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Environmental ethics in Poland

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Environmental Ethics in Poland

The last dozen or so years following the collapse of communism have to a great extent made Polish people more sensitive to matters relating to environmental protection. The commonly observed resistance to actions undermining the sense of security within the nation in this respect does not however derive directly from changing life conditions but mainly results from a purposeful education and prophylaxis rendered by the many who are concerned about the direction in which our country has been developing. The efforts put forth by representatives of humanities and biological sciences who univocally presented their opinions greatly contributed to building the environmental awareness within the society. This collaboration would never have taken place if it had not been for Poland's recognized philosophers, especially those representing various trends in ethics, who became involved in the process. No wonder it was the ethics that gave solid grounds to the first concepts combining the achievements of particular sciences with human drive for secure life in the surrounding environment. The discussion on environmental ethics consequently could begin no sooner than in the turbulent period of transformations in the social and political systems that marked late eighties and early nineties. In an attempt to evaluate the past epoch's socialist industrialization, a stress was put on the relationship between man and environment that was lacking any normative regulations. As the result of such negligence on the part of politicians and economists more than 11% of Polish territory had to be identified as environmentally endangered areas [1]. Debates held at the time also touched upon a certain inertia of Polish ethics, which failed to notice the existing threats. Accordingly, the first attempts to develop Polish environmental ethics made direct reference to studies made in the West. This specifically applied to ethics of English and German origin.

The stance of Polish first philosophers with regard to dangers resulting from degraded environment can be presented as follows:

1. "There are no grounds for man to oppose Nature.
2. Focus on protection of life in every respect must be moral, not limited merely to protection of plants and animals surrounding man.

3. The world of living creatures requires dynamic rather than static approach with emphasis put on development, whereas in case of man – on developmental motivation”[2].

Geopolitical location of Poland has always favored strong influence of German philosophy, which is a reflection of hundreds of years of scientific relationships between the two nations. On the other hand, mainly due to Polish scholars abroad, ideas propagated in the USA and in the U.K. have also exerted their influence on Polish ethics. Still present today, they resulted in dual approach toward moral considerations relating to the environmental crisis that Poland is currently undergoing.

Those two different sources of influence have entailed a certain discrepancy in approach that ethics representatives show in their attempts to identify the limits of moral regulations, which ought to define human relationship toward the environment. Opinions are encountered whereby these regulations are derivatives of moral evolution, and hence are compliant with the interest of life and, consequently, our species at large. They do reflect certain objective conditions under which the evolution has been taking place in both its biological and cultural aspects. This is an optimistic approach, which assumes that the existing trends within ecology anticipate but an improvement. Influenced by concepts of German philosophers a competitive approach was formulated, this time derived from pessimistic predictions as to human ability to willfully take the path of ecodevelopment. It is characterized by a conviction that “main principles of environmental ethics should become a law, and the execution thereof should be subject to sanctions”[3]. Both the standpoints, competitive as they may be, are a derivative of the situation our civilization has found itself in. Julian Aleksandrowicz, a prominent Polish humanist described it figuratively by saying that our species is unable to avoid a catastrophe of cosmic [global] scale but has already developed a means to cause one. Such a situation entails uncertainty and ever growing concerns about the future of humanity. We are then aware of the potential influence and its scope of the polluted environment on our health and life but we cannot predict the consequences of our actions toward the environment. Environmental threats do not respect the limits set by man, they are therefore global in nature. Environmental ethics by the same token needs to show such global character.

The two sources of influence on the ethics approach toward the threats resulting from degraded environment have also caused discrepancies in terminology used by their respective promoters. German influence resulted in announcing the birth of new discipline of ethics: ecoethics. Representatives of this trend have adopted the new term by analogy to ecophilosophy. Anglo-American influence on the other hand provided Polish ethics with the subject of the study, and, consequently, the terminology that is now used in environmental ethics.

Environmental Ethics in Poland

The first attempt to develop a concept of environmental ethics comes from representatives of Christian philosophy. As early as in 1983 Rev. Jan Grzesica published a pioneer work *Ochrona naturalnego środowiska człowieka – problem teologiczno-moralny* [Protection of Human Environment – a Theological and Moral Problem]. One of its chapters *Ochrona etyczna środowiska naturalnego* [Ethical Protection of Environment] presents an attempt to develop the environmental ethics concept that seeks theological grounds for pro-environmental valuation of reality[4]. Following the same path Rev. Julisław Lukomski, who in his book *Próba zbudowania chrześcijańskiej etyki środowiska naturalnego* [An Attempt to Build Christian Environmental Ethics] made an assessment of scientific reflection on the relationship between man and the environment, and offered an original concept of such ethics that combined scientific knowledge with Christian doctrines [5]. A feature that both these works share is an attempt to build an anthropocentric environmental ethics that would combine a distinguished position of man in Nature with the principle of respecting the environment. It is particularly apparent in an attempt to develop the assumptions of human ecology.

Environmental ethics is a relatively new discipline in Poland. As noted by Zdzisława Piątek, whose stance is representative for Polish environmental ethicists, its rise “was stimulated by two factors. The first and, as it seems, the most important factor is that the mounting environmental crisis has eventually been recognized. The other factor is an extremely rapid development of biological sciences, and particularly that of theory of evolution, ethology and ecology.” Its rise is then an answer that ethical theory provides to challenges of the present. Environmental ethics thus understood does not ruin the ethics proper – it broadens limits of morality so as to include the relationships connecting man with Nature. “To fulfill this task the ethical theory aspiring to the environmental ethics should:

1. formulate norms defining human behavior toward non-human creatures and justify the moral status they should receive;
2. define what is good and what is wrong in our actions with regard to the environment;
3. motivate people to do what they recognize as good, and to avoid doing what is evil”[6].

Environmental ethics thus understood makes the basis for theoretical reflection on which it interweaves with projections and planning of pro-environmental actions as well as their execution. This latter objective refers to what is the single most essential part in humanities – changes within human awareness. The ethics can fulfill this task only through properly oriented education

for one of the fundamental values that the ethics propagates is restraint, which when referred to man, constitutes a postulate of sensible and justifiable ability to use natural resources. It does not require any resources, nor vast structures. What it takes is a certain degree of good will and disinterestedness. We know that the principles of anthroposphere man created are local by nature and binding only for so long as they are in line with the laws by which the entire biosphere is governed. It is natural that we protect what we perceive as insufficient or impermanent in anthroposphere. This being the case, it is easy to understand why the theses of the many environmental movements that call for extending the morals onto the *non-human* sphere focus in the first place on species threatened with extinction.

What is typical of the reflections on environmental ethics offered by Polish thinkers is that they distinguish numerous standpoints invariably associating them with their originators. Such approach has been adopted by Polish philosopher Mark Bonenberg of Cracow who in his book *Etyka srodowiskowa [Environmental Ethics]* listed as many as nine trends related to specific individuals. According to Bonenberg basically each ethics is environmental for it endows selected impersonal beings with moral meaning [7]. In his book he highlights differences between the concepts formulated by their authors. The trends in environmental ethics are presented in the following order:

1. concept of “extending morals onto impersonal beings” by Tom Regan;
2. “individualistic environmental ethics” by Robin Attfield;
3. “theory of respect for Nature” by Paul Taylor;
4. Aldo Leopold’s concept presented in his famous book *The Land Ethic*.

Within the framework of this concept the author also renders J. Baird Callicott’s concept;

5. “Deep ecology” by Arne Naess;
6. ecocentric theory by Holmes Rolston III;
7. Gai concept developed by James Lovelock;
8. “Ethics of biosphere” formulated by Edward Goldsmith;
9. Ecoethics system by Henryk Skolimowski.

Even though Bonenberg’s book did not contribute to commencing any discussion on moral aspects of environmental protection in Poland but it presented the status of such discussions elsewhere. The foregoing typology was also quoted in other numerous Polish publications dealing with ecology and ecophilosophy [8]. At the same time it became evident that the achievements of our philosophers and ethicists in this field are extremely limited.

Zdzislawa Piatek in her book *Etyka srodowiskowa [Environmental Ethics]*, a widely recognized manual, made an in-depth analysis and assessment of some of the aforementioned concepts. She also critically reviewed other concepts of environmental ethics that were less commonly known in Poland. She especially focused on four approaches of the environmental ethics. They are, in order

proposed by the authoress: ethics of communities - otherwise known as holistic environmental ethics, biocentrism, ethics of animal protection formulated by Peter Singer, and “anthropocentric variation of environmental ethics” in which a fundamental value, the value *per se*, is human life”[9].

The last trend reviewed by Zdzisława Piatek is John Passmore’s anthropocentric variation of environmental ethics in which the highest value is human life, and any obligations of man to Nature arise from his obligations to himself and to future generations. This trend is relatively unknown in Poland, and its fundamental assumption is that any problems of moral nature relating to environmental protection are solvable on the grounds of traditional ethics. There is no need then to develop a separate field of environmental ethics for all of its aspects have already been covered by ethics proper. Having reviewed the concepts Zdzisława Piatek presented in her book one can notice that the concepts once defined by their respective authors have now been categorized according to their respective subjects.

One more proposal of typology of the environmental ethics is offered by Włodzimierz Tyburski. His categorization is based on the belief that “the primary objective of environmental ethics is to protect Nature from human aggression and acts of destruction on the one hand, and on the other to save man, both as an individual and as entire species, from the environmental threats man causes himself.” Inclusion of man in the regulations set forth by such ethics derives from author’s belief that “the basic thesis of environmental ethics is that living creatures have the right to life and the protection thereof”[10]. In compliance with these assumptions the author distinguishes only three types of such ethics: anthropocentric (homocentric); biocentric and holistic. This is a subject-oriented typology and it addresses exclusively that area of reality, which is governed by morals.

The works of Zdzisława Piatek and Włodzimierz Tyburski still deserve a special attention for, in addition to the ideas of other established thinkers, they present their own concepts of the environmental ethics.

Ecoethics

The latter trend of ethical reflection referring to German philosophy came to Poland slightly later with an article by Joanna Pawłowska published in 1993 *Sporne problemy etyki ekologicznej* [Debatable Problems in Environmental Ethics] [11]. Polish theoretical ruminations on environmental problems came late not only when compared with works of English origin but were also preceded by our country’s nearest neighbor. In her article Pawłowska presents the typologies of ecoethics that refer to the set of moral principles proposed therein. As a basis for this typology she took the scope of reality which is covered by obligations of

moral nature. That type of classification was first offered by a German philosopher Gotthard M. Teutsch, who introduced it in *Lexikon der Umweltethik* issued in 1995 [12].

1. Egocentric ethics – in which what matters is the good of a distinguished entity or a group, not the good of entire humanity;
2. Anthropocentric ethics – which takes into consideration only human good, where man is given a distinct position within Nature. Such ethics is defined through the rights of evolution that favor dominating or best adapted organisms or, alternatively, through man's superiority over all other beings resulting from religious assumptions or from man's ability to think. Other beings can only be given a moral status if they are of importance to man;
3. Pathocentric ethics – all creatures capable of suffering or experiencing pain deserve moral protection;
4. Biocentric ethics – whatever lives deserves protection. Such concepts usually perceive life as a self-contained value. Albert Schweitzer is regarded one of originators of such ethics;
5. Holistic ethics – demands that people have moral obligation to all life forms, as well as all other natural objects[13].

Fringing upon both the aforementioned trends is an attempt by Ignacy Fiut, a Cracow's philosopher, to systematize trends of ethical reflections on environment. In his work entitled *Ecoetyki* [Ecoethics] Fiut made an interesting attempt to classify all concepts hitherto developed on the grounds of environmental ethics, ecoethics, bioethics and even ecophilosophy according to a uniform pattern that takes into account historical data and variation between subjects. Starting from the thoughts of Albert Schweitzer, Konrad Lorenz, the above-mentioned Julian Aleksandrowicz and Van Rensselaer Potter who are regarded the initiators of philosophical reflection on environment, Fiut lists variants of "ecoethics proper", the concepts with their respective originators once presented to Polish philosophers by Zdzisława Piątek and Mark Bonenberg. From those concepts he then moves on to the trends that respect moral obligations of man toward animals. His systematization ends in ecophilosophical concepts formulated among others by Henryk Skolimowski or Hans Jonas, which Fiut perceives as those continuing and complementing the theses formerly presented on the grounds of ecoethics [14].

Environmental ethics has gained extensive body of literature and has made its way to the world of science in Poland. One of the ways to facilitate it were scientific conferences on the subject first started in 1989 by II Jagiellonskie Sympozja Etyczne [2nd Jagiellonian Symposia on Ethics]. Their topic *Aksjologiczne i etyczne aspekty współczesnej ekologii* [Axiological and Ethical Aspects of Contemporary Ecology] provided inspiration for further activities undertaken in that field [15]. In 1993 Jan Debowski started annual Olsztynskie Sympozja Ekologiczne [Environmental Symposia in Olsztyn, Poland], which gained interest in the scientific circle as

well as attracted numerous supporters to environmental ethics. During VI Polski Zjazd Filozoficzny [6th Polish Philosophical Conference] held in Torun, Poland the meetings also took place at Bioethics and Ecophilosophy Department where lectures on environmental ethics played a prominent role. Since that same year the annual conferences dealing with interdisciplinary approach toward environmental protection organized by Włodzimierz Tyburski in Torun have also become a tradition. In 1998 Torun hosted a conference under the title of *Etyka środowiskowa. Teoretyczne i praktyczne implikacje* [Environmental Ethics. Theoretical and Practical Implications], attended by representatives from majority of academic centers all over Poland [16]. Similar conferences were also organized at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński Catholic University in Warsaw.

The above-mentioned examples of concepts clearly indicate that environmental ethics in Poland has already become a greatly advanced discipline, and it may serve as grounds for considerations on general trends in development of culture and science. Another example of a good condition of this discipline in Poland is a book by the author of the present article recently published under the title *Etyka środowiskowa wobec biotechnologii* [Environmental Ethics and Biotechnology] [17]. Undoubtedly, despite attempts made by representatives of bioethics who claim ownership of this discipline, one should expect that the interest in environmental ethics will constantly grow, which is the consequence of increased sensibility of communities to threats from the environment whose immediate cause is human activity, and which are difficult to grasp within the limits of traditional ethics.

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STRESZCZENIE

Prezentowany artykuł jest próbą oceny stanu etyki środowiskowej w Polsce. Zdaniem autora dyskusję na temat etyki środowiskowej w Polsce zapoczątkowano dopiero w burzliwym okresie transformacji społeczno-ustrojowej, jaka miała miejsce na przełomie lat osiemdziesiątych i dziewięćdziesiątych. W toczących się wówczas dyskusjach wskazywano też na swoistą inercję etyki polskiej, która wcześniej nie dostrzegała istniejących zagrożeń. Taka sytuacja spowodowała, iż pierwsze próby opracowania koncepcji rodzimej etyki środowiskowej nawiązywały wprost do opracowań, jakie powstały na Zachodzie. Autor wskazuje zwłaszcza na wpływy etyki anglosaskiej i niemieckiej.

Pierwszą próbę sformowania koncepcji etyki środowiska naturalnego podjęli przedstawiciele filozofii chrześcijańskiej. Cechą charakterystyczną dla refleksji nad etyką środowiskową w Polsce jest wyróżnieniem wielu stanowisk poznawczych, które wywodzone są z reguły od nazwiska ich twórców.

Etyka środowiskowa w Polsce mimo stosunkowo krótkiej historii zdążyła doczekać się rozbudowanego piśmiennictwa oraz ugruntowanej pozycji w życiu naukowym. Zyskuje także coraz więcej zwolenników czego dowodem są cykliczne konferencje naukowe organizowane przez różne ośrodki akademickie w Polsce.