

DONOR-RECIPIENT IN THE HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP. EDUCATIONAL ASPECT

Marcin KLIMSKI

Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego w Warszawie; m.klimski@uksw.edu.pl,
ORCID: 0000-0002-9118-1673

Abstract: The 20th century is still a time of intensive promoting the sustainable development concepts, the assumptions of environmental ethics and curricula for ecological education in Poland. The already observed problem of natural resources and their initial shortage combined with the ongoing increase of human life's needs not only inclines us to reflections, but also extorts us to undertake radical actions. Human being with his rationality and freedom places himself and his personal good above any other existence, which makes him believe he is the moderator or even the nature's ruler.

Human activity, his strive for quick implementation of ideas and pursuing material comfort – by developing new technologies – diminishes natural resources, interferes in the environment, as well as threatens the existence of many species. Nature – the giver – tries to resist peoples' irresponsible actions, while the taker – human being – without any awareness of the consequences, significantly overuses the environmental components. The result of the conflict is the environmental crisis manifesting itself in mutually excluding both parties' interests. The extremely anthropocentric point of view presumes unidirectional relations between human being and nature. A breakthrough, realized by alteration of the human value – system that would include unanimous relations with nature, is inevitable in order to prevent the irreversible changes.

Keywords: ecological education, environmental ethics, ecological crisis.

1. Introduction

The 21st century is a time of intensive promotion in Poland of the idea of sustainable development, environmental ethics, environmental education programs and problems faced by global education. The problem of the limited resources of the natural environment and their initial deficit, noticed earlier, with the continuous increase of people's needs, not only provokes reflection, but forces radical actions. Otherwise, unilateral actions of the human subject, often focused on the consumption dimension, will prove fatal to all components of the natural and social environment. The need for taking into account global problems related to the

relationship between man and the environment becomes necessary in order to counteract the effects of the ecological crisis. Undertaking remedial concerns not only the practical sphere, e.g. new technologies, but also requires taking them into account in the humanities. Therefore, contemporary discussion on the relationship of man to the world of nature needs relevant argumentation to help in protective measures. The quality of the environment in which man lives and realizes himself also depends on the state of his awareness of global problems. Whether a person is aware of the threats that result from their one-way activities is related to, among others properly implemented environmental education.

2. Relationship of man and the world of nature

Man, because of his rationality and freedom, places himself, his personal good above the good of other beings. Because of this he feels a moderator and even the master of nature. Implementing activities, the man quickly implements its ideas into practice, while at the same time striving for comfort, e.g. developing new technologies, depletes resources and transforms the environment threatening the existence of many species. The donor-nature – as much as he can, resists irresponsible human actions. A recipient-human – significantly misuses the components of the environment without being aware of the growing consequences. The result of this conflict is an environmental crisis manifested in the exclusion of the interests of both parties. An extremely anthropocentric point of view presupposes a one-way relationship between man and nature. In order to avoid irreversible changes, there must be a breakthrough – a change in the human value system that takes into account compatible relationships with nature.

In the broadest sense, the term donor refers to the one from whom we receive something. It is the entity from which some goods are obtained. The recipient is the one who uses this good, in a specific relationship. A relationship is understood as relations or dependencies occurring or arising between people, communities. Each relationship or bond taking place inside a being, as well as bonding two separate beings, is called a relationship. A relationship is an affliction subjected to two entities simultaneously. It is not an independent entity itself, but it can combine independent and dependent entities, ensuring the impact of one on the other. In the structure of the relationship there exists a being that initiates the relation called the subject of the relationship and the being who receives the impact of the subject in this relationship, i.e. the end of the relationship. The subject is active and the effects that it causes are transferred through relationships to an end. And the relationship itself is filled with what (content) the subject wants to convey or what to connect with the term for longer (Gogacz, 2008). In the division of relationships, there are, among others, the existence personal relationships and the existence non-personal relationships. The first are two-way relationships, or rather two parallel

relationships. This means that in the structure of this relationship there is a person who is the subject of the relationship and the person who is its end, and at the same time the opposite happens. The end is the subject that directs the content of the relationship to its end, which was originally the subject of this personal relationship. Existence non-personal relationships are unidirectional because they cannot be reciprocated by the entity that is the end of this relationship. For example, unidirectionality occurs in the lowest level of love, which is the relationship of kindness. If it is directed at plants, it will not be reciprocated by them. The same happens with products. Both plants and products coexist only with personal beings, and their nature does not allow a relationship of kindness. Between non-personal beings and products there is only a meeting that does not have the rank of presence (Gogacz, 2008).

If nature can only be a limit in the relationship with man, it results from the fact that the subject of this relationship - man initiates it and provides it content. Man's conviction of his superiority over impersonal beings is the result of adopting the position that nature was created or evolved to serve man. The uniqueness of personal beings often identified with rational beings was already emphasized in ancient philosophers. Aristotle was the one who was the first to evaluate living entities through their general analysis and life functions. He considered the soul to be a principle of life with the ability to direct and regulate the activities of entities. On this basis, he distinguished the vegetative, sensual and intelligent soul. Plants have only a vegetative soul, which is the most basic principle of life that allows birth, nutrition and growth. Animals also have a sensual soul, in addition to the vegetative soul, that directs the functions of perception, desire and movement. Man is distinguished by the fact that he has not only a vegetative and sensual soul, but also a rational one. The superiority of the human being over impersonal beings is manifested in the ability to learn, reflect and choose through the intellect which "comes from the outside" and is divine (Reale, 1996). Similarly, in Plotinus' science regarding hypostases, one can find confirmation of the significant position of man among other entities. By showing the infinity and transcendence of One, the philosopher pointed to the cause of existence and the hierarchy of other beings. All beings are thanks to unity, but those less perfect have a weaker one, and the existing ones retain more unity marked by multiplicity. In the Plotinus system, the world was the emanation of individual beings, and the being was more perfect the more creative it was (Reale, 1999). In the Middle Ages Saint Thomas Aquinas talked about the hierarchy of beings, but not in the sense that more perfect give birth to less perfect, as in Plotinus. However, in the meaning of comparing beings in terms of their perfection, one can speak of a hierarchy. Saint Thomas also placed man as a rational being above animals and plants. As Z. Piątek noticed, the hierarchy of beings affects the attribution of values to its individual levels today. This results in the conviction that every entity lower in the hierarchy has a lower value than the entity higher in the hierarchy. As a consequence, this means that a higher level entity can dominate lower level entities (Piątek, 1998).

3. Environmental ethics and the ecological crisis

Human conviction about his superiority over the natural environment and excessive exploitation of natural resources resulted in imbalance in the biosphere. The beginnings of the ecological crisis, which today has become the subject of numerous discussions and debates in international arenas were noticed in the mid-20th century. The reason for this phenomenon was the quite strong industrialization of developing countries, which mainly resulted in its expansion or interference in the natural world. The numerous actions that man carried out in the environment to draw on his resources have become a reason to strongly signal that the unidirectionality of human proceedings has its limits. Among the main reasons that initiated the phenomenon of the ecological crisis there are, among others, of course: depletion of natural resources, increase in consumerism, the emergence and rapid spread of civilization diseases, uneven population. Initially, the phenomenon of the ecological crisis was recorded locally. Its effects did not have a strong impact on the activity zone of the biotic and abiotic environment. The sudden globalization of life at the social, political or economic level began to result in a widespread disturbance of harmony. Z. Hull points out that the current ecological crisis is a global, total and social crisis. Its global aspect refers to the fact that the crisis reaches the biosphere in general, and not just some ecosystems. What is more, environmental problems are of a cross-border nature and are linked to other global difficulties. The total form of ecocrises results in the fact of its presence in the life of a particular person. It occurs in the consumption and processing, formulation of the life of the general public, leisure and politics. The social manifestation of the ecological crisis is reflected in the fact that the feeling of threats by the general public imposes a kind of change in man's coexistence with the environment. A new form of human relations with the natural world is postulated here (Hull, 1999).

The problem observed for a long time associated with the occurrence of quite sudden changes in the socio-natural environment prompts an increasing number of people to reflect on their inhibition. The changes that human beings begin to notice in the natural environment are largely due to their impact. There is a problem here, how should man's behavior towards nature be oriented, and thus what should man's relationship with the natural environment look like? Natural science, as well as thought focused on ecological issues help answer the question. Humanities quite strongly shape pro-ecological awareness and attitudes and allow them to be justified. Such justification is made on the basis of ethical considerations, because this discipline allows to refer to the axiological dimension (Tyburski, 2001). Environmental ethics plays a key role in issues related to the natural environment, its protection and human impact. The subject of its research was outlined at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. The beginnings of the idea of environmental ethics go back earlier and are a response to violations that have occurred and are currently taking place in the natural environment and to their effects. The consequences of such changes have caused that environmental ethics became an alternative

to a definite change in human relations with his environment. In ethics, an important role can be found in moral values and norms that allow for proper human interaction with the natural world. It calls for the expansion of the traditional area of morality, which mainly covers man and his interpersonal relationships by the world of living organisms such as animals, plants and entire ecosystems. This would make it possible to clearly indicate which human actions are morally good and which are bad (Tyburski, 2017). Generally, it can be said that environmental ethics tries to point out and explain moral norms directed at the correct treatment of non-human beings. Looking narrowly at the subject of environmental ethics research relating to the relationship of man to the environment, one can distinguish the main theses found in most ethical positions:

- there are impersonal entities that are objects of morality,
- the class of objects with moral significance is wider than the class of sentient beings (Wróblewski, 2002).

Environmental ethics is also characterized by a significant distinction between the concepts of moral subject and object. In the first category, beings with the following characteristics can be classified: the ability to assess in terms of good and evil, the ability to critically choose and make decisions, the ability to take personal responsibility. Only men have the above-mentioned features. The second category defines moral objects, i.e. all beings with an autotelic, autonomous, immanent and non-instrumental intrinsic value. Internal value allows them being placed within the moral responsibility of the subject. Z. Wróblewski points out that in order to speak about internal value in environmental ethics one should refer to certain criteria that are associated with being the subject of life or being a good person, having own interests that characterize entities capable of benefiting or harming developing essential capabilities (pursuit of specific goals), with belonging to a community of life understood holistically (to be part of the ecosystem, biosphere), with the pursuit of achieving specific values determined by genetic information, with mechanisms of the biosphere modeled on the basis of personal existence¹. The criteria enable the extension of the object of morality towards non-human beings. For the first time, such an operation was carried out in the concept of the ethics of animal protection. In it, the narrow understanding of the object of morality that was propagated in classical ethics was strongly condemned. Extending the object of morality began to embrace animals to both animate and inanimate system entities. When a dispute arises between the priorities of human and non-human beings, it is justified to refer to the basic and preferential interests, which will enable an appropriate assessment of a given situation (Wróblewski, 2002).

¹ Z. Wróblewski presents the criteria citing: T. Regan, A. Leopold, J.B. Callicott, E. Goldsmith and J. Levelock.

4. Education in the context of selected concepts of environmental ethics

Reflecting on environmental ethics, it is reasonable to indicate that this is an ethical discipline with developed concepts in which positions on moral ideas regarding the environment, their various preventive measures, and axiology are discussed. Basically, the following concepts of environmental ethics are distinguished: anthropocentric ethics, biocentric ethics, holistic ethics, animal protection ethics. W. Bołoz, enriches the basic division also with the Christian concept proposed by the teaching of the Catholic Church, especially by the teachings of John Paul II regarding environmental issues (Bołoz, 2007). This trend is currently being developed by Pope Francis, signaling that the need for social theoretical and practical nature has become a key challenge for integral ecology that *Laudato Si'* refers to in his Encyclical. Thus, he outlines the possible directions of corrective actions, precisely *for the sake of a shared home*. Due to the broad research issues of integral ecology, many issues can be analyzed and discussed in the humanities (especially philosophy, and within ethics), social, pedagogical research and those strictly related to the protection of the socio-natural environment, such as sozology² (Dołęga, 2006). In order to illustrate the relationship between a donor and a recipient in relation to man and nature, the anthropocentric and biocentric concept will be discussed in greater detail. The description of the others will be limited to indicating their main theses.

Holistic ethics, also called ecosystem, in the discussions of its supporters, emphasizes a very broad subject spectrum, because it takes into account both the biotic and abiotic environment. Representatives of this ethics postulate to increase the group of entities to which moral values are attributed. Ethical holism calls for reflection on the biosphere, which is a good for man, and therefore he should embrace it with moral reflection. Man has specific duties with respect to the entire natural environment. The ethics of animal protection is sometimes excluded from the scope of ethical concepts, because its main assumptions about the subject of morality are directed solely to the species of higher animals, which is why it becomes very stigmatized. Generalizing, proponents of animal protection ethics want to cover all or some animal species with the moral status (Tyburski, 2001). The anthropocentric concept of environmental ethics illustrates an ethical approach that indicates the key position of man in the terrestrial ecosystem. It is strongly associated with traditional ethics, stressing that freedom, responsibility and rationality are determinants of the human moral status. According to representatives of environmental ethics, man occupies a key place in the environment, and the care he should

² This term was popularized by Walery Goetel in the second half of the 20th century. Sozology indicates science whose subject is nature protection and, consequently, concern for the natural environment of man. Due to the extensive scientific achievements in the field of holistic environmental protection, the term "sozology" has been expanded in terms of content and scope. Józef M. Dołęga, "Ecophilosophy and its buffer zone" in *Varieties of ecophilosophy*, ed. Antoni Skowroński (Olecko: Acta Universitatis Masuriensis Publishing House of Wszechnica Mazurska, 2006), pp. 58-59.

display is in the interest of man, because without the environment he could not exist. The favor of environmental ethics to emphasize the dominance of man over the environment indicates that the good and well-being of human being are key. Taking this relationship into account, the anthropocentric concept indicates that the good of the environment and its components are becoming secondary values. Only those human activities that are directed through the environment to himself can be subjected to moral assessment. If any actions are taken only in relation to nature and its individual elements without any benefits for humans, they are not subject to moral evaluation. The anthropocentric concept of environmental ethics shows a relationship that places personal beings at the forefront of all existence, and the moral obligations of man apply only to people. There is, however, a clause that allows other living organisms or natural ecosystems to be covered by the moral issue, but only if they have a positive relation to man and his rights (Tyburski, 1999). Referring to the above, it can be pointed out that there are two types of environmental ethics directed at the anthropocentric current. The ethics referring to extreme anthropocentrism and moderate anthropocentrism. "Extreme anthropocentrism says that only man has an intrinsic value, and all non-human beings have instrumental value. Moderate anthropocentrism says that apart from man there are beings with intrinsic value, but this value is lower than the supreme value (man). Beings with a "lower" intrinsic value are carriers of instrumental values" (Wróblewski, 2002, pp. 78-79). In opposition to the assumptions of the anthropocentric concept, the biocentric concept, also called the individualistic one, is presented in many places³. The basic message is to cover all living beings with no particular human position. It indicates the important role played by individual biotic elements in various terrestrial ecosystems. Highlighting the differences with the anthropocentric concept, the following aspects can be pointed out:

- in environmental ethics advocating a biocentric concept, it is postulated to include, in the context of the subject of ethics, every being who feels or is sensitive to pain. A more radical approach to biocentric ethics also includes pain-sensitive organisms because it wants life on earth to be sustained entirely.
- indicating that this nature is only for man to use it and feel its master is unreasonable and unacceptable.

The key assumption in ethical biocentrism is the fact that each organism can exist on its own in natural ecosystems. The right to live for all organisms is strongly emphasized here. Nature owes its components respect, not because of the role they play towards man, but for itself (Tyburski, 1999).

When discussing the issue of environmental education, it should be noted that this is a process based on which the preferred behavior of man towards his environment is shaped. It occurs on the psychological and pedagogical level because, the main factor in it is education showing proper norms and attitudes (Kozłowska, 1997). All attitudes and behaviors that man

³ The individualistic concept is represented by Paul Teylor.

externalises are acquired or become the result of the external environment. Both the first and the second should be attributed to the factors that contribute to education, affecting its dimension. Education in a general sense, as well as education focusing on environmental issues can take place through various stimuli and be based on various techniques or methods of its implementation. Therefore, when implementing such activities, all entities that undertake the implementation of guidelines for environmental education will play a key role. The main goals that were imposed as part of the eco-education process were formulated at the international conference on environmental education in Tbilisi in 1977. The fruit of it was the development of the Tbilisi Declaration focusing on structural matters, forms of such focused education and the legitimacy of its implementation at individual stages of education (Hull, 1993). The main postulates adopted, according to which work on environmental education should be conducted, were:

- universal social access to knowledge about the state of the environment and its changes,
- of all friendly behaviors and attitudes towards the environment, including its protection,
- sensitizing individual units to factors that have a destructive effect on the balance of the biosphere,
- creating an ecological culture by referring to axiology in environmental protection,
- work on undertaking all activities oriented towards international unification for the sake of the environment (Bohdanowicz, 2005).

Contemporary education implemented in both formal and informal aspects should refer to certain common values and norms that can be found in all the mentioned concepts of environmental ethics. Analyzing eco-concepts, it can be concluded that they have a common goal. It is concern for the environment understood as a space for biosphere development. The goal of the educational process oriented in this way allows the holistic sensitization of the education subject to dependencies and processes that occur and function in the environment. Understanding the causes and effects of unidirectional human action in relation to the natural world enables the identification of current problems faced by the modern world. It is also important that man also belongs to the natural world. Therefore, educating the society in terms of global problems requires taking into account the broad spectrum of understanding the environment with all its components, from plant organisms through animals to man himself. As E. Szadzińska notes "(...) the new sense of being human in the world has resulted in the creation of a new concept of education, referred to as global education. It is assumed that its foundations are: values (justice, biodiversity), attitudes (care for the natural environment, tolerance towards other cultures, care for justice in the world, sense of agency), knowledge necessary to understand the world, thinking skills (critical, creative), social skills (conflict resolution, cooperation)" (Sadzińska, 2017, p. 35). The outlined assumptions of global education are, in a sense, a reflection of the problems pointed out by representatives of individual concepts of environmental ethics. The introduction of the above assumptions into educational practice, while strengthening them with ethical arguments, is an opportunity to

achieve a balanced order in the socio-natural environment, or at least to sensitize society to the problems, which ultimately also destructively affect people as a result of their activities.

5. Summary

In the context of the above presentation of individual concepts of environmental ethics, it should be emphasized that man as the entity that is particularly distinguished among organisms in terrestrial ecosystems should use all its attributes and take responsible actions. Any interference in the environment must take into account the negative effects and, if possible, limit them. Axiology developed by environmental ethics becomes an alternative to indifference prevailing in the socio-natural environment. There is therefore the possibility for man to apply rules and standards that help regulate the donor-recipient relationship in the context of nature and man himself. The moral evaluation of human behavior proposed by environmental ethics results in reflection and at the same time undertaking actions that will help repair and not worsen the existing condition of the environment. Prudence in human action will allow the implementation of pro-environmental attitudes focused on maintaining such a status that will suit man and ensure peace for the natural environment.

Axiological and ethical regulations become the starting point for conducting proper argumentation helpful in the assessment of human choices and activities. It is crucial for a person who, being the subject of corrective actions in an environmental crisis, can realistically respond. The indicated relationship between the donor and recipient should also become the subject of reflection in the educational process. Nowadays it is necessary to shape proper awareness of global problems existing in the socio-natural environment. The aspects of the ecological crisis signaled by Z. Hull prove that we are currently dealing with a global dimension. This is evidenced by the effects that the environment experiences, along with its components, in the form of e.g. climate change, civilization diseases, insensitivity of developed societies towards people affected by widespread poverty. The consequences of the environmental crisis do not know the territorial boundaries and this proves that you need to influence society with properly prepared educational programs from the youngest generations. Thanks to appropriate education containing a reference to the values and norms proposed by environmental ethics, future social choices can be shaped. The education process directed at all age groups should also include issues signaled by the issues of global education (Kaniewska, and Klimski, 2017). This will make the subject of education sensitive to the current problems of the modern world.

References

1. Bohdanowicz, P. (2005). *Turystyka a świadomość ekologiczna*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.
2. Bołoz, W. (2007). Główne koncepcje etyki środowiskowej. In: M. Pawliszyn, and M. Urban (Eds.), *W trosce o dobrą filozofię. Księga pamiątkowa w 50. rocznicę święceń kapłańskich Ojca Profesora Edmunda Morawca CSsR* (pp. 253-276). Kraków: Homo Dei.
3. Gogacz, M. (2008). *Elementarz metafizyki*. Warszawa: Oficyna wydawnicza „NAVO”.
4. Hull, Z. (1993). Filozoficzne podstawy edukacji ekologicznej. In: M.R. Dudzińska, and L. Pawłowski (Eds.), *Ochrona środowiska w nauczaniu i wychowaniu. Materiały II Ogólnopolskiej Konferencji* (pp. 509-518). Lublin: Środkowo-Europejski Instytut Badań nad Środowiskiem.
5. Hull, Z. (1999). Problemy filozofii ekologii. In: A. Papuziński (Eds.), *Wprowadzenie do filozoficznych problemów ekologii* (pp. 55-95). Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Wyższej szkoły Pedagogicznej w Bydgoszczy.
6. Kaniewska, M., and Klimski, M. (2017). Global education as a way of reinforcing the process by which a solidaritous and just world is built. *Papers on Global Change*, 24, 83-94. doi: 10.1515/igbp-2017-0007.
7. Kozłowska, I. (1997). Edukacja ekologiczna studentów. In: A. Pfeiffer (Eds.), *Edukacja i świadomość ekologiczna* (pp. 43-57). Poznań: Wydawnictwo Akademii Rolniczej.
8. Piątek, Z. (1998). *Etyka środowiskowa. Nowe spojrzenie na miejsce człowieka w przyrodzie*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Księgarnia Akademicka.
9. Reale, G. (1996). *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, t. 2. Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.
10. Reale, G. (1999). *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, t. 4. Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.
11. Szadzińska, E. (2017). Zrównoważony rozwój inspiracją dla zmian w edukacji wczesnoszkolnej. *Lubelski Rocznik Pedagogiczny*, XXXVI, 1, 29-40. doi: 10.17951/lrp.2017.36.1.29.
12. Tyburski, W. (1999). Główne kierunki i zasady etyki środowiskowej. In: A. Papuziński (Eds.), *Wprowadzenie do filozoficznych problemów ekologii* (pp. 97-132). Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Wyższej szkoły Pedagogicznej w Bydgoszczy.
13. Tyburski, W. (2001). Etyka środowiskowa – przedmiot, stanowiska i propozycje. In: Z. Sareło (Eds.), *Meandry Etyki* (pp. 131-182). Olecko: Wydawnictwo Wszechnicy Mazurskiej Acta Universitatis Masuriensis.

14. Tyburski, W. (2017). Edukacja etyczna na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju. In: R.F. Sadowski, and Z. Łepko (Eds.), *Theoria i praxis zrównoważonego rozwoju. 30 lat od ogłoszenia Raportu Brundtland* (pp. 203-211). Warszawa: Towarzystwo Naukowe Franciszka Salezego.
15. Wróblewski, Z. (2002). Uwagi na temat kontrowersji antropocentryzm – biocentryzm w etyce ekologicznej. In: J.W. Czartoszewski (Eds.), *Etyka środowiskowa wyzwaniem XXI wieku* (pp. 73-81). Warszawa: VERBIUM – Wydawnictwo Księży Werbistów.