.M. Roy, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
9. Tagore's thought on environment, Atiur Rahaman, June, 03, 2011./ Last modified June 3, 2011.
10. Vedas on environment by R. Thiyagarajan, research unit, IGNOU.