

3. Values in environmental ethics

The term “value” is taken from economy and it means relative worth, utility, or importance. This term is also one of the most often used in the moral philosophy and there word “value” denote the moral ideal that we aim to, applying values to a life is equal to living a good life in a moral sense. Moral values are of special kind because there is special kind of obligation. Whenever I notice that value is needed I feel obligation to realize it. It is the characteristic only of moral values. There is ongoing discussion about which values constitute the good life. The values that are crucial in environmental ethics are those that recognize the moral standing of nature and enable including it to our moral choices. One of the axiological¹ cornerstones of environmental ethics is the concept of intrinsic value of nature. The intrinsic value of a human, any other animal or ecosystem, is value which originates within itself, the value it confers on itself by desiring its own lived experience as an end in itself. Intrinsic value is often opposed to instrumental value of nature which means that we appreciate nature only for the benefits we derive from its usage.

Values in environmental ethics

There are many environmental values that are discussed in literature. Włodzimierz Tyburski, a polish environmental ethicist, suggested to discriminate values as an aim itself (life and health) and values that are a road to an aim (responsibility, moderation, solidarity). To the following presentation of these values I add an environmental justice, which I find also crucial in terms of environmental protection.

Life

Life here is understood as life of every living being, thus the human life is not the only that deserves protection according to environmental ethicists. One of the examples of philosophy that appreciate life in every form is Paul Taylor, who introduced biocentric philosophy. According to him every living organism has its intrinsic value and moral standing. All organisms are teleological (=goal-directed) centers of life, which means that they realize goals typical for their form of life. Thus we cannot evaluate the other forms of being in human

¹ Axiology is philosophical study on values.

criteria, because every living beings has its own goals. Taylor introduces also biocentric egalitarianism, which claims that all living organisms are equally important. Thus, human beings are not privileged members of the earth's community of life, in fact they shouldn't be shown more respect than any other living organism.

Health

This is one of the values that is threatened the most when nature degradation and technology appears. We have compelling evidence that climate change has a negative influence on our health, we know also that highly processed food is unhealthy for us. We could give many other examples of how our culture creates an environment that is not good for our health. Even though, health is one of the most crucial values in our lives we usually tend to appreciate it only if we are in threat of losing it. Many people do not take proper care for themselves and choose lifestyles that are not good for them. Thus, we should be aware of the value of health and we should learn how to provide it for ourselves and our communities.

Responsibility

Antoine Saint-Exupéry said that to be a man is, precisely, to be responsible. After the Second World War philosophers raised the question of responsibility for the cruelty that happened, some of them claim that responsibility is the only way we could morally answer to the world after holocaust. Moreover, being responsible enables us crossing a border between „I” and outer world and reply to the moral challenges in the right way. The very unique contribution to responsibility was one provided by Hans Jonas in *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* published in 1979. He claimed that we are responsible for nature. We are responsible because our ability to influence nature grows together with technological development. And responsibility is connected with power the bigger power one have the bigger responsibility he holds. Thus, we should act to prevent nature destruction and a special kind of responsibility is hold by politicians, whose power is bigger than power of average person, thus they hold the biggest responsibility for natural protection.

There are two kinds of responsibility: negative and positive one. The negative one is responsibility for one's actions. After doing something we are responsible for what have been done by us. While the positive one is responsibility for something, someone or some issue, like

a parent is responsible for a child. It's derived from the term „to respond” from two sources: law (it's responding in front of the court) and religion (it's responding in front of the highest judge – God). In many countries law regulates the first kind of responsibility, so we should focus also on the second kind of responsibility. And act in a way that shows that we are responsible for nature and we include this responsibility to our moral choices.

We are responsible also for future generations because the more resources we use the less they will have. This prospective concept of responsibility have few difficulties. First of all we do not know with absolute certainty what future generations will need. We can only assume that they will need same resources as we find the most important. However, we do not know whether future modes of transportation will rely on fossil fuels or what kind of resources it will use. The other important issue is question about the time frame, namely for how many generations we should provide resources? This question is also impossible to answer, we have no idea how many people will live after us and thus we have no possibility to estimate how much of the resources will they use. The third objection is similar to the first one, the critics of responsibility for future generations says that it is possible that effect of our destructive actions will be beneficial for future generations. For example due to human engineering future people might appreciate the higher level of CO₂ in the atmosphere. The fourth difficulty is that no one can advocate for the interests of future generations. There is no official body or governmental unit that will secure any right for those who are unborn yet. Despite this theoretical difficulties we have a moral intuition that tells us that it is unfair to use the resources without considering those who will come after us.

Moderation

One of the factors that contribute the most to nature destruction is consumerism. In Western societies people consume extreme amount of resources. For example the average rates at which people consume resources like oil and metals, and produce wastes like plastics and greenhouse gases, are about 32 times higher in North America, Western Europe, Japan and Australia than they are in the developing world. As Baudrillard notices: “we are at the point where consumption is laying hold of the whole of life” (1998: 29).

The members of Western society contribute to resource depletion and planet degradation. That is why the value of moderation is crucial to stop careless resource usage and wastage. To use the value of moderation properly we can apply to the Aristotelian

understanding of virtue, which he defines as a golden mean between the two extremes of excess and deficiency, and a virtuous person is disposed to apply the most appropriate action in a certain situation. As Aristotle writes, “both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasures and pain may be felt both too much or too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is both intermediate and the best, and this is characteristic of the virtue” (Aristotle, book 2, chapter 6). What is intermediate is the form of success; what is one of the extremes – either excess or deficiency – is a failure. Thus moderation would be some sort of golden mean between consumerism and extreme limitation of resource access.

Solidarity

This value enables us to feel a special bond or connection with our environment. Aldo Leopold claimed that we are a part of biotic community, and we are one body with the natural environment. Thus, we have a moral obligation to take care for nature and provide a stability and integrity of our natural environment. Acting against it is morally wrong. According to Leopold we are just a members of wider, biotic community, we are not privileged in any way. Thus, in our moral choices we should focus on securing what is good for the whole community, the individual interests doesn't count.

Justice

Since publication of John Rawls' book on *A Theory of Justice* (1971) the question of social **justice** is widely discussed in philosophy. Even though Rawls himself didn't mean to discuss justice in an international terms, many philosophers analyzes his theories in terms of global moral obligations. The very crucial ethical questions in this context are: whether we are morally obliged to all human beings?; whether the disproportions between income all over the world are of any moral relevance?; whether the world wealth should be distributed in a more equal way? These questions about the global justice are answered in various ways by moral philosophers (see: Web-01). For example some claim that Rawlsian principles (mainly: fair equality and opportunity and difference principles) should be applied on a global scale (Caney 2005a, 2005b, Moellendorf 2002). While the other thinkers believe that we should ground justice on a basis of capabilities (Nussbaum 2006) or human rights (Pogge 2008). Except

philosophers also theologians are more and more concerned about the issue of global justice. The issue of global justice is crucial in terms of environmental protection, because the poorest ones are those who will suffer the most due to environmental degradation. Even though, the poor has very little impact on global emissions, they will suffer climate change the most, since most of them earn their living in agriculture and fisheries. So any changes in the weather, especially extreme weather events occurrence, can threaten their crops or catch. This is the reason why climate variabilities and extreme weather events influence co-called **intra-generational injustice**. The concept of intra-generational justice applies to the just behavior within one generation, mostly deals with an unequal wealth distribution. While **intergenerational justice** concerns about the moral character of relation between different generations, for example tries to answer what are the consequences of our usage of resources for the next generation and whether this has a moral relevance.

Caney, S., 2005a, "Cosmopolitan Justice, Responsibility, and Global Climate Change," *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 18 (4): 747–775.

Caney, S. (2005b) *Justice Beyond Borders*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moellendorf, D. (2002) *Cosmopolitan Justice*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Nussbaum, M. (2006) *Frontiers of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Pogge, T. (2008) *World Poverty and Human Rights*. Cambridge: Polity Press (second edition).

Web-01 – Brock Gillian, Global Justice, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (spring 2017 edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://stanford.library.sydney.edu.au/entries/justice-global/#GloIntJus> (22.11.2019).