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SOME REMARKS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF ECOLOGY

„Universities must give future generations education and training that will teach them and through them others, to respect the great harmonies of their natural environment and of life itself”.

The Magna Charta of European Universities
Bologna, 18 September 1988

At the beginning I want to refer to English summary of prof. Manfred Stöckler's paper with the purpose of clarifying my position according to the principle *omnis determinatio est negatio*. Firstly, my point is opposite to „scientific” conception of nature, which establishes the sharp demarcation line between theoretical knowledge of nature and environmental ethics. Secondly, I am not so sure whether, as prof. Stöckler writes, „we do not need a teleological conception of nature to justify the care for the environment”. Still another difference between us: my opinion is different from prof. Stöckler's view, because I want to propagate such a conception of relationship between man and nature, that is (I quote prof. Stöckler's) „weak from a theoretical point of view, but strong enough to be useful in its practical consequences”. I do not contend that I have found the right answer to the problem.

I

There is no need to demonstrate how dangerous for humanity is to disturb, and what is more-even to violate the established balance between man as a natural being and the same man as a social being. It is evident that our natural environment has been put into a great danger which requires from man

quite new attitude to himself and to nature. The question concerns not only a new attitude of political authorities or political and economical institutions. This question is located on a more fundamental level, namely on the level of existence of an individual human being-existence of a particular man. If the total change of the relationship of man to nature is to become a real fact, the whole existence of an individual must undergo a fundamental transformation. This transformation must include man's sensitivity and thinking, his habits and aims, his way of life in nature, and his image of nature.

In this process of global transformation an important role should be played by the educational system. From his early childhood an individual must get into the way of considering the living nature, plants, animals not only as objects that serve us, and are destined to satisfy the human needs. They should be considered as creatures having their own telos that must be respected. In brief: the problem is as follows: what are the philosophical (ontological) premises on which a radical change of man could be achieved? This change should manifest itself in a new vision of nature, in such comprehension of natural beings, that they do not appear as an object, but as subject, and cannot be reduced to the role of collections of beings dependent on the needs and egoistic projects of man.

There arises a question: what philosophy is able to constitute the basis of quite new approach to the problem of man-nature relation. As to me, I come to rather sceptical conclusion: neither roman-catholic theology and philosophy nor the prevalent marxist philosophical interpretations possess theoretical instruments which would be satisfactory to deal with the problem.

To begin with the actual Roman-Catholic point of view: the Pope's encyclic *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, published December 1987, is a significant document in which the Pope deals, among others, with the problem of the man-nature relation. He is right, trying to direct our attention to the moral dimension of using „the elements of nature” by man. In the Pope's analysis of man-nature relation the starting point of the argumentation is the traditional notion of man's dominion over creation. All terrestrial beings – the Pope writes – were given by God under the power of man, „who is over all other creation”.

At the same time the Pope stresses the point, that the domination of man over nature takes place inside the limits determined by will of God. The use of created things should not be performed without respect for the objective rules imposed by God. It is true – says the Pope – that the main purpose of man is to dominate over all creatures, but it must be realized on the basis of submission of man to the Law of God. Thus power of man, and its functioning should be subjected to the vocation of spiritual amelioration of man whose final goal is immortality. The Pope maintains that man's relationship with nature has a moral dimension.

We must acknowledge that it is a very important idea, worth being accepted, something new in comparison with earlier Roman-Catholic image of man's attitude to nature. The Pope is perfectly aware of the significance of the protection of nature and, may be for this reason, he introduces some new elements to the traditional image of nature, the main destiny of which is to serve man. But I am convinced that the essence of the Christian idea of the World rests unchanged: man remains a central being, and nature is still a secondary being of a less important status in the structure of the Univers. It is man, not nature who had been created in the image of God.

You can easily imagine, that the moral relationship of man to nature would be preserved also in the case, when nature is considered only as an obstacle to the moral developpement of man. But the Pope tries to root the idea of moral attitude of man to nature on a more solid ground. He insists on the necessity of respect towards the creatures of nature. This idea is based on arguments of a different origin.

1. The Pope refers to greek notion of the world as Kosmos. Particular elements of the world: things, plants, animals are bound together in a harmonious structure, in which every particular component is dependent upon all other elements, and takes place and functions in the global system according to its proper essence. This objective harmony of the world cannot be disturbed with impunity by arbitrary decisions and actions of man.

2. The Pope employs also another argument, this time taken from science. Natural resources are limited – he writes. Absolute unrestricted power over nature causes degradation of environment, is a danger for health, provokes deterioration of life's quality. It creates also great danger for the future of mankind. If the natural resources are exhausted now, nothing will be left for the future generations. This argument rests in the limits of the reasonable utilitarianism, and is not founded on these particular philosophical premises on which the Christian vision of the world is based.

3. However, in Pope's encyclic we find a different kind of argument founded directly on the text of the Bible. From the very beginning the Lord restricted the man's freedom to enjoy the fruits of nature, and indicated that the relationship between man and nature is subordinate to moral laws. This original situation is symbolically represented by God's interdiction of eating the fruit from the tree in Paradise. The forbidden fruit – says the Pope – is a symbol of nature in which man lives. The interdiction means that our relation to nature is submitted to moral laws.

Well, if we try to assess the Pope's description of the man's relation to nature, we come to the following conclusion: Pope's intention is to enrich the traditional notion of mastery of man over nature by introducing the moral law mediating the relationship between man and nature. But one can make an objection, that this moral element is introduced from the outside. What

remains as a fundamental relation is the relation between man and personal God, and not the man-nature relation. According to religious Roman-Catholic hierarchy of values, the ontological status of nature is secondary in comparison with that of man. Being of nature is submitted to the interests of man.

In connection with this idea – typical of the christian vision of the world, it seems to me that Pope's reference to the ancient greek notion of Cosmos is not compatible with the biblical concept of nature as subordinate being. Also the utilitarian argument which we have found in Pope's encyclic cannot be considered to be a sufficient basis for a new idea of relationship between man and nature. Utilitarian way of thinking, whatever form it has, results in attitude relative to institutional and individual needs in a respective situation. We can be aware of the fact, that it will be better for the future generations if, at present, we use resources in a restricted way, but under the pressure of political, economical, and ideological needs we choose what we consider necessary in our present situation, even if this choice is against the good, and against the interest of future generations. As long as we are located within the utilitarian thinking, one cannot expect a radically new approach to the problem man-nature relationship.

The last Pope's argument of biblical character is rather arbitrary in interpretation. The Pope says: the biblical image of Paradise in which the fruit from one tree is forbidden, means that from the very beginning God imposes certain restrictions on man's use of nature and establishes the relationship between man and nature as moral relation founded on God's will. But (it is my remark) there are many other possible interpretations. Moreover, to refer to God's will means to base the problem on the fragile subjective foundation. Holbach, Bentham, and also Kant were right in their statement that universal, necessary morality cannot be based on a changeable image of God's will, because this image contains too many arbitrary components and varies with the circumstances.

In conclusion, my opinion is, that Roman-Catholic philosophy, as it is presented now in Pope's encyclic cannot give us a satisfactory idea of the ontological foundation of a new relationship between man and nature.

By the way, it seems to me that we cannot find the positive satisfactory solution of the problem in another current of religious thinking – in rabbinic judaisme based on Hebrew *Bible* and on the text of *Talmud*. Perhaps it would not be useless to mention here a remark made by Feuerbach in his *Essence of Christianity*. Feuerbach's view was that ancient Jews regarded nature in terms of its utility for their needs¹. As far as the question of judaism's attitude towards nature is concerned, we meet also a different interpretation – I mean

¹ L. Feuerbach, *Das Wesen de Christentums*, Bd. 1, Kap. 12 (*Die Bedeutung des Kreation im Judentum*), Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 1956, p. 186–197.

the view of prof. Emmanuel Lévinas who in his book *Difficile Liberté* tries to explain the fact that in text of the *Bible* the description of nature occupies a very insignificant place. But despite of the essential difference of the original philosophical position between Feuerbach and Lévinas, the idea they have in common is, that nature has not its own autonomy and does not constitute the value in itself. Lévinas maintains, according to rabbinic judaism, that the essential element of human existence consists in ethical relation of me to another man-to his „visage”. In this ethical relationship, that has nothing to do with the relation to nature, the presence of God is directly experienced by me. Nature should be regarded as a neutral background of this ethical relationship, and must not disturb it². For the purpose of our analysis, it is important to stress that in Lévinas' view ethical relation of man to man requires that we are not too much attached to nature and to our natural environment. It is evident that such a point of view cannot offer us a positive idea of establishing a new kind of relation of man to nature.

II

I agree with prof. William McBride who says, that two different streams of european thought – religious and scientific coincide in the same conclusion. Biblical, I quote, „injunction to subdue the earth was reinforced by development of modern science, which is connected with the idea of the dominance of nature and „almost unlimited exploitation of the human ecosystem”. McBride indicates that the important social philosophers of midnineteenth century, namely Marx and Mill continued this attitude maintaining the idea of subjection of nature to man.

As for the evaluation of Marx attitude I prefer to be more prudent, not only for the reason that McBride lives in United States and I live in Poland. I am not sure, if one can succeed in it, but may be, it is possible to reread the texts of Marx in a new way, so that we can find some suggestions giving us an opportunity to present Marx's view not in terms of mastery of man over nature. I am of the opinion that this problem is too complex to be resolved now, so I prefer to confine myself to the current interpretations of Marxian philosophy. I am not going to analyse Marxism in itself. I am rather interested in Marxian philosophy as far as it is reflected in contemporary marxist philosophical thought. My question is whether prevalent Marxist interpretations are capable to deliver to us theoretico-philosophical basis for a new attitude toward nature.

² E. Lévinas, *Difficile Liberté*, Editions Albin Michel, Paris 1976, p. 40-41, 326-327.

Generally speaking, we can distinguish two modes of thinking among the Marxist philosophers: antropological and scientific one. In the antropological model man's existence is the central object of reflection. This attitude refers to the writings of young Marx, especially to the *Oekonomish-Philosophische Manuskripte*. In the case of the second attitude, metodological problems as well as the knowledge of objective laws of nature and society are of primary importance. But in my opinion, as far as the problem presented above is concerned, these two attitudes do not differ essentially in their approach to the question of relationship between man and nature. Both of them share the idea of mastery over nature and maintain the idea that destiny of man is connected with his domination over nature: the progress of science should serve the purpose of bringing all hidden reserves of nature into use, and our knowledge of the objective laws must be used for more efficient exploitation of matter and objects of nature, to satisfy the ever growing needs of man. Nature is treated here as an external force, that should be overcome and submitted to man. A very simple truth is lost in this vision of the world, namely that the individual is not only the product of social environment, but first and foremost is a natural being who rests inside nature and should never neglect the fact, that forces acting in individual's existence belong to the complex of universal forces functioning in nature. The one-sided image of nature as object used for human needs is correlated here with the one-sided image of man's existence.

To my mind, very pernicious, detrimental effects for understanding of the relation of man to nature resulted from the extreme form of antropological interpretation of young Marx. Such a view, which in my opinion was influenced by Sartre's philosophy of *L'Être et le néant*, was presented by prof. Leszek Kołakowski in his article on young Marx. From the analysis of *Economico-Philosophical Manuscripts* of Marx Kołakowski concluded that nature can be compared to a very deep well, but in the well-water man sees nothing but reflection of his visage³. According to this interpretation there is, on the one side, a human being – the absolute creator of all sense of the Universe, the source of all meanings of creatures and things of nature, – on the other side there is passive matter, nature that is meaningless in itself. All sense and all meanings of nature are introduced only by the activity, by praxis of man.

III

To my opinion, if we want to create a new ecological philosophy, we must overcome the subjective view such as presented above. I think, that in connection with the problem we are discussing, it would be useful to restore

³ L. Kołakowski, *Karol Marks i klasyczna definicja prawdy*, „Studia Filozoficzne” 1959, nr 2, p. 67.

the positive value of Feuerbach's philosophy. Two ideas seem to be of great importance here. First one is the comprehension of alienation as a global process, which includes three aspects of individual's existence: relation to himself, relation to another man, and relation to nature. Feuerbach demonstrates that religious alienation expresses itself in a false, distorted relationship between man and nature. In this case the value of nature is reduced to utility of nature for man. The second interesting element in Feuerbach's philosophy is his idea of a certain state of passiveness of man, – a positively valued passiveness, which is constitutive of human disinterested attitude of man toward nature. Feuerbach was criticised, from the Marxian point of view, for his negligence of the important role of the praxis as the primary and fundamental form of relationship between man and nature. But the attitude of Feuerbach appears at present to be a positive quality of his philosophy, when discussing the problem of philosophy of ecology. Feuerbach in the *Essence of Christianity* states that the true nature of a human being manifests itself not in practical attitude based on interest and utility, but in theoretical approach to nature apprehended as the object of our admiration and delight⁴. Feuerbach reminds us that the true relationship between man and nature can be and should be something different and more fundamental attitude from the attitude regarding nature in terms of utility.

I would like to avoid a misunderstanding. I do not propose to reject Marx and to come back to Feuerbach. Marxian philosophy reflects a very important aspect of human existence and nobody can deny its great value for European culture. I want to lay a stress on the necessity of a new ecological thinking, to turn our attention to such a concept of man that unites in its image of human existence both man's activity and passivity, creative acts of man transforming nature and his consciousness that he is a part of greater being which has its proper laws, inherent sense and its own telos. The development of European and American civilization was and still is directed toward more and more technical mastery over nature. This tendency is irreversible and cannot be reversed, but can be rationally controlled and even hampered in a situation where man's technical intervention in natural processes threatens him with the detrimental and dangerous changes in non-human nature and in living organisms.

We must assume as necessary a more global attitude towards nature instead of the technical attitude, and this new attitude, being the synthesis of man's activity and his passivity, should be based on ontology which maintains, that the original sense of nature is not exhausted by its sense of the object of human praxis.

⁴ Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, Bd. 1, Kap. 12, p. 187–188; Bd. 2, Kap. 20 (*Der wesentliche Standpunkt der Religion*), p. 305–306.

The suggestions of this kind are to be found in the philosophy of Heidegger who makes distinction between *das Sein* and *das Seiende*, and who creates the image of nature not only as the object of praxis but also as the primary being that, in ontological sense, is previous to man's activity and constitutes the fundamental condition of this activity. But Heidegger's description is too abstract, vague, indefinite. Moreover, Heidegger was not the first philosopher who introduced this idea. The intellectual impulses going in the right direction can be derived from philosophy of neoplatonic origin and romantic philosophy. For this reason I prefer coming back to the sources.

I personally think that there is a romantic philosopher who formulated in a stimulating manner the problem of man-nature relationship. This is Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was influenced by neoplatonism and transcendentalism, but modified these ideas incorporating them into his own conception of active man. In Emerson's thinking about man and nature we find very important ideas which help us to qualify the constitutive features of the new relationship between man and the world. The Universe and human being are in the ontological unity (in Emerson's vision of the world – it is a spiritual unity). Existence of an individual is considered as a particular manifestation of the forces of Nature. On the ontological level, there is no opposition between man and Nature; man does not exist in front of Nature but inside Nature. The primary relationship between man and Nature is not of utilitarian and technical character; what is the essence of the relationship is an ontological unity and inner kinship. Nature has such an ontological dimension, that „she” cannot be reduced to her being for man. Hence man should treat Nature with respect, and should recognize the fact that Nature has in herself an inherent telos independent of our practical projects. If we apprehend human existence in its essential ontological links with the Universe, the moral attitude towards Nature appears as a constitutive component of this relationship. To take it for granted that man ought to live in truth, one should accept man's relation to Nature as a moral relation. One must reject the idea that relationship between man and Nature is only a neutral background of moral decision made by an individual in his relations to other people. There is one indivisible morality that embraces the relationship of an individual with Nature, and his relation to other human beings. To exist in truth means for man to change the matter of Nature by his activity, but it means also that, at the same time, man preserves the attitude of respect towards Nature and recognizes her inherent telos.

I have still one emendation to what was spoken above. It is not sufficient to say, that our attitude to nature is of moral character. There exists (I am here in agreement with Emerson) more fundamental, ontological relationship, prior to the moral relationship of man to nature. Man is ontologically rooted in nature by the ontological openness of human existence, which corresponds to the ontological openness of the being of nature. But the ontological unity

manifests itself on the existential level as ontic duality man-nature, subject-object. It is individual himself who chooses his attitude to nature. If nature is regarded as object used for my purpose, this means that the way of living chosen by me is a distorted existence, deprived of some essential human possibilities. In Emerson's vision of the world ontology is ethics, laws of nature are moral laws. The knowledge of the essential unity of human being and Nature should be transformed into our every day behaviour based on respect for Nature.

All these ideas above mentioned are not without significance for a new philosophy of ecology. The idea of fundamental and initial ontological unity of man and nature, – of unity even more primordial than biological intercourse of human being with nature, seems to be very important in the process of establishing a new attitude of man to the Universe. Perhaps, this idea will constitute an essential part of new education and each individual will be taught anew to perceive Nature in her proper light, in her internal laws and activity that impose on us insurmountable limits. To recognize these limits does not signify to become a slave of Nature. On the contrary: the new situation and the new education will foster the development of our creative capabilities, and „unlock for us the concealed faculties of the mind”⁵. When the new relationship between man and Nature is established, it opens – Emerson writes – another chamber in man's soul. Man gets a new feeling, a new thought, a new organ, and man's mind will be as broad as nature. „The problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty is solved by the redemption of the soul. The ruin or the blank that we see when we look at nature, is in our own eye. The axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things, and so they appear not transparent but opaque. The reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is because man is disunited with himself [...] To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. [...] The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is

⁵ R. W. Emerson, *Education*, [in:] id., *Selected Prose and Poetry*, Rinehart and Company, New York 1957, p. 210.

not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right"⁶.

My last remark: new vision of Nature to which corresponds new morality, sensitivity, receptivity and new mode of thinking leads us to broader interpretation of the notion „personalism”. Personalist apprehension should be extended over Nature. Long ago, only God was considered a creative personality, later – this quality was ascribed to man. At present, it is high time to attribute the status of personality also to Nature. This possibility is indicated in Martin Buber's philosophy⁷. I-thou relation has to do not only with existence of another man but also with plants, animals and other objects of nature. It remains to consider to what extent the idea of the personality of Nature or – if you want – the idea of respect for the sovereignty of Nature and her telos, can be well founded on the ground of materialist vision of the universe. I leave this question open.

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KILKA UWAG O FILOZOFII EKOLOGII

Coraz większe zagrożenie ludzkiej egzystencji przez pogłębiającą się, w zatrważająco szybkim tempie, – degradację środowiska człowieka stwarza konieczność radykalnego przewartościowania jego dotychczasowej postawy wobec siebie i przyrody. Teoretycznym fundamentem wychowania nowego człowieka ujmującego przyrodę nieużytkowo, podmiotowo powinna być nowa filozofia ekologiczna. Istniejące filozofie, w których dominuje idea panowania człowieka nad przyrodą, nie są przystosowane do realizacji tego zadania. Zarówno w filozofiach religijnych, jak i w rozpowszereczonych interpretacjach marksizmu występuje przedmiotowo-użytkowe traktowanie przyrody, podczas gdy dla radykalnej zmiany stosunku człowieka do przyrody potrzebna jest filozofia przedstawiająca naturę jako byt suwerenny, posiadający swój wewnętrzny telos – byt, do którego człowiek odnosi się z szacunkiem, nie naruszając jego praw. Pozytywne elementy nowego ekologicznego myślenia można znaleźć w niektórych filozofiach XIX i XX w.: w poglądach Feuerbacha, Emersona i Bubera. W rozważaniach tych filozofów ważne miejsce zajmuje myśl o szczególnym znaczeniu dla człowieczeństwa człowieka, jego bezinteresownego stosunku do przyrody, w którym nawiązuje on z naturą partnerski dialog, odślaniający mu nowe dotychczas niezauważane wartości.

Artykuł kończy się postulatem, by osobową relację Ja – Ty rozszerzyć także na Przyrodę.

⁶ R. W. Emerson, *Nature*, [in:] id., *Selected Prose...*, p. 5–7, 44.

⁷ M. Buber, *I and Thou*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1958, p. 31–33, 65–66, 101, 114, 124–126. „It is the I of pure intercourse with nature; nature gives herself to it and speaks unceasingly with it, revealing her mysteries to it but not betraying her mystery. It believes in her, and says to the rose, „Then thou art it” – then it takes its stand with it in a single reality. So the spirit of the real remains with it when it turns back to itself, the gaze of the sun abides with the blessed eye that considers its own radiance, and the friendship of the elements accompanies the man into the stillness of dying and becoming”. (*Ibid.*, p. 66).