

Towards an Ethics of Sustainability: The Embodied Self as a Basis for Environmental Decision-making

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The purpose of this thesis is to develop an alternative to the conception of the Self as *homo oeconomicus* lying at the roots of the dominant economic ideas which are leading to the global environmental crisis. I argue that the (self-)conception of the Self influences decision-making processes about environmental ethical dilemmas in the everyday life. The question is then what conception of the self is more likely to encourage sustainable individual lifestyles. The dominant economic conceptions of the Self as independent and self-interested, and of its environment as objectifiable resources are confronted to intercultural and interdisciplinary perspectives. First, the notion of embodied self in interdependence with its environment and others through empathy-like-intersubjectivity and embodied cognition is explored with the tools of cognitive sciences. Second, the understanding of the self as a performative dialogical construction is shown to be a powerful tool for the development of environmental self-construals and narratives.

Obstacles to the theorization of sustainability are contributing to complexifying environmental individual decision-making. The intrinsic uncertainties, the problem of spatial distance and the problem of temporal distance are weakening the emergence of empathy and dialogue between the agent and the victims (human or/and natural). Based on the works by Watsuji Tetsuro and Augustin Berque, I propose a conception of a relational individual living in a global shared historical milieu which, I argue, can provide solutions to some of these problems. For the relational individual, the self is embodied, relational, situated in a milieu and continuously creating itself. Ethics emergence from the cycles of exchanges between the self and its milieu, as a way to foster adaptability and survival of the human individual and its contribution to the world. Taken as a stage of environmental decision-making, this conception of an embodied and relational Self provides the ground for an Ethics of Sustainability through the recognition by the Self of its essential intrinsic relation with its historical milieu.