

## Section 1

### Emergency, Crisis and Catastrophe Ethics

#### 1. *Emergency Ethics: Which Form of Sustainability?*

My vision regarding sustainability finds its best form of expression through sheer respect of life. This type of respect can be described through an ethics of love towards God, human beings, and every creature belonging to the natural world, which we could call the “environment”. It aims to mediate the opposing positions of strong anthropocentrism and radical biocentrism. This vision rejects both an absolute anthropocentrism, and an extremist perspective of eco-centrism.

A culture of sustainable development lays down the basis for a new way of thinking, and living in the world, and it requires the responsible modification of our lifestyle behaviours. It calls for a new form of anthropocentrism, which I would qualify as “responsibly mediated anthropocentrism”. “Responsibly”, because an acceptable model of anthropocentrism cannot exist without the criterion of responsibility which governs the actions of humanity, and “mediated” because it incorporates the reasons related to ethics, anthropology, philosophy, theology, ecology, law, and social development, directing them towards claims of social equity and justice, making sure that economic development and the protection of the environment of life, and society as a whole<sup>1</sup> walk on the same path.

My study has recently been moving towards a new theoretical interpretation that moves in the direction of an ‘emergen-

<sup>1</sup> Marco Ettore Grasso, *Lineamenti di Etica e Diritto della Sostenibilità*, Milano, Centro di Studi sulla Giustizia, 2015.

cy’ dimension, dealing with the study of humanitarian, ethical, environmental, health, and social emergencies, which are particularly connected to crises and catastrophes. In this sense, I had argued about a new branch of sustainability (*Emergency Sustainability*)<sup>2</sup>, which would aim to overcome the classic bipartition between ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ sustainability, as well as contemplating a series of concepts, such as those of “epistemic health” and “responsible catastrophism”<sup>3</sup>, which give the ethical direction to this particular sustainable kind of vision. To better understand the “emergency” dimension, we just need to think about the fact that the protection of natural resources is becoming increasingly placed at risk, along with the lives of vulnerable populations who are faced with the consequences of emergencies deriving from climate change, and the numerous social, economic, and natural disasters, which often, unexpectedly, occur.

### 1.1 *The Theoretical Foundations of Emergency Ethics*

“Emergency Sustainability” constitutes a preliminary assumption for “emergency ethics”. It is a type of ethics, moving towards the “emergency” perspective. Therefore, it is “light”, without any complex abstractions, and “rapid”, because it is able to move fast, anticipating emergencies.

<sup>2</sup> Marco Ettore Grasso, *Ethical Approaches to the Tortuous Path of Climate and Health Justice*, Conference: *Ecological Integrity and Land Uses: Sovereignty, Governance, Displacements and Land Grabs*, Global Ecological Integrity Group, University of Salerno, 2018; Marco Ettore Grasso, *Emergency Sustainability and Ethics: Climate Change, Epistemic Health and Nihilism*, in Laura Westra, Klaus Bosselmann, Virginia Zambrano (eds.), *Ecological Integrity and Land Uses: Sovereignty, Governance, Displacements and Land Grabs*, New York, Nova Science Publishers, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Marco Ettore Grasso, *Natural Catastrophes and Forms of Catastrophism. A New Ethical and Moral Framework Leading Towards the ‘Responsible Catastrophism Model’*, in Laura Westra, Janice Gray, Franz-Theo Gottwald (eds.), *The Role of Integrity in the Governance of the Commons: Governance, Ecology, Law, Ethics*, Cham, Springer, 2017.

Etymologically speaking, the term “emergency” means “what emerges”. It seems to have a “flavour” of novelty, but it also preserves the meaning of ‘critical situation’.

“Emergency Ethics” aims to promote an “emergent transformative justice”, that is to say, an emergency sustainable justice, that intends first of all to recover human and social dignity, as this dignity is often endangered, due to various individual and collective actions undertaken by mankind<sup>4</sup>.

Moral and political nihilism, therefore, contributes to an increase in the extent of harmful effects caused by man. In this sense, I prefer to speak of “*masochistic nihilism*”, because these consequences also befall those who provoke them. The perception that the human being does not really love himself is evident, because through his actions, he damages himself, his own health and the health of the whole Earth, and subsequently, his entire living environment.

“Emergency ethics” gives a new sense to the term “health”, as interpreted in its philosophical, spiritual, psychological, and anthropological dimension. This sense is heading towards “what is healthy”. As we all desire a healthy life, we should embrace a moral kind of responsibility, which has both a deontological and a consequentialist matrix: a responsibility that imposes the necessity to make an authentic examination of our own consciences, which is related to the impact of our actions.

Moreover, given that political nihilism derives from a pathological vision of “power”, “emergency ethics” also proposes the revision of the concept of “power” through a heuristic key. Indeed, it should be lived as a service for the “common good”<sup>5</sup>. Within this perspective, we need a “*transfiguration of power*”<sup>6</sup>, through critical and conscious discernment, regarding the true

<sup>4</sup> Such as, for example, the emission of greenhouse gases. Climate change is in fact caused by man, and its harmful effects fall on all humanity (present and future).

<sup>5</sup> I would like to underline that both terms “climate”, and “health”, are to be considered, in an epistemic sense, as two common goods ‘par excellence’.

<sup>6</sup> The term “transfiguration” brings to mind, the transfiguration of Jesus on Tabor Mount, a transformation that starts from above, as in, from God. There can be no authentic transformation of power if this is done by man himself. It, in fact, requires divine intervention. This requires a desire for change, along with the awareness that man cannot replace God.

meaning related to the ethics of the “common good”, as well as the ethics of “good living in common”.

I would now like to deal, briefly, with the concept of “risk”, which is fundamental for any sort of emergency. “Emergency ethics” uses the theoretical matrix of “vulnerability”, in order to then continue in the direction of “resilience”<sup>7</sup>. As I will explain later, however, the concept of risk is insufficient to rationally explain a crisis or a catastrophe.

### 1.2 *The Concept of “Risk”*

Effective risk management is a tool that allows us to be able to make a reality check with full awareness of all factors involved. Assessing the risk, and acting accordingly, means increasing the degree of resilience required by any given circumstance.

The concept of “risk” is an interdisciplinary concept that maintains a strong economic connotation, under which the notion of “probability” is an essential component of the same concept. The term “risk”, etymologically speaking, could be derived from the Arabic word *rizq*, the Latin *risicum* (or *resicum*), or on the other hand it could have Greek origins, or possibly even Celtic-Breton ones. For many authors, the word “risk” was first used in 12th/13th century in Italian seaside towns, when making reference to the shipping of goods, and the emerging insurance-business. The distinction between “risk” and “danger” was indeed introduced in the more recent German language debate by Evers and Nowotny.

According to Niklas Luhmann, the concept of risk is part of the decision making process in relation to which we can reasonably expect some degree of probability of repentance for our decisions. Although the concept of “danger” is connected to the idea of probable damage, Luhmann states that it is attributed to factors outside the social system. Technological development leads to an increased risk, as it transforms dangers into risks,

<sup>7</sup> About the relationship between “resilience”, “sustainability” and law, see: Marco Ettore Grasso, *Resilience and Sustainability in Law. Theoretical and Critical Approaches*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2021.