

Environmental ethics from a Thomistic-personalistic perspective (implications for the sustainable development concept)

Etyka środowiskowa w ujęciu tomistyczno-personalistycznym (implikacje dla koncepcji rozwoju zrównoważonego)

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Abstract

According to the author, Thomistic environmental ethics is the ethics of respect for man and nature. Contrary to popular opinion it doesn't possess a strong anthropocentric nor a non-ecological character but a theocentric one with a pro-ecological dimension. Thomism teaches that there is hierarchical order in reality. In Thomistic ethics it is God who is the main reference point and the supreme good (*summum bonum*). Thus, it has a primarily theocentric character, and secondarily an anthropocentric one, which is inscribed in relations between humans and other beings. However, this anthropocentrism is moderate and is not hostile towards nature. In theocentric terms, God is the cause and source of all natural beings. From the ontological perspective they are therefore good, and which must be protected. However, from this assumption it does not mean that all natural beings have the same axiological value. In Thomistic eco-ethics a man, understood as a human person, has an autotelic value. Currently, for this reason, traditional Thomism is increasingly supplemented with personalistic reasoning. In anthropologic analysis a man appears as a psychophysical being. He is therefore unique and the most perfect of beings occurring in nature. Only man can be described as a free and rational being, transcending nature which surrounds him. That is why the dignity of a human person is considered as the moral norm of Thomistic eco-ethics. It also has a person-centric dimension. The value of a human person also controls the relations between a person and other beings inhabiting the Earth. However, they cannot be based on the idea of human domination over nature. The duty to protect nature is inscribed in natural law. This understanding of Thomistic-personalistic eco-ethics can be reconciled with the sustainable development concept.

Key words: environmental ethics, sustainable development, environmental protection, (eco)Thomism, (eco)personalism

Streszczenie

W ocenie autora tomistyczna etyka środowiskowa jest etyką szacunku dla człowieka i przyrody. Wbrew obiegowym opiniom nie ma ona charakteru skrajnie antropocentrycznego i nieekologicznego lecz teocentryczny, który ma także swój wymiar proekologiczny. Tomizm albowiem uczy, że istnieje porządek hierarchiczny w rzeczywistości. W etyce tomistycznej to Bóg stanowi jej główny punkt odniesienia i najwyższe dobro (*summum bonum*). Ma ona zatem w pierwszym rzędzie charakter teocentryczny, wtórnie zaś antropocentryczny, wpisany w relacje pomiędzy człowiekiem a innymi bytami. Antropocentryzm ten ma jednak charakter umiarkowany, nie nastawiony wrogo do przyrody. W aspekcie teocentrycznym Bóg jest przyczyną i źródłem istnienia wszystkich bytów przyrodniczych. W perspektywie ontologicznej stanowią one zatem dobro, które należy chronić. Z założenia tego nie wynika jednak, iż wszystkie byty przyrodnicze mają tę samą wartość w ujęciu aksjologicznym. W tomistycznej

ekoetyce wartością autoteliczną jest człowiek pojmowany jako osoba ludzka. Z tego powodu obecnie coraz częściej tradycyjny tomizm uzupełnia się argumentacją o charakterze personalistycznym. W analizie antropologicznej człowiek jawi się jako byt psychofizyczny. Jest zatem unikalnym i najdoskonalszym z bytów występujących w przyrodzie. Tylko o człowieku można orzec, że jest bytem wolnym i rozumnym, przekraczającym otaczającą go przyrodę. Dlatego godność osoby ludzkiej uznano za normę moralności tomistycznej ekoetyki. Ma ona zatem również wymiar osobocentryczny. Wartość osoby ludzkiej reguluje również stosunki pomiędzy nią a innymi bytami zamieszkującymi Ziemię. Nie mogą się one jednak opierać na idei dominacji człowieka nad przyrodą. Obowiązek ochrony przyrody jest wpisany w prawo naturalne. Tak pojmowaną tomistyczno-personalistyczną ekoetykę można również uzgodnić z koncepcją rozwoju zrównoważonego.

Słowa kluczowe: etyka środowiskowa, rozwój zrównoważony, ochrona środowiska, (eko)tomizm, (eko)personalizm

Introduction

Thomism is a philosophical system with its origins in classical philosophy. In modern times it is one of the fundamental and best known schools of philosophy included in the canon of European philosophy. Throughout the world Thomism's popularity has decreased in recent years in favour of other philosophical movements, but it still remains an important and influential system. From the times of St. Thomas Aquinas this philosophical movement has undergone development, adjusting itself to new problems and challenges. This modern version of Thomism is called *neo-Thomism* by some authors.

Neo-Thomism undertakes to explain a number of current issues. One of these is undoubtedly protection of the natural environment. Many thinkers are of the opinion that the ecological crisis is one of the most urgent contemporary problems. In the times of Thomas Aquinas this problem did not exist due to the lack of relevant threats. However attempts to grapple with this issue on the basis of Thomism appear today. This trend is particularly noticeable in modern Polish philosophical and theological thought where Thomism (increasingly supplemented with personalistic argumentation) dominates. Efforts to develop *eco-Thomism*, however, are most frequently limited, as they highlight only selected issues or concentrate solely on theology evoking Christian Revelation. The author of this article is attempting to show an overview of the Thomistic eco-ethics approach supplemented with fundamental personalistic findings. The aim of the article is to describe the foundation and main assumptions of neo-Thomistic environmental ethics. This approach is the author's own proposal and interpretation on the basis of his research to date (Ciszek, 2006, 2007, 2009), as well as other lines of enquiry not undertaken so far. In this article the author's idea has also been supplemented with the findings from other Polish authors based on an analysis of their publications. The publications have contributed to the development of the concept discussed in this article with the majority based on Thomistic philosophy and Catholic theology which also relates to personalism. However, this particular article on Thomistic environmental ethics is written mainly from the philosophical point of view.

Theological issues have been omitted or reduced to the absolute minimum. Although theological argumentation is valuable for people accepting the Christian faith, it may not be acceptable to other philosophical or ideological points of view.

According to the author, Thomistic environmental ethics is the ethics of respect for man and nature. Thus it can be easily reconciled with the current popular sustainable development concept. This kind of eco-ethics derives its anthropological and axiological solutions, as well as the resulting moral imperatives, from a realistic vision of reality (Ślipko, 1994).

1. Metaphysical basis of Thomistic environmental ethics

From the ontological (metaphysical) perspective Thomism is pluralistic for, according to the doctrine, reality consists of many real existing beings (substantial beings), different from each other, but interconnected through numerous relationships. They do not form a manifestation of a single thing (being), but are different beings. Thus nature consists of a multitude of (substantial) beings, interconnected with each other through various relations (Bocheński, 1950).

It is worth noting that, according to classical metaphysics, a being is synonymous with goodness (perfection). A *being* is a real existing thing (which could of course not exist). Perfection flows from its existence. However *goodness* is a conceptualisation of a thing (a real existing being) due to the fact that it can be the object of human choice (desire). Thus, value and being are inseparable (Anzenbacher, 1992; Stępień, 1995; Andrzejuk 2012). This type of assumption is significantly important for Thomistic environmental ethics. For beings co-creating nature exist in reality (indeed they might not exist). In this regard it must be held that each one is good (perfection). For this reason numerous natural beings constituting a natural environment are worth affirmation, desire and pursuit. Therefore they are of value. However, Thomists do not share the currently popular bio-centric and eco-centric trends in environmental ethics, as they attribute the same value to each living being, or even to the whole of nature, without singling out man (a human person). The followers of

bio-centric axiology in environmental ethics reason that, similarly to other organisms, man is one of many organisms co-creating (animate) nature. For this reason neither man nor a representative of any other species is entitled to any particular position or value. All living organisms are equal having the same value. Each of them has appropriate characteristics and skills enabling each its survival in nature. Therefore, each being endowed with life should be protected from the perspective of the totality of the biosphere it co-creates. Such a standpoint leads many bio-centrists to the viewpoint that not only specific organisms, but whole populations, as well as the biosphere are entitled to an autotelic value. The followers of eco-centric ethics go even further. They consider both animate and inanimate nature as an intrinsic value, due to the whole which they constitute. It appears to the followers of eco-centric environmental ethics as an autotelic value, a value in itself. Thus it is not difficult to notice that representatives of eco-centric environmental ethics treat nature as an individual, independent entity (metaphysical monism). Such a viewpoint is not acceptable from the Thomistic (classical) metaphysics perspective. It acknowledges that natural reality consists of various interrelated beings (metaphysical pluralism). Also it does not share the bio-centric viewpoint that all animate beings have the same value. The perfection of existing natural beings in the metaphysical (ontological) aspect is in fact different. Thus from the Thomistic environmental ethics perspective, man as a human person is the most perfect being inhabiting our planet. That is why he is the main reference point. Here we touch upon a very important issue, namely the anthropocentric aspect of Thomistic environmental ethics. Currently the ecological crisis is blamed on the alleged Judeo-Christian heritage of anthropocentrism. Such a view is not objective in the opinion of Catholic thinkers. It results from a lack of deeper knowledge of Thomism which has a clear theistic and consequently a theocentric character.

2. The theistic and theocentric character of Thomistic environmental ethics. God as the *summum bonum*

Thomistic philosophy has a theistic character. However, it does not follow on from the theological assumptions which refer to Revelation. Theism is a conclusion from philosophical assumptions of realism and pluralism. Thomism teaches that God is a cause and source of the existence of all beings. As a person He has infinite reason and an infinite free will. He is also the supreme and infinite Being, the highest value, infinite Truth, Goodness, Beauty, Love, Knowledge, etc. Thomism results from the assumption that there is a hierarchical order in reality (Bocheński, 1950).

For Thomistic philosophy, these ethical findings mean that the purpose of human life is infinite goodness, i.e. God. In the context of Thomistic environmental ethics it should be accepted that the *summum bonum* (highest good) is God. Thomistic ethics is therefore theocentric. Recall that theocentrism (Greek *theos* = God + Latin *centrum* = centre) is the direction in ethics, which requires man's moral actions to be considered in relation to God as the supreme and only value (God is identified with *summum bonum*, Gawor, 1999).

Such an understanding of theocentrism, in terms of Thomistic environmental ethics, requires any relation between man's moral actions and the natural environment to be considered in relation to God as the cause and source of existence of all natural beings in nature. They have a value because of God who created them and continues to keep them in existence. Man as a unique entity among the beings that populate Earth, should fulfil the role of a good steward, host and mentor of the natural world, who has been endowed by the Creator. People destroying nature oppose God by doing evil. Therefore, from this assumption the duty to protect nature can be deduced. However, a fundamental question arises here of whether there is any room for moral anthropocentrism in Thomistic ethics (including environmental ethics)?

The answer to this question is yes. Anthropocentrism is written into the relation between man-person and the remaining beings in nature which constitute the natural environment. Indeed Thomistic environmental ethics in its assumptions emphasises the uniqueness of man against a background of other earthly beings. It places man at the centre of its interests. However, it is anthropocentrism, which has its own characteristics. It has little to do with the current, negative meaning of this term.

It is worth remembering that the concept of anthropocentrism has a wide range of semantics. Two varieties governing the relationship between man and nature can be distinguished here. The first is strong anthropocentrism, the second is moderate anthropocentrism. Supporters of the former, strong approach, treat the natural environment as overly instrumental. It appears to them as a reservoir of natural resources, which can be used indefinitely or even be destroyed. This approach is a derivative of a consumptive lifestyle which accents only the materialistic side of human existence, disregarding almost the entire spiritual dimension. This extreme attitude is thus fundamentally distorted and non-Christian. It also stands in contradiction to the assumptions of Thomistic ethics for which the act of destruction is a moral evil. Evil results from such an act, whose purpose (direct aim) is mindless vandalism. However, representatives of the latter, moderate approach treat nature as a common good, so this approach is the most environmentally friendly. It denies man unlimited power over nature in line with the *responsible trusteeship*

and *guardianship* motto. It is in the latter, moderate approach that the anthropocentric nature of Thomistic ethics must be understood.

In the opinion of Thomists strong anthropocentrism is not a product of Christianity or classical philosophy, but is the work of the modern age. The Renaissance, the start of the modern era, is especially at fault here since it investigated the human phenomenon in isolation from God, whose place was replaced by human autonomy, often construed as too extreme (Dogiel, 1992). On this secular basis of anthropocentrism the causes of the ecological crisis should be traced. However, Christian anthropocentrism is moderate. Within it, we are dealing with a theocentric, and not a homocentric vision of the world, since God is the central reference point. It is true that Thomism recognises man (human person) as the most perfect of beings inhabiting the planet. However, this maxim applies to the relations between man and other beings in nature. Against their background man is an autotelic (superior) value. Therefore one cannot behave egocentrically and nature should be treated as a common good which should be protected and be responsible for. However, in a broader context, in Thomistic philosophy it is God who is the highest good (*summum bonum*). He is a fully perfect, personal being. In Thomism, anthropocentrism therefore gives way to theocentrism. Therefore, it has a derivative and moderate character. Theocentrism also provides an additional reason for the protection of man's natural environment. Natural beings that form nature arose as a result of God's creative action, who still keeps them in existence. For this reason they are of value. Therefore, man should not be nature's ruler but its manager, since after all he did not create nature. He should be responsible for it with regards to other people, or otherwise he commits evil. This idea is also promoted today within the frameworks of Thomistic theology and Catholic social teaching. They teach that nature is a gift from God, and therefore the skilful management of her resources is a moral imperative. Man was placed at the head of creation by God, in order to care for it, and also to use it for his own purposes, as taught in the Bible. However, any mismanagements of nature constitute a grave sin against the Creator, i.e. an ecological sin (Bayda, 1999).

It is the opinion of a growing number of Thomists that a theocentric paradigm of environmental ethics understood in this way could even become a *third way* between holistic-bio-centric and anthropocentric ethics. It endorses both the value of nature and man, avoiding the extremes expressed when absolutising one of the two listed categories (Ciszek, 2009; Biesaga, 2009).

Naturally, Thomistic environmental ethics assumptions which place man in a privileged position in relation to other natural beings, does not convince everybody. Environmental anthropology teaches us that

man is part of nature, with which he is closely associated. Like other species, *Homo sapiens* arose through evolution. Thomistic environmental ethic does not deny it. However, Thomists consider environmental anthropology as an incomplete science in relation to philosophical anthropology, which in a rational manner, without any reference to Revelation, is able to show the phenomenon and the superiority of the human being and justify his intrinsic value.

3. The anthropological basis of Thomistic eco-ethics. The autotelic value of man-person in the world of nature

From the classical philosophical perspective man is a unique psychophysical being. He is the only living organism inhabiting the Earth, about which it could be predicated that he is a person representing the highest type of being. It is a fundamental assumption for Thomistic environmental ethics. On this basis Thomists claim that man-person, as the most perfect being in nature, should be an autotelic value in their system of ethics. They justify this type of assumption with philosophical argumentation by referring to reason, and not the Christian faith. They advocate performing a philosophical analysis of man's *intrinsic value* in order to determine what this *value* depends on, and its relation with the *values* of other natural beings (Ślipko, Zwoliński, 1999). Thomists believe that without such a philosophical insight, it is impossible to properly practice environmental ethics.

Catholic thinkers have pointed out, that what undoubtedly differentiates man from other organisms is human psychism which is worth philosophical analysis. The answer to the question *who is man?* depends on what form of being this psychism represents. Then we can also determine how man's relationship with the natural environment should be shaped (Ślipko, Zwoliński, 1999).

Modern scholars point to some similarities between animal behaviour (especially primates) and human behaviour. Thomists however emphasise that one should not lose sight of the fundamental differences which distinguish man (and human psychism) from other species (Ciszek, 2013). These are presented below (Słomkowski, 1957).

- 1) Sensory cognition. This applies to all animals. With this type of cognition animals can associate specific objects with the help of their senses, e.g. a monkey, thanks to such an association, can use a stick to dislodge fruits. However, this type of cognition in animals is limited to specific beings, from which they cannot extricate themselves, unlike humans. For man, relations between objects are detached from cognitive and material specifics such as abstract and general concepts as well as symbols (Kłósak 1960). For this reason, animals

cannot develop psychologically or spiritually nor shape an autonomous and specific animal culture as a result of their own internal initiative (Ślipko, Zwoliński, 1999).

- 2) Usage of tools. Observation and experiments on hominids show that on a 6-point scale for using tools (a tool as a natural, purposeful, a modified means for direct and future use, as a prepared means for a particular situation and the choice of tools as a means), only three points can be assigned to the apes, whilst the remaining points only to people (Zięba, 1995).
- 3) Mental cognition. Only humans are characterised by it. Using abstraction man is able to create general ideas which exceed the being's individual qualities. The immateriality of concepts and thus spiritual knowledge manifests itself even more in abstract concepts such as *truth, goodness, beauty*, and especially *God, spirit* and *angel*. They relate to immaterial beings that cannot be observed by the senses. Man must therefore possess a cognitive spiritual power enabling him this abstraction. The ability to capture such relations, such as the relationship to an aim or cause to effect, also exceeds sensory cognition and point to man's immaterial cognitive power.
- 4) Sensual desire versus spiritual craving. Man, in contrast to animals exceeds biological determinism. It can be stated, that he is a free entity, able to control his instincts, even as strong as the instinct to maintain his life or sexual drive. He is able to give them up for the realisation of spiritual ideals. Therefore, there must exist in man an immaterial factor that can stand up to strong, congenital needs.

Thomists emphasise that these examples speak in favour of the thesis about the existence in man of a spiritual dimension called a soul (rational soul). However, the human soul cannot be identified with matter (which is a form), because its essence is different from the body. It is immaterial and its origins cannot be inferred from the development of the material body (Słomkowski, 1957). Thomists are in fact of the opinion that the essence of humanity is the unity of the immaterial element (rational soul) with the material element (body). Man, in this approach is not a cluster of immaterial and material factors, but a monolith, an organic psychophysical whole. This sources the dynamics of human development, the richness of spiritual experiences, and man's cultural creativity, which can be defined as his intrinsic value. Man, in comparison to members of other species is a completely different and unique being. He is an autonomous being, free, rational, acts in his own name and on his own responsibility. He is a psychophysical person-being (Ślipko, Zwoliński, 1999).

Moreover, Thomistic philosophers point out that there is no logical possibility of building bio-centric or eco-centric ethics. Anthropocentrism is inherently inscribed into the practice of any kind of ethics. As Juliusław Łukomski states, nature itself does not give us the models of behaviour and is not as idyllic as her supporters would like. Cuckoos lay their eggs in other birds' nests, squirrels devastate other birds' nests. It also happens that tigers and other animals eat their children. However, in the animal world there are actions arising from instincts which are not subject to moral evaluation. Of course, many negative actions can also be observed among people but they constitute a breach of the applicable norm, which by its nature is already immoral. This is because the guilt, the moral responsibility, can only be placed on man because he is able to distinguish right from wrong and understands that he has a moral duty with respect to another person (Łukomski, 1999).

Thomists do not deny that man has a body and as an organism is part of nature. But as a rational and free person he transcends the natural world. However, animals (and other natural beings) are fused with nature to such an extent, that they are unable to free themselves from natural conditions. For this reason, the value of non-human natural beings is replaced by human value. On this basis it is possible to justify man's moral right to appropriately manage nature. Hence, Thomists recognise man-person as an autotelic value in their system of environmental ethics. Man's chief goodness is thus a criterion for the moral evaluation of acts including those with respect to nature. Consequently this places on man a responsibility for the condition of the natural world around him. In this perspective, nature has an instrumental value since by destroying nature we contribute to the destruction of man, exposing him to death and disease. This way, we violate his goodness. Yet, on the other hand, we must remember that in the theocentric paradigm of eco-ethics there is a fundamental issue which revalorises the natural world. Nature is in fact a reflection of the supreme Being who is the cause and source of its existence. In classical philosophy that being is God. God as the Creator of nature still continues to support its existence. However, it should be remembered that the dignity of nature is ranked lower than the inviolable dignity of man, which according to many Catholic ethicists is the moral norm in their ethical system. This follows on from the assumption that man, understood as a human person, is the material object of Thomistic environmental ethics (Łukomski, 1999, 2000).

4. Man-person as a material object of Thomistic environmental ethics

The material object in Thomistic ethics is man, or more precisely his decision, which arises as a result of a particular dialogue between reason and human volition. Ethics is interested in actions, not in the

general but in the context of their moral value, i.e. those which are morally good and those which are bad. We now arrive at another issue, that of the moral norm. In ethical literature it is accepted that the norm is the source and criterion of an act's moral value (Szostek, 1998). Let us recall that in classical Thomism four types of mutually subordinated measurements (norms) of a human action are recognised: eternal law, natural law, positive law and human conscience (Bocheński, 1950). However nowadays, more and more frequently classical Thomism is combined with ethical personalism. In such a Thomistic-personalistic approach it is accepted that the chief moral norm is the dignity of a human-person. This also applies to environmental ethics. It can even be claimed that it is person-centric.

4.1. *Natural law and human conscience versus environmental protection. The environmental dimension of the norms for human action*

Natural law on an ecological level is consistent with the previously presented anthropological assumptions of Thomistic philosophy and ethics. It emphasises that, despite the fact that the same material groundwork links human and non-human natural organisms, nevertheless they form two separate worlds. Man lives in nature, without which he cannot do without. However, he is not just nature, since he transcends nature, that is, in a certain sense, he is beyond nature (Ślipko, Zwoliński, 1999). Therefore, one cannot explain the existence of man and his position in the world by referring only to natural laws. It is worth opening up yet to a different perspective – eternal. The argumentation for such a position is based on the assumption that the world created by God is not accidental and chaotic. Even for an atheist, who accepts the existence of order in the world, it is sufficient for him to recognise moral law (Ozoroski, 2002). This eternal law was inscribed by the Creator into the moral consciousness of people and into nature itself, the human being and the created world. It manifests itself as the natural law with objective moral governance and rules of conduct arising from the rational, psychophysical nature of the human person. In the ecological aspect, this means that man, by his nature, will make use of the natural resources he needs for personal development and daily life. However, one cannot talk exclusively about unlimited use of the environment. Natural law also imposes on man an obligation to take rational care of all the elements which make up man's natural environment. Indeed destroying nature, we also destroy man who is anchored in nature, violating his goodness. In an ecological aspect, natural law also finds its dimension in positive law which is determined by authority. The legally binding authority must develop appropriate regulations with the intention to protect man's natural environment. This task can best be accomplished by supporting the ecologi-

cally sustainable development of human culture and civilization.

As far as natural law is a measure of moral governance, so conscience is the *guardian* of morality, applying natural law to specific situations. This also applies to ecological issues. Contrary to popular belief, conscience in terms of Thomistic ethics is not a feeling but syllogism. It is therefore an act of reason, which applies the general moral law to a specific case (Bocheński, 1950). This general moral law can also be interpreted in the spirit of pro-ecological norms. Human actions which destroy nature, nevertheless cause harm to man. It is therefore necessary to evaluate them as morally wrong. To this end, special proposals for the examination of ecological conscience have been developed. For example, in Poland (a country where the majority of the population is Roman Catholic) two models for the examination of ecological conscience have been developed (Czartoszewski, 1999). Their aim is to shape the ecological conscience and to make each person aware of whether his relationship with the natural environment supports his conduct and positive balance, or in an immoral way it contributes to environmental devastation violating human dignity. Here we touch upon an important issue. Currently, more and more frequently Thomistic philosophers make use of the achievements of ethical personalism. Consequently, they accept that the chief moral norm is the dignity of the human-person (personalistic norm). It also has its own ecological dimension.

4.2. *The dignity of man as a moral norm for Thomistic environmental protection ethics. The ecological aspect of the personalistic norm*

Personalistic ethics states that every man is a person (Latin *persona*) having a unique property – dignity. The dignity of a person is thus considered in this ethical direction as an autotelic (superior) value. Every existing person is entitled to it, thus it is inviolable. For this reason, we must incorporate human dignity into everyday life, acknowledge and maintain it in other people. That act of affirmation of personal dignity is identified in personalism with love which should be the direct goal of our actions. Karol Wojtyła articulated this assumption most fully in the personalism norm, which states: *A person is such a being, that a proper and fully valued reference to him constitutes love* (Wojtyła 2001, p 43). Love characterises all interpersonal relationships, not only between people but also in the relationship between God and man (Ciszek, 2011).

In Thomistic-personalistic terms it is therefore accepted that in contrast to the existence of things and objects *the dignity of being a person* must be recognised before other beings. Man being a person, is self-determining and consequently, at the same time, the object of all rights and responsibilities. He is also entitled to respect, and thus cannot be treated as a commodity or an object of manipulation (Wojtyła,

1970). This principle also applies to environmental ethics and contrary to popular belief, it is not an expression of a species' chauvinism. The fact that man deserves particularly special treatment is not due to the fact that he is a representative of the *Homo sapiens* species. For this reason human dignity is the prime norm of Catholic environmental ethics, because people are individuals (Szostek, 1998). As noted by Andrzej Szostek, such an approach entails, appropriate consequences such as *if I were to meet individuals who are not human beings (angels, extraterrestrials), I should treat them as humans, even though they are not, from a genetic point of view* (Szostek, 1998, p 103).

The personalistic norm in environmental protection ethics means, that there is a justified duty to recognise the value of man's natural environment. We come to this conclusion by purely rational means. After all, actions which contribute to the destruction of nature lead to harming humans. Human volition should therefore strive towards pro-ecological actions (intellectualism of Thomistic ethics). According to Julisław Łukomski, endorsing the value (goodness) of the environment, we must also recognise the ecological goodness of its main inhabitant – man. The respect shown to nature, which forms man's living environment, is an indirect recognition of human dignity. Therefore, when there is human interference in nature, it is important to realise to what extent this action confirms and contradicts a person's dignity. All interpersonal relationships should be supported on mutual respect and love (Łukomski, 1999). Love is also the supreme criterion of man-person's dignity. It governs our actions in relation to others, including the natural environment. The love towards another human being requires preserving for his own good an appropriate state of the natural environment which is the guarantor of his health and life.

4.3. *Ethics of respect for a human person (man) as the basis of respect for the natural environment. The person-centric dimension of Thomistic eco-ethics*

In summarising earlier considerations, it must be mentioned that Thomistic environmental ethics recognises the duty of protecting the natural environment. The respect for nature, which is the habitat for man's life, results from the affirmation of the human person's dignity (Łukomski, 1999). It can therefore be concluded that moderate anthropocentrism in Thomistic eco-ethics also has the person-centric dimension.

Following on from Julisław Łukomski, and based on comments herein, two Thomistic-personalistic postulates of environmental ethics can be mentioned (Łukomski, 1999) and should be accepted:

- 1) An absolute duty to perform actions aimed at protecting a human person's natural environment, which is an expression of acknowledgment of man's dignity and
- 2) an absolute duty not to perform actions which constitute a threat to the natural environment and consequently for the human person.

These two fundamental general postulates justifying moral protection of nature can be further refined within the framework of moral norms, prescribing or prohibiting certain conduct with respect to man's natural environment (e.g. conserve water, don't drop litter in the forest). Deviation or respect for these norms should involve the socially defined moral sanctions (rewards and punishments). However, to achieve this aim which is included in the pro-ecological norms, Thomistic environmental ethics must strive to teach man the relevant moral skills.

5. **Ecological virtues - the role of moral fitness in pro-ecological education**

Thomistic ethics is educational ethics. In accordance with Thomistic assumptions man will not be a good person without an appropriate character, which will enable him to effectively perform morally good acts. Man must therefore teach himself the moral skills (dispositions) i.e. *virtues* (Bocheński, 1950). This also applies to Thomistic environmental ethics. Each of the classic virtues i.e. cardinal virtues (which traditionally include prudence, justice, fortitude, and moderation) may also be adopted in pro-ecological education. Its aim is to shape the character for fulfilling the actions which protect man's natural environment in accordance with the concept of the golden mean (avoiding extremes).

In Thomism it is accepted that the virtue of prudence is the most important virtue. Without it one cannot properly evaluate the situation which allows for a morally fit deed. It is therefore a prerequisite for the existence of other virtues. Without prudence, in principle, it is impossible for other virtues to exist, since only reason can evaluate the situation properly. It is not a recipe, but man characterised by prudence who can assess good and evil. Recipes are characterised by generality, whereas in deeds it is the particular good which is borne in mind and which should be properly identified (Jaroszyński, 2003). The virtue of prudence in the ecological dimension allows for the thoughtful and wise use of natural resources. It also leads to the opposition and disapproval of those actions which lead to the devastation of man's natural environment (Dziekoński, 2002). This virtue also allows the golden mean to be maintained between the two failings (extremes). For example, prudence induces man to the optimal use of natural assets, necessary for his existence, and for the development of culture and civilisation. It does so in such a way so

as to avoid excessive degradation of the natural environment (the extreme is expressed in the excess) and avoiding insufficiency, and thus the extreme expressed in the almost complete abandonment of the use of environmental resources (in accordance with the utopian mottoes of some extreme pro-ecological organisations calling for man's return to nature).

The virtue of prudence on the ecological level is closely related to the virtue of moderation (restraint). In Thomism this virtue has a general dimension, since in every virtue there is a certain reasonable restraint present in human behaviour. Also, in an atmosphere of moderation other virtues can actually develop (Wichrowicz, 2002). The virtue of moderation by definition fits perfectly into Thomistic environmental ethics. Excessive and unreasonable exploitation of nature stems from the consumer lifestyle of modern people. Even in ancient times the need for implementing reasonable moderation when experiencing sensory pleasure was recognised. Christian moralists also remind us of this. People must therefore develop within themselves an appropriate restraint in the use of environmental resources and other material goods (e.g. technological achievements) in accordance with the requirements of reason. Without teaching themselves the virtues of prudence and moderation they will be unable to overcome the ecological crisis.

The virtue of fortitude, enabling difficulties to be overcome, on the surface appears to be of little use on the ecological level. But to persevere in pro-ecological acts man must undoubtedly strengthen himself. The ecological crisis arose because of people's passivity towards the environmental protection issue. Sometimes people also lack the courage to speak up and point out to others the major issues concerning environmental protection. The virtue of justice can also help. Let us recall that it facilitates man to give everyone his due, according to a fair measure (Podrez, 2012). The environmental protection postulate remains consistent with social justice. The destruction of nature takes resources from other people, which they will not be able to use, and to which they have an equal right. It is precisely on this foundation that the modern idea of sustainable development is based.

6. Thomistic eco-ethics and the sustainable development concept. An ecological dimension of the common good

Sustainable development is currently a popular concept, developed mainly on the basis of economic and social sciences (Pawłowski, 2008). It seeks to harmonise the country's economic and social developments with the protection of the natural environment. This concept emphasises that the natural environment has a value that must be preserved for future generations (Dołęga, 2007).

Such a view of the development of human civilisation is possible to reconcile with the assumptions in

Thomistic eco-ethics discussed in the article. This is due to the fact that the sustainable development concept, as opposed to the idea of sustainability, takes into account social development. Therefore, it is possible to argue on the basis of Thomistic ethics that the aim of environmental protection, in the context of sustainable development, is the implementation of the common good. This assumption is consistent with Thomistic social personalism (isolated from ethics), which recognises the primacy of the person over society. From the perspective of classical ontology (metaphysics) a person is a substantial being as opposed to society which is a secondary being (Bocheński, 1950). Society exists only in people. It is a group of people associated with each other through different relationships. The purpose of its existence is the realisation of the common good. The common good is not something abstract, it must take into account the interests of each individual man-person. The common good so understood may also have an ecological dimension. It is difficult to realise man's well-being in a devastated environment that exposes man and society to unnecessary risks. Nature must therefore be preserved for other people, by the moderate use of natural resources. Responsibility for nature results from the responsibility with respect towards another human being, understood as a human person.

Philosophical and ethical justification for this pro-ecological concept therefore requires man's well-being to be recognised as an object of sustainable development. Nature must be protected because its degradation will turn out to be bad for each individual person (and globally for the whole of humanity). It is not hard to see that we are dealing here with an approach called moderate anthropocentrism based on environmental ethics. To some extent it tries to adapt and *sustain* man's (society's) interests with the *development* of other species in nature (Ciszek, 2008). It should be emphasised that moderate anthropocentrism so conceived has nothing to do with the now discredited idea of strong anthropocentrism which treats nature as a reservoir of natural resources, that can be freely used.

On this ethical foundation one can justify all pro-ecological ideas, provided however, that they will not equate man's value to that of nature. The idea that man is the object of sustainable development, and not, for example nature can be further justified on the anthropological level. Anthropocentrism in Thomistic eco-ethics is person-centric. It emphasises that man is superior to other living beings in the natural environment. Man in an anthropological analysis appears as a psychophysical being i.e. a person. Thus he is a unique and most perfect of beings inhabiting nature. Only man can be described as a free and rational being who transcends nature which surrounds him. Thus, he is the subject of all pro-ecological actions, and not nature, which can only be the object of such interactions.

Conclusion

Thomistic environmental ethics is ethics with respect for man and nature. Its findings in anthropology and axiology, as well as their resulting imperatives are based on a realistic vision of reality. This reality is structured hierarchically.

This article showed that in Thomistic environmental ethics God is the highest good (*summum bonum*). This ethic is therefore primarily theocentric, and secondarily anthropocentric which is inscribed into the relationship between humans and other beings (but in a moderate form that is not a threat to nature). This follows on from the assumption, that God is the cause and source of the existence of all beings in nature. In metaphysical terms, they constitute a goodness, which should be cared for. However, not all beings occurring in nature have the same value in axiological terms. In Thomistic environmental ethics the autotelic value is man-person. Anthropocentrism in Thomistic eco-ethics is therefore person-centric. Unlike other natural beings, man is a psychophysical being, transcending nature which surrounds him. Therefore, a human person's dignity is the norm in Thomistic-personalistic eco-ethic morality. This value also regulates the relationship between humans and other beings inhabiting the Earth. However, these relationships cannot be based on man's domination over nature (within the meaning of strong anthropocentrism) or *domination* of nature over man-person (as proponents of bio-centric and eco-centric axiology would like in the postulates of *equalising* the human person with nature). Theocentric and person-centric axiology imposes on man the duty to care about the natural environment and the well-being of the human person. This duty is inscribed in natural law. An unspoiled natural environment consisting of non-human beings is of instrumental value, i.e. a value which is a means to achieving a superior goal (superior value). Without nature it is impossible to preserve human health and life, and consequently the well-being of each individual person. In this approach, the duty to demand respect for man-person is also the basis of respect for the natural environment. However, we will never achieve the superior goal if we do not change our lifestyle. Therefore, it is necessary to shape the ecological conscience and the necessary actions (moral fitness), which are described as virtues. These are the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and moderation. However, the staple holding together all the moral principles of Thomistic eco-ethics is love which regulates the relations between human individuals, as well as in the socio-natural environment.

The vision of Thomistic eco-ethics, outlined in this article, is consistent with the currently popular concept of sustainable development. In the author's

opinion Thomistic ethics is able to show the arguments in favour of accepting such a pro-ecological idea.

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