

Energy Security, Environmental Ethics and Ableism
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This conference covers among others environmental ethics for the Post 2015 World and ethical aspects of setting research priorities in climate change and environmental policies. I want to contribute to this meeting the concept of ability expectation (want stage) and ableism (need stage) which is both a cultural dynamic and an analytical framework. As for this talk I make two assumptions

- 1) The concept of ableism can be used as an analytical framework to analyze strategies and priorities for gaining energy security and for avoiding or reducing energy insecurity, as well as envisioning governance solutions.
- 2) The cultural dynamic of ability expectation and ableism is entangled with ethical theories in general and environmental ethics in particular (eco-ableism) in three ways: 1) certain ability expectations were and are one trigger for the development of ethical theories; 2) a given ethical theory, depends on certain abilities to function; and 3) a given ethical theory, promotes certain abilities and as such its uptake correlates with the acceptance of certain ability expectations[1].

What is Ableism?

The disabled people rights movements in the United States and Britain were the first to look at cultural dynamics and the cultural impact of ability expectations coining the term ableism as a cultural concept during the 1960s and 1970s. The disability studies field uses the term ableism to question and highlight the expectations towards species-typical body abilities (we expect certain abilities from different species; humans are supposed to walk but not to fly, birds are supposed to fly) and the disablement, the prejudice and discrimination people experience whose body structure and ability functioning are seen as sub species-typical and therefore labelled as “impaired”. However, the cultural reality of ability expectations (want stage) and ableism (need stage) go far beyond how it is used within disability studies and by disabled activists. Individuals, households, communities, groups, sectors, regions and countries make daily numerous decisions based on ability expectations; some perceive the ability to protect one’s privacy as important, others do not; some perceive the ability to buy a house as essential, others not; some cherish being competitive, productive or efficient, others not; some find the ability to consume essential; some the ability to live in a harmonious equitable society. Ableism does not have to be negative: it simply indicates that one has certain ability expectations one lives out. A society could decide that equity is an important *ability* of a functioning society, and this could be perceived as positive; however, ability expectations can and have been used in a negative way not only against disabled people, but also used to support negative –isms such as racism, sexism and anti-environmentalism. Ableism used in a negative way leads to disablism: the lack of accommodation for the needs of people and other biological structures seen to lack certain abilities; and the unwillingness to adapt to the needs of others. Ability expectations and ableism “lead to an ability based and ability justified understanding of oneself, one’s body and one’s relationship with others of one’s species, other species and one’s environment” . This phenomenon holds true for individuals through to nation states, as individuals, households, communities, groups, sectors, regions and countries expect numerous abilities of themselves and others (e.g. having the ability to consume, to compete, to produce). Anthropocentric and bio/ecocentric views of human-nature relationship are based on fundamentally different ability expectations.

Eco-ableism: Enabling and disabling the ecosystem

Ecology is about the interrelationship of organisms and their environment. The article on environmental ethics in the Stanford Encyclopedia for Philosophy cites the following from the 1972 Limits to Growth study; "We affirm finally that any deliberate attempt to reach a rational and enduring state of equilibrium by planned measures, rather than by chance or catastrophe, must ultimately be founded on a basic change of values and goals at individual, national and world levels" [2]. Ability expectations and preferences are dynamics that drive households, communities, societies, sectors, regions or countries and often generate values. Furthermore, values espoused often lead to certain ability expectations and preferences. The abilities one favors and the ableisms one exhibits impacts human-nature relationships and how one defines ecological problems and identifies solutions to the problem.

The anthropocentric and the eco- or biocentric school of thought for example have different ability preferences[3]. Players involved in the shaping of ecological discourses also exhibit ability expectations and forms of ableism that influence how they define ecological problems and solutions to the problem and whom they invite to the table. According to Ness (1973) the central objective of the 'shallow ecology movement' is to increase the ability to increase the health and affluence of people in developed countries whereas the 'deep ecology movement' has its focus on the ability to promote "biospheric egalitarianism, the view that all living things are alike in having value in their own right, independent of their usefulness to others" [2]. Reflecting a shift in perspectives at the scale of social movements that extend across countries, Eco-feminists movements are seeking to increase the ability of a more balanced relationship between humankind and the Earth [4]. This is linked to the expectation of the ability to care [5] and the promotion of the idea of interconnectedness [6] while rejecting dualistic hierarchical worldviews which divide humans and nature. In other words, ecofeminism rejects the ability expectation of "dominance, competition, materialism, and technoscientific exploitation inherent in modernist, competition-based social systems" [6] and nourishes the ability expectation of "caring and compassion and the creation and nurturing of life" [6].

A shift in ability expectations is occurring at the scale of nations, social movements and academic disciplines. Ecuador, for example, could be construed as the first country to become a legal biocracy and ecocracy giving a new set of rights to nature. Articles 71-74 of its new constitution describe the relationship of humans to nature. Article 71 can be interpreted as giving rights to the 'entity' nature. Article 72 talks about nature's right to an integral restoration and Article 73 talks about what actions against nature are prohibited. However article 74 suggest retains anthropocentric reasoning: "Persons, people, communities and nationalities will have the right to benefit from the environment and form natural wealth that will allow wellbeing"[7].

Ability expectations and Energy security

Energy insecurity is felt, and energy security is desired on a global, regional, national and local level and on the level of households, communities, groups, sectors, regions, countries and cultures. Different strategies and priorities for gaining energy security and avoiding energy insecurity are envisioned and employed by different households, communities, groups, sectors, regions, countries and cultures. "Energy is fundamental to the quality of our lives. Energy security based on access, affordability, and quality is an essential driver for development[8]. The European Commission Directorate-General for Energy and Transport highlighted in 2006 two ways to deal with energy insecurity: "reducing energy demand by changing consumption patterns or using energy in a "greener", more diverse and more efficient manner"[9]. The fear of energy insecurity is also exploited. In a recent financial times article with the title "Total warns of Energy insecurity" one reads that: "Total, the French oil group, has warned politicians that they risk accelerating an oil supply crunch if they enact environmental policies that deter investment in oil and gas before enough viable alternatives are available"[10].

In developed countries, most of the discourses are around how to keep one's level of energy

security and one's level of consumption and way of living. However, for many individuals energy insecurity is part of their daily life. According to the World Energy Outlook report by the International Energy Agency, some 1.6 billion people – one-quarter of the world population – have no access to electricity. In the absence of vigorous new policies, 1.4 billion people will still lack electricity in 2030[11].

Energy security and Ability security/capability security

"Ability security' means that one is able to live a decent life with whatever set of abilities one has, and that one will not be forced to have a prescribed set of abilities to live a secure life" [12]. It was noted that "Nussbaum generated the term capability security in 2011 "‘capability security’ (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 43): that it is important to people not only that they enjoy a certain level of functioning but also that they are able to sustain it over time. Furthermore, it is important to people to be free from the worry that can be experienced if one’s functionings are at ongoing risk”[13]. Capability security in other words is the ability to have ability security although her focus is on being able to reach and keep a certain level of abilities, whereas the original meaning of ability security is that one has a decent life independent of one’s abilities.

Question is whether we assume certain levels of abilities and trying to make them energy secure or whether we generate a society that one can have a decent life even without energy security. If we assume the first which abilities do we want to make energy secure?

Ableism, the environment and environmental ethics

So what to do? The Ethics of Energy report by the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology states, "It is calculated that an amount of energy roughly equivalent to 7 per cent of the world's current electricity production could cover basic human needs. In an age of apparently advanced technological and management skills, we have failed in this relatively modest challenge"[14]. "How do we balance short-term social costs, borne largely by the poor, the disadvantaged and the developing nations (costs that may in the immediate future increase the disparities between rich and poor) against the long-term benefits of moving to a more sustainable society and protecting the global environment?"[14]. Ethics is about what one ought to do. However, as Sherwin recently stated, "we [ethicists] lack the appropriate intellectual tools for promoting deep moral change in our society”[1].

I submit that ethics is deeply culturally situated. Ability expectations (want stage) and ableism (need stage) are an example of such a cultural dynamic which has to be taken into account and influenced if ethicists are to be able to promote moral change.

Conclusion

In 2001--02 the Millennium Project in collaboration with the Foresight and Governance Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Study conducted a survey to generate an international outlook on what goals might be desirable to achieve and what is seen as politically achievable by 2050. Most of the 44 identified goals (such as ending water shortages, water pollution and hunger) are directly or indirectly affected by the existence of energy security. However, despite the pervasive importance of energy security so far, no global consensus has emerged as to how far and with which tools to address energy inequity. Achieving political and social change happens among others through ability expectation changes. Change in ability expectation does not only impact political and social change but also which ethical theory and which ethical reasoning might be employed. Ethic theories might also lead to a manifestation or change in ability expectation. Using an ability expectation and ableism lens within ethical reasoning might be one possible tool to help achieve the goal of influencing political and social change Sherwin is envisioning[1].

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