

# Environmental Ethics in Poland

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**Abstract** In the 1960s, western societies discovered that unlimited technological progress has a very high price that the environment pays. This was also the beginning of the discussions on the role of ethics in the protection of the environment and the moral aspects of nature exploitation. Even though the state of nature was not better in Poland, it took Polish philosophers a few decades to recognize the moral problem and to address it. The prevailing communistic propaganda of progress had blurred the perception of Polish people and they are unable to notice the environmental problem. Thus, only in the 1990s, after the fall of communism, Polish philosophers noticed that our approach to nature can have a moral aspect and we are exhausting the resources of the Earth. Since then, Environmental Ethics in Poland has been developed. Polish Environmental Ethics (PEE) is an interesting blend of inspiration from internationally recognized thinkers as well as original approaches to the ecological problem. The first wave of PEE addresses problems discussed abroad, namely the range of ethics (whom do we include into ethical consideration?) and the problem of values, analyzing them in the context of Polish culture and philosophical traditions. It also proposed original approaches developed by Henryk Skolimowski as well as approaches inspired by the problems considered from the perspective of Catholic theology. The article will give an insight into PEE and will present how these applied ethics have been received and cultivated in Poland in the so called first wave. It will also highlight the problems of the second wave of PEE.

**Keywords** Environmental ethics · Polish philosophy · Biocentrism · Axiology · First wave of Polish environmental ethics

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## Introduction

While Carson (1962) was awaking an awareness of ecological problems in the 1960s in the USA, in Poland the area of ecological problems was not even discussed and there may be just a few who realized that there was a problem. As in the other countries behind the Iron Curtain, in Poland the problem of the destruction of nature was of minimal concern. The government of the Polish People's Republic<sup>1</sup> was focused on industrialization and the priority was how to produce more steel (Olszewski 2011, p. 15) and not how to protect the environment. So, any obstacle in the way of development and industrialization was ignored. In the communistic ideology the environment was of little concern and it often paid a high price for industrial development. However, the government realized how huge the destruction of nature was and there was an awareness of the problem of pollution. Up to the 1970s, pollutions was not a consideration and in later years it was not much more visible (Ibidem). The imperative of industrialization was so strong that nature and the lives of workers had to be sacrificed for the development of economy.

Poland was the first country in the eastern block to realize how big the natural destruction was, but even though it was first it was still "much too late" (Ibidem). As Radosław Gawlik claims "the authorities knew that water from the rivers is not suitable even for industrial purposes, Silesia is suffocating, and lack of water sewage treatment plants is changing Masurian lakes into a cesspool." (Gawlik 2011, p. 17) However, this knowledge was not accompanied by actions; rather, it was hidden and censored. The book entitled "Czarna księga cenzury"<sup>2</sup> has shown how much the attention of censorship was devoted to masking the problems of destruction of nature and the threats to the natural environment. Moreover, the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party in the mid-1980s prepared a document presenting the threats to the environmental. This was not published and it was not presented to the public but it was exclusively available to the Party's elite. The picture drawn there was very pessimistic. Even though government was clear about the state of the natural environment, it was not willing to deal with this issue or even to make it public. The dictatorship of progress was prevailing and any voice advocating protection of nature was subdued and not allowed to interfere with development. Luckily, the analysis of the state of nature was adopted by the opposition who started a movement for the protection of nature.

Thus, before 1989 advocating for nature was also an act of opposition towards the communistic government (Kassenberg 2014, p. 6). Moreover, there was an inner contradiction in the governmental approach to this area. On the one hand, people were obliged to realize social goals and protecting nature was one of them, while on the other hand the maximization of production was one of the main goals of government and was very much in contradiction with the taking care of nature

<sup>1</sup> The name of the country under communism/the communist regime.

<sup>2</sup> The translation of the title is: "The Black Book of Censorship". The book presents texts and documents presenting the mechanism of communistic propaganda and exhibiting some of the contents that had been censored. The book was first published in 1977.

(Ibidem). This ambiguity made any social movement advocating for nature part of the opposition, at least until 1989.

### Sketch of the History of the Beginning of PEE

The historical context explains why environmental concern was raised in Poland almost two decades later, and in Polish academia three decades later, than in the USA and in Western countries. Even though, in the 1970s and in the 1980s, a group of scientists had raised the issue of the environment, the problems were made known to the governing elite and not to the public at large. Therefore, ethical reflection on the environment only emerged after the fall of communism and it has been very much a live issue since the 1990s. In 1995, during the sixth Polish Philosophical Congress in Torun, there was even a section on Environmental Philosophy. In the 1990s, we noticed the beginning and flourishing of environmental reflection in Polish philosophy. How vivid and diverse the movement was can be seen in Dołęga's (2006, pp. 18–19) typology of Environmental Philosophy listing 15 types of environmental philosophy cultivated in Poland. Moreover, the typology only covers the situation up to 2006, when the article was published. The Congress in Torun was an important event in the history of reflection on environmental issues in Poland. The Congress was the inspiration for the setting up of a scientific seminar that has met a few times a year to discuss environmental issues. For many years, it took the form of informal cooperation. In 2016, there has been a written agreement by the participants of the seminar to set out a framework for formal cooperation. The initiators of the meetings were four philosophers: Professor Józef M. Dołęga from Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Professor Zbigniew Hull from the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Professor Andrzej Papuziński from Kazimierz Wielki University and Professor Włodzimierz Tyburski from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun—the host city of the Congress. These four philosophers could be called the founders of environmental reflection in Polish philosophy and ethics. However, there were also other Polish philosophers working on environmental ethics and environmental philosophy.

One of the areas of interest was the ethical aspect of environmental protection and one of the most important contributors in those times was Marek Bonenberg (1992), the author of a book entitled “Etyka środowiskowa. Założenia i kierunki”.<sup>3</sup> According to Professor Tyburski, this was the first and very competent presentation of a variety of environmental ethics developed in Anglo-Saxon philosophical and ethical reflection (Tyburski 2006, p. 12). In this book, the author presented a wide spectrum of environmental ethics and prevailing discussions in this area. It includes the thoughts of Tom Regan, Robin Attfield, Paul W. Taylor, Aldo Leopold, J. Baird Callicott, Holmes Rolston III, Edward Goldsmith, Henryk Skolimowski and ideas like deep ecology, and the Gaia hypothesis. The book was an important introduction to Polish readers of the phenomenon of environmental ethics and it served as a tool for the popularization of the moral aspect of environmental protection.

<sup>3</sup> Translation of the title: “Environmental Ethics: Principles and Directions”.

In the 1990s, a few other books were published presenting an original approach towards the discipline. Professor Włodzimierz Tyburski made an important input into the development of PEE. He has a significant influence on its development and he set up the framework for discussions. His first books about the issues discussed were: “O idei humanizmu ekologicznego” (1990), “Pojednać się z Ziemią. W kręgu zagadnień humanizmu ekologicznego” (1993) and “Etyka i ekologia” (1995a, b).<sup>4</sup> These works present the main approaches to environmental ethics; they introduce and analyze the issue of values in applied ethics; they present the deontological interpretation of environmental ethics and the educational aspect of the discipline (Tyburski 2006, p. 13). These books have given the impulse for others to carry out research in environmental ethics and have started the intellectual debate within this field.

Later, other authors also contributed. Among the first published books, there are a few that have to be mentioned: “Ekofilozofia i bioetyka” (1996a),<sup>5</sup> “Ekonomia–ekologia–etyka” (1996b),<sup>6</sup> “Kryzys ekologiczny w świetle ekofilozofii” (1996),<sup>7</sup> “Etyka środowiskowa. Nowe spojrzenie na miejsce człowieka w przyrodzie” (1998),<sup>8</sup> “Etyka środowiskowa. Teoretyczne i praktyczne implikacje” (1998),<sup>9</sup> “Życie–nauka–ekologia. Prolegomena do kulturalistycznej filozofii ekologii” (1998),<sup>10</sup> “Próba zbudowania chrześcijańskiej etyki środowiska naturalnego” (1998) and “Rozdroża ekologii” (1999).<sup>11</sup> These are just few books that were published in Poland during first few years of reflection over environmental ethics; the first phase of movement can be called its first wave. The first wave of environmental ethics is constituted by the group of those thinkers who laid the foundations of PEE. Nowadays, many young philosophers address the problems and they continue the work of the representatives of the first wave or they start reflection in new areas of ethical concern over the environment.

<sup>4</sup> The titles of the books are: “On the Idea of Ecological Humanism”, “Unite with the Earth. Issues in Ecological Humanism” and “Ethics and Ecology”.

<sup>5</sup> English title: “Environmental Philosophy and Bioethics”; the book consists of the texts presented during the VI Polish Philosophy Congress in Torun by Philosophers like: Zdzisława Piątek, Włodzimierz Tyburski, Józef M. Dołęga, Zbigniew Hull, Andrzej Papuziński (editor Włodzimierz Tyburski).

<sup>6</sup> English title: “Economy–ecology–ethics”; book edited by Włodzimierz Tyburski, consisting of articles devoted to the analysis of axiological problems connected with the development of the economy.

<sup>7</sup> English title: “Environmental Crisis in the Light of Environmental Philosophy”, this book by Konrad Waloszczyk presents philosophical reflections on the ecological crisis.

<sup>8</sup> English title: “Environmental Ethics. New Insights into the position of Human Beings in Nature”. The book was written by Zdzisława Piątek, who uses biocentric perception to try to explain the role and the location of human beings in nature and their obligations towards the environment.

<sup>9</sup> English title: “Environmental Ethics. Theoretical and practical implications.” This book, edited by Włodzimierz Tyburski, presented the results of the first Polish conference on environmental ethics.

<sup>10</sup> English title: “Life – science – ecology. Prolegomenon to the Culturalistic Philosophy of Ecology”. This book by Andrzej Papuziński presented the original interpretation of the philosophy of ecology in the context of previous discussions by Polish Philosophers.

<sup>11</sup> These two books make an effort to interpret environmental ethics from the perspective of Catholic theology. Their English titles are: “Attempt to build Christian Ethics for a Natural Environment” (Julisław Łukomski) and “Crossroads of Ecology” (Tadeusz Ślipko and Andrzej Zwoliński).

However, it is not only books that represent the development of the discipline. There are at least two journals dealing with environmental issues from an ethical and a philosophical perspective, namely: *Studia Ecologiae et Bioethicae*<sup>12</sup> and *Problems of Sustainable Development*.<sup>13</sup> It has to be emphasized that articles presenting problems in the discipline have also been published in other journals incorporating this area of applied ethics into wider ethical discussions. As can be seen by the number of publications, the discipline has been interesting for Polish philosophers. However, numbers and quantitative approach never give an adequate insight into the matter of the subject itself. In the next paragraph, I will look to the more qualitative aspect, namely to the problems addressed by PEE.

### **Problems Addressed in the First Wave of PEE**

The history of first few years of environmental reflection in ethics has been quite dynamic and recently even more so. More philosophers have become interested in the issue. Even though the source of inspiration for the appearance of the discipline and for the problems addressed were mostly from Anglo-Saxon and German philosophers, the history and culture of the country has shaped the peculiar perception of it. PEE is a discipline that can be divided into two historical periods: the first wave that was developed from the start of PEE, which laid the foundation for further discussions, and the second wave—the contemporary philosophers and ethicists, students of the founders, their philosophical children, who either continue their work or develop their own original work. The first wave can be divided into four main research areas, two of them are connected with the two most frequently asked questions in environmental ethics (See Brennan and Lo 2016) namely questions about frames of ethical consideration and environmental values. The other two are the ecophilosophy of Henryk Skolimowski and the opposition to Skolimowski's philosophy—environmental ethics inspired by Catholic theology and teaching.

### **Dispute Over the Frames of Ethical Consideration**

Setting the frames for ethical consideration is one of the crucial issues that environmental ethics undertakes. The privileged position of human beings is very flattering for us and it makes us feel that we can subdue nature in so many areas. The anthropocentric approach is the subject of doubt for many environmental ethicists and it has been questioned in philosophy since at least the time of Nietzsche (Gunkel 2012, p. 109). Even though human beings rely strictly on nature and on the ecosystem, we do not treat nature as it should be treated and natural goods are overexploited making our natural debt bigger than ever before. Therefore, setting

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<sup>12</sup> Founded in 2003 by Dołęga in the Institute of Ecology and Bioethics of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw.

<sup>13</sup> Founded in 2006 by Artur Pawłowski from Lublin University of Technology.

the wider context for our ethical consideration and including nature and the natural world in our ethical choices is a very challenging task. It reaches the roots of our cultural identity as a species that rules over the world and changes the world according to its fancies and whims. We operate under the illusion that we can control nature. We forget that we are dependent on nature.

In such an intellectual atmosphere, when someone comes along saying that we are not different from the other beings in the natural world it creates a controversy and it disrupts the way we think about nature and our place in it. The first one in Poland to declare herself as a biocentrist was Professor Zdzisława Piątek. In her book “Etyka środowiskowa. Nowe spojrzenie na miejsce człowieka w przyrodzie”, she presented the theoretical aspect of reframing the ethical borders of moral consideration. Piątek tries to answer the question of the relation of new ethics to traditional ethical approaches and the role of ethics in our relations with others, emphasizing that biocentrism approves:

- Not only human beings, but also nonhuman living organisms have an intrinsic value.
- Not only human beings, but also nonhuman living organisms have an awareness proper to them of vital values and know how to live according to their nature.
- Every living organisms is the measure of those aspects of the environment, with which it co-works to live.
- The biosphere should not be exploited and managed only from the perspective of human interests (Piątek 1998, pp. 11–12).

Biocentrism demands the rejection of speciesism and this new thinking is a way of thinking that can be achieved when philosophy is rethought in the context of new scientific discoveries and is a fruit of critical thinking on the subject of the place of human beings in the universe. The ontological gap between human beings and other living beings has to be removed. The theory of evolution has provided the reasons to overcome homocentrism and anthropomorphism (Piątek 1998, p. 13). According to Piątek, the “The theory of evolution is a test of the neutral perception of living Nature. It rejects the illusion of anthropocentrism and it overcomes the tendency to accept teleological explanations (...) some illusions may be fully justified in the techno sphere but, when they are projected to the biosphere, they do not make sense.” (Ibidem) Unlike Paul Taylor, for Piątek living organisms are not teleological centers of life. Teleology is reserved for artefacts, for the technological world not for the natural one. However, Piątek recognizes Taylor’s philosophy as the most appropriate in terms of enabling human beings to live harmoniously with the other living organisms on Earth. Thus the classical ladder of beings is changed.<sup>14</sup> It becomes the tree of life where the human race is just one of the branches of the tree. The branch is not better than the others. It is equal to all other branches, thus human

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<sup>14</sup> This is the ladder of beings inspired by Aristotelian and Thomistic Philosophy, whose basis is pure matter, followed by the elements and the plants, above which there is the animal world and above the animal kingdom is the human being, the highest element of the natural world on the ladder. Only angels are higher and God Himself is on the top of the ladder.

beings are dethroned from the center of the universe and become just another element of the natural ecosystem.

Human beings are not different from other living organisms in the natural ecosystem, so a differentiation between human living organisms and nonhuman living organisms is not valid, both are equal. Both groups have their unique qualities and their special place in the natural ecosystem. Each one has an intrinsic value and the value of natural organisms does not depend on its utility for human beings, it is valuable in itself. Arrogant anthropocentrism has to be rejected and we should employ the attitude of neutral observer of the natural world. This attitude, especially biocentric egalitarianism, has been criticized, since in a non-hierarchical world there are no norms directing preferences towards choosing the norm (Wróblewski 2002, p. 80). If there is no hierarchy in the world of values, there are no moral values. Then, all values are same. However, biocentric ethics can be accepted for pragmatic purposes. Even though the theoretical background is not perfect it has a great capacity to stimulate environmental thought and actions (Wróblewski 2002, p. 81).

The declaration of Professor Piątek as biocentrist makes her an important figure in PEE. Her declaration has been admired and followed by some, but it has been criticized by others. Therefore I present the discussion on her framework of ethical consideration based on her works.<sup>15</sup> The wider discussion on the context of moral consideration has been mostly focused on the theory of the four following approaches: anthropocentrism,<sup>16</sup> biocentrism, holism and animal ethics (Tyburski 1999, pp. 101–113).<sup>17</sup> The latter has recently been experiencing a revival and it is one of the most original and promising areas of research in Poland.

## The Axiology of PEE

The other most important question of environmental ethics, namely the question about values has also been a subject of debate in PEE. One of the main disputants in this area is Professor Włodzimierz Tyburski. His philosophical background is his education in Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun and most of his research work has been devoted to ethics and axiology. His work is inspired by the eminent Polish philosopher from Nicolaus Copernicus University, namely Henryk

<sup>15</sup> On the other side of the barricade is anthropocentrism, trying to protect the traditional approach. The dispute over anthropocentrism in PEE has been limited in Poland. There are some glimpses in the Catholic inspired PEE area. Catholic philosophers protected the tradition Aristotelian-Thomistic perception of the hierarchy of beings. However, there were critical about perceiving human being as too privileged. For example Tadeusz Ślipko has written about anthropolatry (from the Greek terms: *ἄνθρωπος*—human being and *λατρεία*—adoration). The term means that the human being is not only the center of world but also a subject of quasi religious cult. (See Ślipko and Zwoliński 1999, p. 105).

<sup>16</sup> In many forms from strong to weak or—as the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy calls it—prudential or even cynical (Brennan and Lo 2016).

<sup>17</sup> However, it is not the only typology of environmental ethics. The other popular one was inspired by Teutsh and proposes the following approaches: egocentric (the approach to environmental protection that protects the interests of certain individuals or social groups); anthropocentric, patocentric (from Latin *patiens*—suffering, proclaiming ethical consideration for every sentient being); biocentric and holistic (see Pawłowska 1993).

Elzenberg, whose main research area was axiology and who has set a tradition, in Torun University, of philosophical reflection over values. So, the continuation of the research interest of the university is clearly visible in the issues analysed by Tyburski in environmental ethics. According to Tyburski, the construction of a catalogue of values and norms has to enable the following:

1. Solving conflict between human beings and the natural environment.
2. Moral judgement of human actions oriented on environment.
3. Motivating to act for preserving and protecting the environment, thereby sustaining such a state of environment that is safe, beneficial for the human world as well as for animals and plants.” (Tyburski 1999, p. 114).

Values as stated by Henryk Skolimowski, are the guardians of natural goods (Skolimowski 1993, p. 189); they play a crucial role in protecting the environment and are like a lighthouse showing the way to people on the sea of life. Tyburski proposes the division of environmental values to two groups:

1. Values that are the aims themselves: life and health.
2. Values that are the way to an aim: responsibility, moderation, justice, solidarity/community.

The first group has a crucial role in the axiology of environmental ethics, it is a category of values that are of tremendous importance and are valuable in themselves. No other conditions have to be realized to find them important or relevant for environmental ethics. In this group, Tyburski lists two values—life and health. Life is a fundamental value in biocentric ethics that has made the life of the organism a criterion for protection and care. This criterion puts some organisms within the context of ethics and puts the others far beyond this, making them irrelevant for ethical consideration. As Schweitzer’s philosophy motto says: “I am life that wants to live, in the midst of life that wants to live.” Life is a crucial value for environmental ethics, but it is also problematic one. Since life is present in bacteria or insects as well as in human beings, this makes the category of life problematic. The problematic equality of life itself has been answered in various ways. One of the solutions to the problem was delivered by Skolimowski who said that the greater the complexity of the organism the greater is their right to be protected and to live. Thus the problematic insects will retreat in their fight for survival with human beings.<sup>18</sup>

The other crucial value that is an aim itself is health. It is one of the most underappreciated values and probably the humblest one that is recognized as precious only when it is lost. As in the Polish poem from the end of the XVI century “my good and noble health. Thou matt’r eth more than wealth. None know’th thy worth until Thou fad’st, and we fall ill” (Kochanowski 2007). It is a value that is

<sup>18</sup> It is however doubtful if ever we will have a situation in which we will have to choose to save an insect or human being, however this imaginary conflict is very functional when we speak about the equality of protected living organisms.



transparent, it is like Jonas' heuristic concept of fear, when he explains the subtle presence of goodness, that is not noticed until it is lost, while something bad is more apparent and visible. Health has the same characteristic. Without it, nothing can be done and nothing contributes more to the quality of life. However, it is a silent witness of our life that remains humble and stays unnoticed, hence it is often neglected. An ecological crisis raises many questions about human health; new environmental problems bring diseases and lead to previously unknown threats to human life.

There is another group of values that are equally important and they play a regulative role in the human-nature relationship (Tyburski 1999, p. 120), since they determine behavior and human choices. These are the values that are the way to moral choices in environmental protection. It has to be emphasized that Tyburski is one of the most recognized Polish environmental ethicists: his works are iconic and serve as a roadmap in the world of Polish environmental ethics.

The influence of German Philosophy can also be seen in PEE (Konstańczak 2006, p. 210). It can be seen in the reflection over the philosophy of responsibility. The paradigm of philosophy started by Georg Picht and propagated by Hans Jonas and his student Dieter Birnbacher has also been a subject of wide discussion in Poland. Generally, the category of responsibility has been widely discussed in Poland.<sup>19</sup> One of the contributors to this discussion was Helena Ciążela (2006), who made a comparison between the theoretical basis of philosophy of responsibility and its practical application by Arelcio Peccei and the Roman Club. The philosopher recognizes the role that philosophy of Georg Picht has had in building the theoretical framework for the responsibility over nature. Even though the Jonas philosophy is much more evident, it was Picht who laid the foundation for thinking about the environment as a subject of our responsibility. This responsibility is a central category of global ethics, it is a category that has been rejected and needs to be brought back to ethics and made to constitute our responses to global challenges. Responsibility is the foundation of the enlightened utopia postulated by Georg Picht. According to Picht, we cannot escape thinking about the future, thus we often tend to finish constructing some sort of utopia (or, as is the etymology of the word, "a place that does not exist"). However, if our thinking about utopia is critical we do not create this non-existing place but rather, as a result of enlightened thinking, the place that can exist in future. If the methodical criticism is used, the picture of the future is not utopian but it is a realistic one. Being responsible for the world makes us use rationality in the right way and helps us to create not u-topos but a possible world for the future.

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<sup>19</sup> One of the greatest contributions is that made by Jacek Filek, who has presented responsibility as a philosophical category in the philosophies of chosen, mostly German thinkers, thus presenting an interesting study on the issue. The study that enables one to learn how the concept of responsibility has been understood in philosophy and how has it changed over the years, among analysed concepts there were reflections of the following philosophers: Edmund Husserl, Nicolai Hartmann, Martin Buber, Eberhard Grisebach, Wilhelm Weischedel, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Georg Picht, Richard Wisser, Roman Ingarten, Johannes Schwartländer, Manfred Riedel, Hans Jonas and Emmanuel Levinas. (More in: Filek 1996, 2004, 2010).

An example of enlightened utopia is the work done by the Club of Rome that has been an eye-opener for the public. The reports prepared for the Club have attracted the interest of the mass-media thus informing the public about the problems of the environment, often in a very alarmistic manner. The structure of the Club has enabled its members to undertake actions leading a rise in global responsibility. In the Club, people from the worlds of academia, business and politics have met to solve global challenges. As Picht had postulated, it has changed the traditional structures in which problems had been analysed. People that met in the discussion forums of the Club were representing various approaches to the world, various interests, various outlooks (sometimes even contradictory towards each other). The aim of the Club was to initiate discussions over global challenges, that had not been discussed in traditional research institutions or other forums. The impressive role of the Club in preparing such accurate reports and the use of systems of thinking methods, and the work of the Club is an example that a utopia of responsible worlds can be realized when right and reasonable tools are employed. Thinking about values has constituted an important part of the discussion of environmental ethics and it is an important input for PEE. It is also one of the trends that is being developed. New ideas and trends are being implemented in the second wave.

## Environmental Ethics Inspired by Catholic Teaching

The environmental crisis is a very complex and multi-layered phenomenon, it can be analysed from various perspectives, not just from the perception of ethics and philosophy but also from a religious one. In PEE, a movement has become apparent that tries to analyze the moral obligations of man towards nature in the context of Catholic theology and teachings. In other European countries it was usual that Protestants developed ethical frameworks for ecological inclusiveness in theology. In Poland,<sup>20</sup> mostly because of the quantitative advantage of Catholics, the eco-theology tended to be Catholic.

Theologians addressing environmental issues have tried to deal with the ecological crisis from the perspective of the “Christian concept of a human being, whose connections with nature also have ethical meaning” (Łukomski 2000, 35). They make an attempt to construct realistic and personalistic ethics regarding the natural environment. There are answers to environmental ethics inspired by Far Eastern philosophies, such as those proposed by Skolimowski and by Naess. The theoretical framework for this approach has a few sources of inspiration: the thinking of John Paul II, Catholic teaching, Polish Neo-Thomistic Philosophy and personalism. This philosophy is an anthropocentric one, it is built on the hierarchy of human beings as higher on the classical ladder of beings, where human beings rule over nature. However, the context of the famous quotation from Genesis that according to White (1967) is the root of destruction of nature by Judeo-Christian religions has been analysed widely. White’s words have been rejected on the basis of the claim that the quote has been misunderstood and led to an imperfect

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<sup>20</sup> The Catholic Church in Poland in 2014 had almost 33.5 million followers from a population of 38.5 million (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland, 2015).

understanding of the role of human beings in protecting the rest of nature rather just cruelly ruling over it without considering its natural constraints.

The basis of Catholic inspirations are the words of Popes, mostly Paul VI and John Paul II. The first one mostly emphasized the problem of unequal distribution of goods. However, in 1970, during the meeting with the representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organisation he recognized that intensive agriculture had led to an unbalanced ecosystem that might lead in future to an ecological crisis. He urged his listeners to rethink the scale of humans' interference with the Earth. He also emphasized the deep respect for nature that underlies Christian tradition (Ślipko and Zwoliński 1999, p. 24). Many more remarks on our obligations towards the natural world can be found in the teachings of John Paul II, who recognized the correlation between care for the natural world and a society built on peace. The world as created by God is the kind of good that has to be managed by man in a good and wise way, without overusing it and unbalancing natural order. We should rein back unlimited and greedy consumption. Our duty is to stop our progression towards a civilization of trash, a civilization of waste. A culture based on consumption leads to the destruction of basic human values and it destroys the value of human life. Unlimited consumption is dangerous not only for nature but also for ourselves. Rather than aiming to "have" we should aim to "be".

Thus the basic teaching of the Popes is that the Earth is a gift from God and the natural world is a heritage that belongs to all mankind. The premise from this teaching is that the gift given by God makes us responsible for keeping the natural environment in such a state that it could serve higher goals than it has. Man has an obligation to rule over nature and its components in a wise way and with love (Ślipko and Zwoliński 1999, p. 49). The practical aspect is overcoming the prevailing paradigm of a life-style based on consumption and the adoption of more moderate lifestyles in terms of consumer goods. Also, the other practical aspect is to protect the environment and to make efforts to restore those ecosystems that have been destroyed by human beings. Thus, on the basis of Catholic teaching, philosophy has tried to construct Christian environmental ethics, whose first rule is: "man has a right and obligation to treat the world according to its triple function in shaping the moral excellence of the human being as a person. Thus he should respect the natural status of the natural environment, protect it from devastation and use it within the framework designed by the ratio of reasonable harmonization with the entitlements that man has" (Ślipko and Zwoliński 1999, p. 139).

Under the influence of theological reflections, PEE has employed a few terms of theological origin, such as ecological conscience, meaning as a special inner power that enables one to make ethical choices in terms of environmental protection. This term and the term "ecological sin" have been also included in public discussion about the ecological crisis. The terms have appeared in a television campaign (in 2010) by the Ministry of Environment that aimed at teaching proper waste management. The light and funny plot of the short spots make this an easy way to make the terms part of public discussion. Therefore, terms with a theological background have become widely known to the public as the symbols of moral aspects of environmental protection.

## Henryk Skolimowski's Ethics

Finally, yet importantly is the philosophy of Henryk Skolimowski, the most original approach in PEE, yet a very controversial one. He has built an original concept of ecophilosophy<sup>21</sup> with interesting ethical dimensions. First of all, he has rejected the traditional philosophies, especially the following ones: (1) Mechanistic conception of the world (Isaac Newton, Pierre Simon de Laplace); (2) *Homo homini lupus est*, man as an egoist (Thomas Hobbes); (3) The invisible hand of the market (Adam Smith); (4) The Theory of Class Warfare (Carl Marks, Friedrich Engels). These four are to be blamed for ethics built on: control, manipulation, efficiency, competition and reification of the world. So, for new ethics they have to be rejected and substituted with more constructive values that the universe needs now. The values for the new ethics are: reverence for life; responsibility for the environment; sympathy/compassion; moderation/temperance; diversity. Skolimowski's approach is inspired by Far Eastern philosophies mostly by Buddhism and Hinduism. However, among Western philosophies he mentions the following inspirations: St. Francis of Assisi, Benedict Spinoza, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer and Teilhard de Chardin.

The foundations of his ecophilosophy were first published in *Ecological Humanism*, (1975) and in *Eco-philosophy: Designing New Tactics for Living* in the mid-1980s. The second one was the crucial work, where he also explains his concept of environmental ethics. Skolimowski claims to call his work a reflection an ecological ethics, since, according to him, environmental ethics “concerns itself with the appropriate management of natural resources and is often guided by cost-benefit analysis” (Skolimowski 1984, p. 45), while ecological ethics “is much broader as it spells out the relationships between man and nature; and also analyses those attributes of man which can make him an ecological animal” (Ibidem). In both types of ethics, values play a fundamental role, and it is crucial to recognize the intrinsic value of life and living forms that deserve our respect. Skolimowski emphasizes that “the conservation strategy is a value programme” (Ibidem). The first step towards the discovery of the value of the world is right thinking. Right thinking leads to right actions. In our thinking about the world and conservation, we have to learn how to include values and the environment. Values are like the road signs that show the right way and lead to the right choices, to the right conservation—conservation is nothing else other than caring, caring for nature seen as a being that has an intrinsic value rather than as a property. In conserving nature, we have to recognize its uniqueness and we need to see ourselves as nothing other than the guardians of the sacred universe. We are obliged to be responsible for the universe and yet it is a great privilege to serve in a sanctuary of the world and to save life in all its diversity. Every form of nature is an important part and has to be protected regardless of its current value for man. Even though it may not seem significant, it is one of the elements of a wider unity and man has no right to interfere in a way that will destroy the integrity of the ecosystem.

<sup>21</sup> Skolimowski coined the term “Ecophilosophy” which is used in Poland to embrace all philosophical reflection over the human-nature relation and ecological crises.

Skolimowski was one of the first thinkers who employed the concept of stewardship, instead of ruling over nature. As he emphasizes “man did not weave a web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself” (Ibidem, p. 46). We are just a part of an evolutionary processes and we have to accept evolution and its results. He suggests the following precepts (imperatives) that can be “extricated from an intelligent reading of evolution:

- Behave in such a way as to preserve and enhance the unfolding of evolution and all its riches.
- Behave in such a way as to preserve and enhance life, which is a necessary condition for carrying on evolution.
- Behave in such a way as to preserve and enhance the ecosystem, which is a necessary condition for further enhancement of life and consciousness.
- Behave in such a way as to preserve and enhance the capacities which are the highest developed form of the evolved universe: consciousness, creativeness, compassion.
- Behave in such a way as to preserve and enhance human life which is the vessel in which the most precious achievements of evolution are contained” (Ibidem, p. 49).

These are the five evolutionary imperatives; they are nothing more than variations of the idea that nature has to be protected in its all diversity. The followers of deep ecology have criticized the Skolimowski’s imperative as too anthropocentric. In his defense, he claimed that old-fashioned anthropocentrism cannot be found in his imperatives. He has been very critical about egalitarianism as postulated by biocentrism. According to him, the right understanding of evolution does not give same value to the life of a mosquito and of a human being. He claims that an egalitarian approach is “also against the *modus operandi* of nature; and of all of evolution” (Ibidem, p. 50). He has also been critical of deep ecology for their view on the population, namely the concept that returning to original natural conditions of hunter-gather societies would lead to the elimination of 80% of the world population, thus leading to massive genocide. This postulate is hidden in the concept of deep ecology. The other point of criticism was that the platform of deep ecology, is according to Skolimowski not comprehensive enough to realise all of the aims that deep ecology announces. Also, in his disputes with deep ecology proponents, he was very critical about their connections with radical environmental movements like Earth First.

Skolimowski’s ethics were much more open to social issues than those of other environmental ethicists. He emphasized the role of harmonious cooperation in nature as well as in society. The relations in nature and the relations between people should mirror and exemplify the good and harmonious relations between human beings and nature. He claims that the “self-reliance of individuals and nations is one side of the coin; ecological diversity is the other side of this coin. In order to do justice to the variety of lands, climates, circumstances and traditions we have to cultivate diversity in ecological, agricultural (as well as in cultural) terms. Because this diversity is the basis of self-reliance; and vice versa; self-reliance in the vastly

varied circumstances of our globe, and within different traditions simply means encouraging and maintaining diversity. Diversity means heterogeneity; it means the opposite of homogeneity. Homogeneity profits central economies, as in high-tech homogeneity. Heterogeneity profits local people; it enables them to be self-reliant; ultimately it enables them to be responsible and good stewards (Ibidem).”

Skolimowski’s thinking is presented at the end even though it should perhaps have opened the discussion, because, historically, he was the first environmental philosopher of Polish origin. The reason for such a sequence of presentation is that most of his influential works were written while he was working abroad at universities in the USA. Nevertheless, he played an important role in Polish environmental thought and he is recognized as one of the most interesting and original thinkers. His thinking has been an inspiration for many and it has encouraged reflection on the concept of environmental ethics in those who did not agree with his concepts.

## Future Development of PEE

The concepts described above can be called the first wave of environmental ethics and environmental philosophy in Poland; these are the thoughts and ideas of the first generation of philosophers who were inspired by the ecological crisis and who tried to analyze it in the context of philosophical or ethical reflection. I focused deliberately on the beginning of the reflection and on the very early works in PEE since these concepts have laid the foundation for further development. These philosophers started environmental reflection in Poland. Some of them are still active and all of them still have an impact on the development of the discipline. In some way, they are like the founders of the discipline who will always be quoted and remembered by their future followers. Some of the books quoted here are as iconic as *Walden or Life in the Woods* or *Silent Spring* are for American environmental philosophy. What is interesting is also the direction in which the discipline will develop. It seems as if some directions will be strengthened and some new areas of reflection are appearing. Let us look at the possible future developments even though it is hard to know what the future reflection will look like and all scenarios are just probabilities and there are no certainties. However, on the basis of current discussions at environmental philosophy seminars and current publishing activity we can anticipate what kind of reflection will be continued in future by the representatives of the first wave as well by the emerging generation of the second wave as presented below.

On the basis of the current analysis it seems that there is a huge interest in axiological reflection. There are many interesting works being done on the value of moderation in the context of de-growth and zero growth ideas. Thus the concept of minimal life has become the corner stone of philosophical analysis at environmental philosophy seminar and in the articles (see Stachowska 2016a, b). While this value is the high ideal which is being analysed as a practical activity, it is virtue that plays a tremendous role as a practical application of values. Environmental virtue ethics is an emerging area of reflection that has been discussed, and we can see the

renaissance of virtue ethics in the reflection on human flourishing that has also entered environmental discussions (see Dzwonkowska 2013, 2014, 2016a, b).<sup>22</sup>

The other field that could constitute a second wave of environmental ethics is the continuation of theological-religious reflections understood in a very wide context. There is a certain amount of interesting research on religious aspects of the human-nature relationship, like the one analyzing White's (1967) claim that Judeo-Christian religions are to be blamed for the ecological crisis (Sadowski 2015). Moreover, Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* has raised more interest in Polish academia than in the Polish Church and a few interesting initiatives (conferences and publications) have been undertaken in this area.

However, the most vivid and promising development is in the area of animal ethics. Research from many disciplines has been undertaken on the problem of ethical obligations towards non-human others and the human-animal relationship.<sup>23</sup> This area of research has been a part of environmental ethics (Tyburski 1999). It has become a subject of research for which the term animal ethics or even animal philosophy would not be sufficiently broad. It is rather human-animal studies—an interdisciplinary approach that analyses the nature of the relation of human beings to non-human others.

## Summary

The overview of PEE presented above is a very general one. It has been a quick look over few chosen concepts than a reflection on them. The panorama of Polish Environmental Ethics is much wider than this. However, the composition of this article has forced me to highlight a few of the most visible and widely discussed problems or philosophers that can be summed up in the four problems and trends of the first wave of PEE presented above. As can be seen, PEE is a blend of concept and ideas inspired by the ideas of Anglo-Saxon or German philosophers. However, the reception of the thought has been connected with the specific historical and cultural background. At the beginning, these works were very important in promoting discussion on international literature. The development of discipline has produced original approaches that were developed during the first wave of Polish environmental ethics. Time is still needed to see how these approaches will influence the development of the second wave of PEE.

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<sup>22</sup> In May 2016 Institute of Philosophy at Nicolaus Copernicus University organized conference on Environmental Virtue Ethics.

<sup>23</sup> One of the most impressive initiatives was opening in 2014 Laboratory on Animal Studies—Third Culture, it is a research group uniting researchers from various disciplines and institutions to carry out research on animals and human-animal relation.



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