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# Ecological Ethics as the Basis for the Philosophy of Ecological Upbringing

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## Why is ecological ethics important for pedagogy?

Ecological issues are undoubtedly related to the reflections on global challenges facing not only European contemporary civilisation. Ecological degradation of the planet and growing differences between the rich and the poor are considered globally to be the greatest threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Compromised ecological balance, the escalating natural environmental crisis, the trends of production and consumption promoted worldwide, climate change and many other environmental problems contribute to growing social, ecological and health risks.

Ecological threats also present a pedagogical problem and consequently form an area of pedagogical thought and activity that is becoming

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particularly important. According to Zbigniew Kwieciński, education includes processes such as globalisation, covering the dangers to the environment that are of interest to us or the expiration of the sources of energy<sup>1</sup>.

The formation of new ethics of behaviour towards the environment is the focus of ecological ethics (or ecoethics, environmental ethics); the branch of science that deals with rules and norms of human behaviour towards the natural (biotic and abiotic) environment<sup>2</sup>, as well as the social environment<sup>3</sup>. In turn, environmental ethics outlines the philosophical basis for ecological upbringing, along with a philosophical basis for environmental protection and nature protection.

In terms of the philosophy of upbringing the interpretation of an educational process and its general, global objectives are important. Philosophy therefore brings the importance of educational goals into focus: basic and supreme values and norms. The relationship between upbringing, pedagogy and philosophy is so si-

<sup>1</sup> Kwieciński Z. (1995), *Socjopatologia edukacji*, wyd. 2 popr., Olecko, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Biotic environment is shaped by living organisms (plants and animals) that occur in a given area and function in various interrelationships whereas abiotic (non-living) components of the environment include physiochemical factors (such as water, soil, climate, the lie and rockiness of the land, atmospheric gases, sunlight, winds, humidity, etc.) affecting all organisms.

<sup>3</sup> Dołęga J.M. (2002), *Podstawowe pojęcia w edukacji środowiskowej* [In:] Cichy D. (ed.), *Edukacja środowiskowa. Założenia i rzeczywistość po reformie szkolnej*, No. 31, Warsaw, p. 51.

gnificant that “many philosophers believe that pedagogy is a verifier of their reflections upon human nature”<sup>4</sup>. The important philosophical areas in terms of the theory of ecological upbringing include: axiology indicating values, and ethics, its sub-discipline, philosophical anthropology, searching for the direction of the development of human existence and theology of upbringing, setting educational goals.

Pedagogy features the broadest, narrower and the narrowest understanding of upbringing. Upbringing, in a broad sense, relates to all types of influence on people. These include the influence of family, neighbourhood, peer groups, institutions such as schools and work places, or the mass media. They are meant to lead pupils to full development, protect them against dangers or provide care. However, various influences pose threats in the form of the adaptation of individuals to existing conditions and social requirements, making individuals aware of the forms of behaviour that become a requirement or systematically influencing one’s beliefs. In terms of ecological upbringing, broad influences may come not only from family, school or other formal educational institutions, but also from central offices, local governments, work places, social and ecological organisations, churches and religious institutions, holiday planners, or the mass media<sup>5</sup>.

Upbringing in a narrower sense, which is the understanding of the term assumed here, covers “all the intended influences on the pupil,

<sup>4</sup> Nowak M. (2008), *Teorie i koncepcje wychowania*, Warsaw, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> In accordance with The National Strategy for Environmental Education, extra-school ecological education should include the discussed subjects. Cf. *Through Education towards Sustainable Development* (2001), The National Strategy for Environmental Education, Ministry of the Environment, Warsaw, pp. 16–21.

undertaken for a specific purpose and in a specific situation”<sup>6</sup>.

The term *ecological upbringing* as defined in the *Pedagogical Encyclopaedia of the 21<sup>st</sup> century* means “the formation of moral principles, habits of pro-ecological activity, orientations and feelings influencing people’s behaviour within the environment and towards the environment”<sup>7</sup>. Useful in the process of forming an individual’s attitudes and systems of values, upbringing accelerates and orientates the process of transforming the acquired ecological knowledge into the norms of everyday life.

Education is a superior and broader category in relation to upbringing and training. Interesting ecological education can be understood as emphasising upbringing by experiencing it in relation to nature and the environment. Danuta Cichy believes that ecological education is “the totality of pedagogical activities and processes that orientate people in the surrounding environmental reality and affect their attitude towards the environment”<sup>8</sup>.

Ecophilosophy deals with the essence and nature of the social and natural environment along with the bilateral causal relations between anthroposphere and the environment<sup>9</sup>. The axiological issues in ecophilosophy focus on the value given to the social and natural environment which is treated as the primary value and common good, as well as the value of human health

<sup>6</sup> Nowak M. (2008), op. cit., p. 190.

<sup>7</sup> Albińska E. (2005), *Pedagogika ekologiczna* [In:] Pilch T. (ed.), *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku*, Warsaw, Vol. IV, letter P, p. 132.

<sup>8</sup> Cichy D. (2003), *Edukacja ekologiczna* [In:] Pilch T. (ed.), *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku*, Warsaw, Vol. I, letter A-F, p. 910.

<sup>9</sup> Dołęga J. M. (2002), op. cit., p. 53.

and life, which are considered the highest value, although not the absolute value.

Ecophilosophy includes educational issues, covering the philosophical basis of ecological upbringing, referring them to the formation of the consciousness that is sensitive to the value of the social and natural environment. The formation of ecological awareness in question depends on educational programmes in nursery schools, schools of different levels, including higher education institutes and the permanent ecological education of adults and, in a wider context, it depends on ecological upbringing in the context of family, school, mass media, religions, social organisations, etc.

### **Selected ecological ethics and their consequences for upbringing**

Ecological ethics is subject to continuous development, with new orientations related to philosophical movements and different philosophies of life coming into existence. Some scholars oppose the creation of general divisions among ecoethics; however, these divisions are often sustained<sup>10</sup>.

Within environmental (ecological ethics) Piotr Skubała distinguishes anthropocentric ethics, non-anthropocentric ethics (ecologism) and intermediary ethics<sup>11</sup>. Anthropocentric ethics is based on ancient Christian foundations and a famous statement from *The Book of Genesis*: "Then God said, «Let us make humankind in our

<sup>10</sup> Dołęga J.M. enlists basic orientations within ecological ethics, namely: holistic variation of environmental ethics, biocentric environmental ethics, anthropocentric variation of environmental ethics, animal protection ethics. Cf. Dołęga J.M. (2002), op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> Skubała P. (1999), *Przyroda i etyka*, „Problemy środowiska i jego ochrony”, No. 7, p. 125–154.

image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth»<sup>12</sup>. According to the principles of anthropocentric ecological ethics, moral relations concern only humankind. Therefore, extermination of pests or collecting plants and animals are not subject to moral evaluation.

Non-anthropocentric environmental ethics (ecologism) is based on the principle of the equality of human and non-human beings, or animate and inanimate beings in some views. It has difficulty proving some of its theses. Questions occur: What or who can be the subject of ethics? Can it be of an inanimate nature? Stones? The cosmos? Its supporters offer different answers, in general, however, there is an agreement that a being of any kind (a plant, an animal) has its 'intrinsic goals' and has the same right to pursue them as a human.

Intermediary ethics (in P. Skubała's classification) finds its reflection in the views of Henryk Skolimowski. The representative of ecophilosophy whilst treating a human as the most important being, also refers to contemplative ideas of Eastern philosophy and advocates a pious and deeply reflective approach to the Cosmos as the parent of humankind. Ecological humanism, advocated by H. Skolimowski, is a reverent approach: full of fondness, reverence, esteem, respect for the world and empathy.

Within anthropocentrism one can distinguish a conservative approach and sustainable development. Environmental conservatives aspire

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 1:26, *The Bible: New Revised Standard Version*.

to create various forms of protected areas so as to preserve areas and lands that are valuable in terms of biodiversity; these activities, however important, cannot counteract the degradation of nature and do not ensure the protection of the integrity of nature. The extension of ecological anthropocentric ethics is the idea of sustainable development. Sustainable development is economic development based on the principle of the harmonious use and preservation of natural resources for future generations; "it is development seen integrally in an ecological, cultural (social) and economic sense"<sup>13</sup>. According to its principles, nature can be exploited and polluted to the extent allowed by its productive and self-regenerative abilities.

Non-anthropocentric ethics (ecologism), in the form of biocentrism and ecocentrism, develops extensively as deep ecology, according to which "the development of human and non-human life on Earth has an intrinsic value, regardless of the utility of non-human forms of life to humankind"<sup>14</sup>.

Biocentrism assumes the non-instrumental evaluation of nature and sees the inherent worth in all living beings. Humankind and all species of animals and plants living in natural ecosystems have inherent worth because of what they are. "Every living being is the subject of life that can be better or worse and, by living a life that is true to its nature, it fulfills its own good"<sup>15</sup>.

In the world of ecocentrism, the value of whole ecosystems<sup>16</sup>, which are animate and inanimate nature in the area, is more important than the value of specific species, including humankind.

Leading representatives of deep ecology Arne Naess and George Sessions formulated basic principles of deep ecology. They believe that the development of human and non-human life on the Earth has intrinsic worth and the diversity of life forms contributes to the realization of this worth. At the same time humans have no right to restrict this wealth, except in order to fulfil their basic human needs. Consequently "the development of non-human forms of life requires the inhibition of the growth of the human population"<sup>17</sup>. This intention to limit the growth of material standards of life to improve its quality finds its manifestation in a mystic attitude of humans towards the world of nature, proposed by Naess (e.g. searching for experiences based on the primary intuition of the cosmic Self, allowing the experience of unity of man and nature). The views of the Norwegian philosopher, the creator of ecosophy T, in spite of the radical anti-anthropocentrism that he advocated, are often perceived as anthropocentric because of his ultimate orientation towards the welfare of humankind<sup>18</sup>.

A professor at Charles University in Prague, Erazim Kohák, created the contemporary concept

<sup>13</sup> Kozłowski S. (2005), *Przyszłość ekorozwoju*, Lublin, p. 49.

<sup>14</sup> Devall B., Sessions G. (1985), *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, Inc, p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> Piątek Z. (2008), *Ekofilozofia*, Kraków, p. 137.

<sup>16</sup> Ecosystem is a stabilized system of non-living, or abiotic, components of the environment and living organisms (animals and plants) interacting with each other; the examples include a forest, a pond, a meadow.

<sup>17</sup> Devall B., Sessions G. (1985), op. cit., p. 99–103.

<sup>18</sup> Fiut I.S. (1999), *Ekoetyki. Kierunki rozwoju aksjologii współczesnej przyjaznej środowisku*, Wyd. 2, Kraków, p. 60.

of ecophilosophy as moral ecology<sup>19</sup>. Kohák's work is often defined as ecological agathology (the science of the moral good) reflected in the care for the life of not only humans but also other valuable beings and the entire existence. Inspired by Christianity and phenomenology, Kohák believes that, by renewing his attitude towards Transcendence, a man stops being the master and manipulator of nature and becomes its partner and guardian instead, enchanted by its beauty and order. He believes that the values of 'good' and 'evil', regarded by men as human attributes, have universal value, hence respect for the non-human world follows from its inherent worth, not given to it by men. Acknowledging the values of protective ecology (he mentions here J. J. Rousseau, W. Emerson, A. Leopold and others) and deep ecology (A. Naess and radical representatives – B. Dewall, G. Sessions) Kohák searches for another ways of reference of man to nature – namely, an agathocentric metaphor<sup>20</sup>. In this approach, mankind can do good, decrease suffering and take responsibility for the impact on the condition of the Earth of activities undertaken locally. The Czech philosopher refers to Tom Regan, Holmes Rolston III and Paul W. Taylor, drawing attention to the fact that all living beings (not only humans) are able to value, and take care of, its own well-being, depending on species. In turn, a being that is capable of value is a value in itself. The primary value is the will to live

<sup>19</sup> Plašienková Z. (2003), *Ekofilozofia jako ekologia moralna albo ku jeszcze jednej koncepcji ekofilozoficznej (Myśl ekofilozoficzna Erazima Koháka)* [In:] Abdak-Kozubski A., Czartoszewski J.W. (ed.), *Humanistyczny profil ochrony środowiska*, Warsaw, p. 105–116.

<sup>20</sup> Kohák distinguishes three contemporary ecological metaphors: anthropocentric, biocentric and agathological (with his thought grounded in the last one).

that is expressed by all living beings, therefore the life of all organisms has intrinsic worth, which is not granted by humankind and which requires respect on the part of humankind<sup>21</sup>.

Which of the presented current of ecological theories may be particularly useful in terms of education? Which ecological ethics leads to specific educational concepts? Which environmental ethics can provide grounds for the philosophy of ecological upbringing of children and young people? On what basis can ecoethics be promoted as an adequate axiological orientation in the process of ecological education? What can be achieved in the process of education? Should we base it on specific environmental ethics? What benefits for the process of ecological upbringing follow from choosing given ecoethics as the philosophical basis of that upbringing? What is the contribution of this kind of ethics to pedagogy? These and similar questions arise after some reflection and it is not possible to offer a simple and unequivocal answer.

Ecological education (especially formal education), and upbringing by analogy, addresses issues concerning the protection of natural resources, the limitation of the emission of pollutants, the reasonable use of non-renewable resources and the minimisation of their exploitation, the use of alternative sources of energy, the introduction of recycling, the creation of protected areas and the protection of animal and plant species, legislation changes. This practice is most frequently found in education that is based on anthropocentric environmental ethics (sustainable development, conservatism) as well as in education inspired by biocentrism.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 115.



It is frequently assumed that the principle of sustainable development, so important in ecological education or education for eco-development, is an exemplification of anthropocentric thought, and therefore stands in opposition to biocentrically oriented environmental ethics. Indeed, sustainable development is oriented towards the wellbeing of mankind (including future generations) and humankind is its main point of reference. However, axiological anthropocentrism in a moderate version, distinguished by Andrzej Papuziński, assumes that if human needs are to be fulfilled, it is necessary to sustain a dynamic balance in nature, which in turn can be achieved through the harmonious co-operation of humankind with the processes of evolution on Earth, and through efforts to sustain biodiversity<sup>22</sup>. Allowing for such regularities, there is no conflict between anthropocentric and biocentric variants of ecoethics, with both movements able to form the basis for the philosophy of ecological upbringing.

Although supporters of deep ecology do not negate the need for temporary activities designed to protect nature and the environment, though they see them as the actions of 'shallow' ecology, as they contemptuously call it, their hope is in the changes taking place at the level of human consciousness. However, the postulates concerning the change of ecological awareness within society and the creation of ecological culture or the change of habits and consumer attitudes to ecological products and preferences are also present in anthropocentric ecological

upbringing and even more so in that which is oriented towards biocentrism.

It would seem that deep ecology cannot provide a philosophical basis for ecological upbringing due to its radicalism (the proposal concerning inhibiting the growth of human population), its condemnation of technology, radical antianthropocentrism, and the lack of relevance to contemporary everyday life. As ecological thought, it is excessively subjective and not sufficiently realistic; the present situation, as far as technological development is concerned, is irreversible and a return to a life that is close to nature on a global scale would be hard to envision; one cannot be so united (close) with nature as to 'think like a mountain'.

Perhaps this assessment stems from the difficulty in distancing oneself from anthropocentric perception of nature (naturally with the exclusion of homocentrism, arrogant anthropocentrism, radical axiological anthropocentrism and any of its forms that treat nature instrumentally); after all, we live in the anthropocentric Western philosophical tradition that remains under the influence of Christianity and not Eastern religions. Leszek Kołakowski claims that a non-anthropocentric approach to nature is fake; he is convinced that "it would be difficult to justify an absolute imperative to respect nature for itself" although "there is nothing wrong [...] with this respect" and "it would seem that thanks to it we also acquire a better understanding of our own humanity"<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Papuziński A. (ed.) (1999), *Wprowadzenie do filozoficznych problemów ekologii*, Bydgoszcz, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Kołakowski L. (1999), *Mini-wykłady o maxi-sprawach*, Kraków, p. 17–19.

### **“Philosophy that became law” exemplified by the idea of sustainable development**

The idea of sustainable development that is both a thought and an ecophilosophical movement concerns itself deeply with fundamental human issues: philosophy, politics and the economy. The changes taking place in the 1970s, characterised by a change in thinking about the natural environment and its resources, led to the implementation of its ideas in the legal systems of different countries and international organisations. Along with the processes of creating environmental protection and nature protection laws, their implementation and execution, a new ecological legislation emerged. General debates of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly in 1968, the Stockholm Conference (1972), the works of the Brundtland Commission and *Our Common Future* report (1987), the conference in Rio de Janeiro (1992), the conference in Johannesburg (Rio + 10 – 2002), the UN and ENESCO Decade of Education for Sustainable Development for the years 2005–2014 were all the manifestation of international law addressing the issues of environmental protection and the principles of sustainable development. During the summit in Rio de Janeiro, 178 states indicated a necessity to undertake sustainable development. The importance of sustainable development is emphasised by international regulations, the Law of the European Union, Polish national law, the Law of the Czech Republic and the Law of the Federal Republic of Germany<sup>24</sup>. The political principle of the EU and

its member states is a sustainable economic development without compromising the natural environment.

In Poland, the principle of sustainable development has been introduced as a method of the development of state, society and economy. References to sustainable development can be found in *The Constitution of the Republic of Poland* from 1997 and in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> *National Environmental Policy*. In accordance with *The Constitution of The Republic of Poland*, public authorities shall pursue policies ensuring the ecological security of current and future generations, inform the society of the state of the environment and support the activities of citizens to protect and improve the condition of the environment<sup>25</sup>.

In accordance with the law of the Czech Republic, the state shall concern itself with the prudent use of its natural resources<sup>26</sup>, because every citizen has the right to a favourable natural environment and complete information about the state of the environment. The main principles of the Czech environmental law can be found in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms, which prohibits, in exercising one's rights, one to endanger or cause damage to the environment, natural resources or the wealth of natural species, beyond the extent designated by the law<sup>27</sup>.

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*u progu trzeciego tysiąclecia. Zagrożenia i wyzwania*, Elbląg, vol. III, p. 84–89.

<sup>25</sup> Art. 74 The Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997 (Dz.U. No. 78, item 483).

<sup>26</sup> Art. 7 The Constitution of the Czech Republic of 16 December 1992.

<sup>27</sup> Art. 35 Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms – Resolution of the Presidium of the Czech National Council of 16 December 1992 as a part of the constitutional order of the Czech Republic.

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<sup>24</sup> Bojar-Fijałkowski T., Plopa W. (2009), *Zrównoważony rozwój – filozofia, która stała się prawem* [In:] Plopa M. (ed.), *Człowiek*



Cultural and environmental heritage are significant factors forming our national identity. Nevertheless, institutional solutions applied to this matter will not be enough; it is necessary to create new ethics of behaviour towards the environment, form ecological awareness and ecological culture, and choose a way of life (consumption) which would comprise the principles of self-restraint and moderation, with nature taken for granted. ■

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### Ecological Ethics as the Basis for the Philosophy of Ecological Upbringing

#### Abstract

The article seeks to answer the question which trends of ecological thinking may be particularly useful in terms of education? The paper presents a review of selected positions anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric (ecologism) within ecological ethics, and considered that environmental ethics can be the basis for the philosophy of ecological upbringing. Also raised the issue of sustainable development in the aspects of philosophical, social, as well as legal regulations referring to the international law of the European Communities, the Polish national law and the law of the Czech Republic.

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