

Uncovering the Ethical Foundations of Circular Economy Thinking: A Humanistic Management Perspective

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Abstract

Nothing except nature can transform the world as swiftly as can business - for better or for worse, Amy Larkin has argued. The ecological crisis is also a crisis of the relationship between man and nature, which can be overcome only if businesses operating models are radically rethought. How then? One vision for a more resource-efficient and therefore less wasteful production and consumption systems is the circular economy, a concept that has attracted a great deal of attention for its potential to address current societal grand challenges. Academically, the circular economy has now established itself as a distinctive field of academic enquiry. However, while scholars across the social and natural sciences have approached this subject from different angles including implementation and relationship with sustainable development, its philosophical and ethical underpinnings are yet to be fully explored. Hence, this article draws on the emerging paradigm in business ethics represented by humanistic management as a conceptual framework to advance our understanding of the anthropological and ethical foundations of circular economy thinking. We argue that humanistic management by studying the relational nature of the human being can open the way to an “integral ecology” that share some common features with circular economy approaches to management practices.

In doing so, we aim to make a twofold contribution to the literature at the intersection of humanistic management and the circular economy: first, we aim to extend the scope and applications of the humanistic paradigm to a specific business model, the circular economy, to assess the adaptability of its relational dimension; second, by mapping management practices against humanistic management and circular economy approaches, we aim to provide a deeper characterisation of the circular economy ethical stance.