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Adventures of environmental epistemology...

The work by Enrique Leff lead us to think through the emergence of ecological thinking, referring to the social, economic, and political changes that have taken place in society, especially concerning the increased production of technological innovations through scientific knowledge. Such changes depict environmental degradation arising from a crisis of knowledge, with excessive appreciation of absolute, unquestionable, fragmented knowledge, which subsumed environmental issues, the relation between human beings and the environment and nature. The spillover of knowledge has produced and it still produces an emptying of existential senses of human beings, denying the otherness constructed through social relations and issues of being in time and history.

Thus, the time to consider the epistemological principles that recognize the specific characteristics of sciences emerges, in order to reconnect society/nature to its history, culture, economy, anyway, social equity and democracy towards the environment. To do this, Enrique Leff explains the concept of environment, presenting a new field of discussion, named as environmental knowledge, a kind of knowledge on the ways to apprehend the world and nature. It involves power relations, however, this does not aim at the oneness, the absolute, or the re-totalization but at eliminating certainties in order to make room for dialogue.

Environmental knowledge understood not only as ecology, but as an environmental complexity that puts the world and nature together. With a view to contribute to this concept, environmental epistemology translates itself into a continued path to think the interconnection of various sciences in generating principles, methods, and thoughts that join real-world, surpassing the absolute scientific knowledge and the rationality of modernity through environmental knowledge. This route allows constructing a new social rationality: the environmental one, therefore, studying the environment interconnects various thinking trends, various sciences, in order to think of the contribution that each, in its socio-historical period, provides to discuss emergent knowledge. This fact converges to constitute the concept of environment.

This conceptual process of environment is based on new perspectives arising within each science or knowledge domain. It also provides, as a primary axis of environmental rationality, the ethics, which seeks knowledge plurality and depth, going beyond truths in the way of environmental complexity.

Environmental epistemology aims at life sustainability, giving reasons for human existence and thinking of environmental
knowledge, based on diversity. There is a break with the positivist project, in order to improve knowledge kinds previously subjugated and build a new social and productive rationality, which encompasses an environmental approach.

This path taken by environmental knowledge, according to Leff, involves the interdisciplinarity and interconnection between sciences needed, seeking a holistic and ecological thinking. It also focuses on environmental externality and power relations involved in knowledge, where environmental epistemology is shown by means of the externality of other sciences. Unthinkable things, lack of knowledge, which contribute to change environmental knowledge; environmental rationality: reason and value, thought and action.

Such actions spark a discussion about a set of thoughts, ethical principles, practices, social actions, and theoretical, ethical, cultural and social values, constituting a new social rationality (sustainability, diversity). Then, environmental knowledge is viewed as the ‘other knowledge,’ which escapes the one already determined, unchangeable, bringing along with it new social meanings and subjectivity ways with political positions in face of the world. There is a dialogue of knowledge kinds that asks about the causes of the current unsustainability, converging to a new rationality, however, the interdisciplinary project has maintained the totalitarian will of sciences by means of an interconnection of subjects and fields of knowledge, without looking at the paradigmatic obstacles and disciplinary interests that resist and prevent such a path of completeness. According to Leff, this is due to the power of theoretical ideologies and conceptual strategies, when crystallizing as scientific paradigms, start driving and constraining the social practices, which focus on the world’s sustainability or unsustainability.

With a view to build a new social rationality, environmental rationality brings into play the value of theory, ethics, cultural meanings, and social movements, in order to open a dialogue between knowledge and wisdom, promoting an encounter between the traditional and the modern domains. Environmental knowledge is shaped and rooted in collective identities that provide a meaning to rationality and various cultural practices. Thus, environmental sciences are called to the mission of achieving their continued updating through interdisciplinary and interconnection of sciences, providing some understanding of and response to social and environmental issues.

REFERENCE