

Environmental crisis? Ethical crisis!

Patrick Blandin

10 September 2018, *La Croix*

Original French version available at <https://www.la-croix.com/Debats/Forum-et-debats/Crise-environnementale-Crise-ethique-2018-09-10-1200967549>

We must thank Nicolas Hulot for his attempt to make clear, not only to the government, but to each of us, that the ecological transition is a major issue for humanity. But is the word "transition" strong enough? It has the advantage of not suggesting a utopia that would not be credible. However, by its gentleness and its pragmatic connotation, it justifies the "small steps" being made as small as possible by those who fear to go too fast and lose voters en route. And by the way, which road is it? Where should it take us?

The accelerated diminution as ever of the diversity of the living world has nothing to do, in its speed, in its magnitude and in its causes, with the natural crises that the living world has known during the long history of life. It is the whole biosphere, in the smallest corners of its ecosystems, with its emblematic species as with the most ordinary, with its soils as with its seas, which is jostled in no time by a species like the others stemmed from the long evolutionary process. "The erosion of biodiversity", to use scientific jargon, is a symptom of the physical, chemical and biological transformation that the development of the human population and its techniques imposes on nature. But it is not only a symptom: it is the weakening of an essential property of the living world, the capacity to adapt. Without diversity, life is impossible.

Life is dynamic, impossible to make a freeze frame. So where do we want the living world to go, including ourselves? The environmental crisis, in which chemical transformations, climate change, the weakening of ecological systems and biodiversity loss interact, is the result of a crisis of governance, at all scales, which results from a lack of vision. In truth, it is an ethical crisis that is in question.

Humanity has come here because it is governed in fact by egoisms whose only "value" is profit. The mirage of the freeze frame is to believe that this situation can last. The enrichment of some humans at the cost of a general deterioration of the planet and the contempt of the lives of other humans is suicidal.

Are there other values on which humans could build a common project? A project that offers a desirable goal and at the same time organizes the present not in a way that is simply bearable, but truly mobilizing?

Such values are not to be invented. They are there, available. Recognize that the other, be it a human or a member of a different species, has value because it exists as a living thing, born of the long history of life, connected by an infinity of links with others within the living fabric of the planet. Recognize that the other has value because it is different from me and others, and so it contributes to the diversity of the living world. Recognize that the very nature of the living phenomenon means that "everything is connected", in space and time, and therefore give value to solidarity. Recognize that every "other" -

because, humans and nonhumans, we are each an “other” for others - deserves respect as a child of life, as an actor of everyday life and a contributor to the future of life.

It is necessary then that the future of life, tomorrow and then, be drawn by a work of solidarity between "others" who respect each other in their diversity; and who know that if humanity does not ensure that the living world is always adaptable, therefore diverse, it cannot last.

The world has always changed. Because of us, it is changing faster than ever before, and we are beginning to understand that the change we are provoking is harmful ... as many pioneers of nature conservation have already understood, some as early as the nineteenth century.

So we have to change the current change. This is what the "ethical revolution" must be: the development of a vision of the world that proposes a desirable change. Not to draw a frozen state, a freeze frame, even an immutable identity, but to trace a path that makes the various human societies create continuously the most favorable conditions for the material, intellectual, spiritual better-being of each of their members. This will only be possible if local projects are developed in a concern for global solidarity, because the planet and the humanity that inhabits it form a unique ecological system, tracing a single story over time.