

EDITORIAL

"Ethics is the infinitely extended responsibility towards all life,"

Albert Schweitzer, *Kultur und Ethik* (1923), 1 p. 241.

We have today entered deep into the era of environmental ethics and ecology. People of all disciplines, not to say leaders of popular thought, are now talking much about it, and theologians are not lagging behind. Daily newspapers and magazines are full of opinions on it. And bookstores are becoming stocked with books on the subject, coming in all colours and shapes, sometimes with screaming titles and containing loud prophecies. It is all very well and appropriate. If, however, the battle against the ill is fought with the same weapons as the ones which caused the ill, for instance the destruction of so many trees to make the paper on which to print the dire warnings against the destruction of trees to make paper for printing, it is but an irony totally unavoidable. The same thing goes with commercial propaganda. Put out fire with fire, *uṣṇam uṣṇena sānti*.

There are difficult ethical questions of all kinds facing us in our environmental decisions. The urgency in many cases would incline one to giving priority to saving the eco-systems from destruction even by adopting extreme tactics. However, apart from urgent decisions that need to be made on given choices, we must review our ethical attitudes in light of cosmic perspectives. The Indian principle of *ahimsā* defines an ethical attitude that involves some profound cosmological perspectives to furnish important guidance in our environmental-ecological thinking - and action. As never before in history our thinking and consequent action have to be total. Our responsiveness to the perils that Nature and all natural life have been subjected to has to be not only total but effective. True, as has been observed by an eminent philosopher our responsiveness cannot transcend the modest limits of human power. But the secret may very well lie in skirting the problem of power and concentrating on attitudes, actually collective attitudes, educated by higher cosmological perspectives.

This issue of the *Journal of Dharma* attempts to concentrate on the attitudes so defined, i.e., in terms of *ahimsā*. The different articles

in it look at different aspects of the matter. The myth of the world having been made, somehow, for the fulfilment of human destiny alone, has made human beings insensitive to the true value of all beings in and for themselves, which means in the cosmos as a whole. Between the humans and Nature as such stand animal and other biological forms of life. Tangible respect for them is an important part of *ahimsā*. As Charles Hartshorne observes (*Logic of Perfection*, p. 309). "Human values emerge [in the Cosmos], sure enough but are there not simian values, amoebic values – and who dares to assign a first level of values?" As if to emphasise this much ignored truth, we have, in a typical *ahimsā* way, included an article on "Indian Perspectives on the Spirituality of Animals."

In the face of the peril that the world is facing, bandage-solutions are no longer useful. We must turn to the deep, fundamental ecology, but one that is derived from a cosmic spiritual outlook, marshalling the resources of all the religions, including the so-called primitive religions.

If that effort on the part of awakened humanity reaches a critical mass – if it does – that would be what we may hope for as divine intervention, which, however, does not rule out its being destruction (*samharam*) in essence, but a meaningful one, perhaps destroying the world in order to save it. But we must still strive to save the earth in a non-apocalyptic way and preserve it.

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