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Ecological Culture as the Hope of the 21ST Century

The purpose of the article is to present the significance of ecological culture in the civilisation development in the 21st century on the basis of the works of Henryk Skolimowski - a philosophy professor, a graduate of the Warsaw Technical University and the University of Warsaw (who completed technical, music and philosophical studies and went to the USA to give lectures in philosophy) and the originator of eco-philosophy. In 1992 he founded the first Faculty of Ecological Philosophy in the world at the Technical University of Łódź. He accepted the following as his philosophical predecessors: Alfred North Whitehead, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Martin Heidegger. Representatives of something he called cosmic religiousness for him included first of all Plato (as he explained, Plato was the most ingenious representative of the harmony of the Greek *Logos*, the Greek sense of harmony), stoics, Plotinus, St. Francis of Assisi, Benedict Spinoza, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Alfred North Whitehead.

According to Skolimowski, ecology is the first holistic science and the hope (the mother of the wise) of new strategies of life in the 21st century. In his concept, the world is a kind of sanctuary, not a deterministic machine. In this context, it is therefore worth reminding that humanism¹ can be perceived as a general view on social life, thinking perspective (see *Wielka Encyklopedia*, 1901, pp. 481-490), humanistic attitude – open, sensitive to the issues of human beings, environment and nature (regardless of professional specialisation) (see Suchodolski, Wojnar, 1990, p. 43), with the simultaneous respect for personal identity in its transforming action, open to people and things, open to the world (see: *ibid*, p. 61).

The notion of humanism refers to a few aspects; first of all - intellectual trend², secondly - philosophical concepts regarding human being as the highest value and thirdly - attitude (intellectual and moral, most of all). The process of shaping this notion was related to the history of philosophical anthropology and the line along which humanism developed evolved from anthropocentric humanism in the Renaissance - through Baroque, multifaceted humanism in the European strife for the emancipation of reason in the 17th century - then civic humanism of the Enlightenment³ - national humanism in the

¹ The notion of humanism was first disseminated in the 19th century. It was first used by a Bavarian teacher F.J. Niethammer in 1808 to refer to a general “classical education” covering the knowledge of languages as well as Greek and Latin literature. See Ostrowska (2003), p. 267.

² The leading thought of this intellectual trend was Terence’s thesis: *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum esse putto* (I am human and nothing human is alien to me), in connection with the rebirth of the ideals of the ancient culture at the turn of the 14th century and their presentation as the opposition to the theocentric culture of the Middle Ages.

³ In the age of Enlightenment there was a shift from the age of religion to the age of science.

age of Romanticism⁴ - humanism of social utilitarianism in the age of positivism - humanism of the general modernist tendency in the Polish culture in the period from 1890 to 1939, to humanism of the general tendency of the post-modern culture after the World War II (Wolter, 2006, pp. 5-7), when attempts were made to discover new meanings and sense of particular aspects of social life in the “global electronic village” (global, planetary humanism).

Humanism of the so called technical civilisation is focused on general human values of the post-industrial society (Bullock, Stallybras, Trombley, Eadie, 1999, p. 461) in the circumstances when facts become an interpretation and challenge the legitimacy of totalitarian thinking (see Janaszek-Ivanickowa, 1996, p. 81 et seq.), and as a result another industrial (postindustrial) revolution related to global industrial technology, fast growth of telecommunications, sophisticated needs blend with egalitarian mass culture (see Wilkoszewska, 1997, p. 32 et seq.), boundaries between art and consumerism, avant garde and tradition, reality and imagination are reduced and the post-modern processing of cultural heritage takes place (with the mission of translators - hermeneutists in culture). According to postmodernists, a historical source no longer guides us into the past, but rather to its new interpretation (see Dybiec, 2005, p 22). The culture of postmodernism⁵ is related to living up to the challenge of constant “becoming” (*homo viator*⁶), expressing disagreement to the presence of the one and only interpretation of thought (see Witkowski, 1997, pp37-315), and is a prelude to the “era of spiritual liberation of people” thanks to the shift towards the ecological age (see Skolimowski, 1993a, p 215).

Human being is an agent (he ruins the global biosphere) and a victim (mental disorders, physical ailments, the *homo homini lupus* ethics of exploitation and unfairness) of the ecological crisis⁷, he creates a dangerous perspective for the world (breakdown of the balance of natural, physical and chemical processes) (see Kożuchowski, 2008, p 25). He should therefore repair the world (Marcol, 2002, p.8) thanks to the process of shaping inner harmony and creating external order, expressed in the social environmental responsibility, awareness⁸ of the danger caused by the degradation of environment. Material needs must be combined with the development of feelings, so that human being in the social and natural environment, in the process of growth learns to use the gifts of nature wisely and resorts only to “soft technology” (Piotrowski, 2006, p. 84 et seq.) in harmony with nature, rather than trying to subordinate nature to science and technology in the process of self-fulfilment.

The alternative to the mechanistic and positivist paradigm⁹ is ecological philosophy¹⁰ (eco-philosophy) (see Dolega, 2007, p. 64 et seq.), which draws on Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s idea on

⁴ According to Henryk Skolimowski, the romantic attitude was the attitude of inspiration and flair (as opposed to the positivist rationalism) and has some practical value. It is the value of beauty and spirit in the mystery of the world. See Skolimowski (1991a).

⁵ According to Piotr Sztompka, the expansion of postmodern concepts involves a rejection of all thought threads typical of 19th and 20th century - modernity - and therefore also of the idea of progress. See Sztompka (2002).

⁶ *Homo viator* (Latin) - man on the way. This term was introduced by G. Marcel and referred to a pilgrim experiencing the dynamics of human being in the environment where he lives.

⁷ The causes of the ecological crisis include: culture-related, scientific, economic, technological and direct factors. See Kielczewski (2001).

⁸ Religious awareness - according to Henryk Skolimowski - constituted the thesis; technological awareness was the antithesis, whereas ecological awareness is the synthesis, since it means return to the spiritual.

⁹ Mechanistic consciousness is related to the idea of the world as a machine.

evolution and from the fact that “positivist ideology has been exhausted - its 20th century version and the general one, starting with Francis Bacon” (Skolimowski, 1993b, p. 20). According to Henryk Skolimowski¹¹, the universe is the man’s home (sanctuary), and physical reality has a holistic nature (see Kielczewski, 2001, p. 69). Ecological humanism is the first step towards ecological philosophy (see Skolimowski, Górecki, 2003, p. 44), which is made up of cosmology (the theory of being), eschatology (doctrine of the destination of the world and human being), ethics (rules of behaviour).

Skolimowski explained that at the turn of the 20th century, a new idea of progress was developing (as a historical necessity), because civilisation is already going along two routes: the old, mechanistic one¹² and the new, ecological¹³, transcendental, evolutionary one. New quality is to be a process of creating awareness: ecological, holistic¹⁴, transcendental, sacral, spiritual¹⁵. It must be related to the shift from analytical and pragmatic reason - to ecological reason, because mechanistic awareness is atheistic (it manipulates and exploits), whereas ecological awareness has spiritual dimension and is transcendental (see Skolimowski (1993b), p. 26. It is a philosophy of life - a strategy of wise, dignified, integral life, therefore it is a healthy/constructive attitude to life.

In Henryk Skolimowski’s concept, ecological humanism is the basis of ecological culture and is part of eco-philosophy¹⁶, while ecological balance is related to the balance of humanity. In professor Skolimowski’s theory, the basic theses of ecological humanism include the following: the coming era should be an era of care and attention, the world should be perceived as a sanctuary and knowledge is to be an intermediary between people and creative forces of evolution (see Skolimowski, 1993a, p. 80). Skolimowski explained that separating facts from values, human being from knowledge and physical phenomena from all the others, has led to the atomisation of the physical world - also human world. He defined three basic (different) thinking systems, which contribute to the ethical atmosphere of the turn of the 20th century. These systems are: postmodernism (ethics of extreme relativism¹⁷ and nihilism¹⁸), pan-

¹⁰ Henri Bergson (1859 – 1941) is one of the precursors of ecological philosophy, because he introduced the idea of “creative evolution” and “deep self” identified with the internal experience of permanence - justified by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

¹¹ According to Henryk Skolimowski, Francis Bacon vulgarised the notion of knowledge and wisdom (he claimed that knowledge is power - the power of extracting knowledge from the nature, subordinating the nature), Voltaire and D. Diderot trivialised the concept of progress and K. Marx and Descartes distorted modern philosophy. See Skolimowski, Górecki (2003), p. 81. See Skolimowski (1993b), p. 85.

¹² Classical empiricism, 19th century positivism and 20th century logical empiricism separated values from knowledge, attributing utmost significance to the latter. Many intellectuals in the so called Western world (also in Poland) have respect for positive knowledge and rationalism - they are driven by ethical imperatives: control, manipulation, efficiency, competition, reification of the world (methodological projection is atomising).

¹³ The key ecological value is reverence (respect for life), understood (especially_ in the Franciscan sense.

¹⁴ Skolimowski explained that life is holistic (from Greek: *holos* – whole, the notion of holism was first used by Jean Ch. Smuts (1870 – 1950) in the book titled “Holism and evolution”. J. Ch. Smuts initiated the theory of development, pursuant to which the whole is not a total sum of its component parts and the world is subject to evolution, thanks to which new qualities appear.

¹⁵ Not necessarily religious, but is supposed to induce reflection on oneself and the world.

¹⁶ The philosophy of Henryk Skolimowski is a form of post-post-modern philosophy expressed in a positive form. See Skolimowski (1999), p. 89.

¹⁷ In the ecological paradigm, relativism and cynicism are not values, but anti-values.

¹⁸ In postmodernism „*anything goes*” – everything is equally justified or equally unjustified. It is a metaphor of “epistemological anarchism”, nothing sacred. See Feyerabend (2001), p. 5.

technism¹⁹ (science and technology in the service of capitalism; maximum efficiency and competition), religious view on life (with the unappreciated ²⁰ ethics of St. Francis of Assisi) (see Skolimowski, 2007, pp. 84-85).

Skolimowski explained that ecological culture²¹ is the hope of the 21st century (see Skolimowski, 1999, p. 105), because technological and information society does not teach wisdom and positive rationalism is down-to-earth (based on empirical, practical values). General vulgarisation of social life breeds the need to protect values such as: truth, beauty²², goodness and human being - who contains Divine Element inside (potential sacredness) (see Skolimowski, 1991a, p 73). Skolimowski emphasised that upbringing, as a social and civilisation-related enterprise, must serve the quality of life (see Skolimowski, 1991b, p 27), and promote liberation from destructive thinking²³, which is the source of most ecological problems. It should be the process of preparation²⁴ for ecological lifestyle (see Skolimowski, 1996, p. 4) and a way to reach the inside of human being, because an ecological human is not a “rational animal”, but a spiritual *homo creator*.

Since evolution involves the understanding of the abundance of contexts and their continuous deepening, professor Henryk Skolimowski explained that it is a specific eulogy of creativity (as well as the whole Cosmos in the process of becoming), it is therefore postulated that it is necessary to bring up a society of wisdom, which values subjectivity²⁵ and intuition. In his opinion, information society does not teach wisdom and as such is yet another illusion. Skolimowski explained that wisdom is expressed in the affinity with the Cosmos, and ecological humanism may not be seen solely in the sphere of ideational attitudes, but should be pursued systemically, in everyday practice, so as to transform creatively and continue the evolution in the process of bringing up the society for “pure lifestyles” and moderation in consumption.

Ecological awareness in Skolimowski's concept is a structure of thinking that leads to beauty and sacredness of life. An ecological human being is to be a spiritual creature, brought up to healthy self-fulfilment and apotheosis of life, aware that economically unsustainable and technocratic progress leads

¹⁹ Machine ethics.

²⁰ Skolimowski claimed that Christian ecological ethics should refer to the concept of St. Francis of Assisi. See Skolimowski (1999a), p. 20.

²¹ Sustainable growth, specific for a particular region is pro-ecological development. The idea of sustainable development must not be detached from life.

²² Skolimowski explained that one of the first philosophers to deal with the issue of beauty was Pythagoras - he was in love with number, which - in his opinion - expresses the essence of the world. Despite the differences between Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle, all of them believed that beauty resides in symmetry, in the harmony of elements, in proper proportions and relationships. In the Hellenistic (or rather classical) period a new concept of beauty is born, starting with Sophists and Protagoras (“human is the measure of all things”) - beauty is now conditioned by human perception. It is in the mind, not in the things. It is the mind and senses that make things beautiful (subjective concept of beauty). Plotinus introduced yet another concept of beauty - apart from extrasensory beauty, he also recognised sensory beauty, as the quality from “above” (from God).

²³ Moral relativism is, according to Skolimowski, a disease (cancer) of society in the general tendency of postmodern culture.

²⁴ According to Skolimowski, on the 21st century, education is supposed to appreciate philosophical knowledge rather than be connected to electronics and computers.

²⁵ According to Skolimowski, in each act of quantitative appraisal there is an inherent a priori act of intuitive, subjective appraisal.

not only to the destruction of nature, but also to the destruction of human (whose health is as valuable as his freedom). Unsustainable development leads to stress, diseases, pathologies and consumerism, completely leaving out the category of happiness (see *ibid.* pp. 2-3). Skolimowski explained that wisdom is a historical category: “it is not a structure of permanent forms, but a structure of dynamic forms subject to constant transformation, adaptation and reformulation. Evolutionary wisdom is understanding how human condition has changed over centuries and millennia” (Skolimowski, Górecki, 2003, p. 151) in the course of the evolutionary “journey”. According to Henryk Skolimowski, harmony is wise, because it maintains all states in proper balance and ecological values are autotelic - they connect humanity to nature, as it were²⁶.

Reverential development²⁷ understood as respect and homage (respect, reverence, religious reflection) to life in the concept of Henryk Skolimowski is the foundation for responsibility, has the “unifying quality in the broadest and deepest meaning of these words, combines the economic with the ethical²⁸ and reverential²⁹, connects modern ethical imperatives with traditional ethical codes” (Skolimowski, 1991b, p. 21), with maintaining peaceful coexistence of people and the nature³⁰. According to Skolimowski, happiness is the balance of being - a condition of inner peace, which gives peace and resolution. Inner peace is the source of true happiness and human mind is not “*tabula rasa*”, but an organ that contributes to creation and from the existing matter it creates new worlds. Happiness is the state of personality balance, which others perceive as radiation and inspiration, it is the “ability to become one with a series of things that touch heavens” (Skolimowski, 1993b, p. 177). The harmony of human life³¹ requires respect, dignity, self-confidence, mature intrapersonal attitudes and approach to the social and natural environment.

Considering main ethical trends for the 21st century (man matching the gods, man matching human being, man matching a machine), Skolimowski wonders why Christianity has followed St. Thomas Aquinas rather than Francis of Assisi. He postulates global ethics - human being matching evolution, life and Cosmos³², emphasising that the condition of environment is the consequence of human thinking and hierarchy of values and reflects the condition of human spirit. An ecological human being in Henryk Skolimowski’s concept is “the creation of the post-industrial awareness; a being conscious of its spirituality and striving to execute it by enhancing his sensitivities; <an aristocratic being>, which believes that spiritual wealth is the only value we may possess; a being that understands his or her place in the cosmic plan, with which it remains in a state of symbiosis rather than constant war; a being that shows

²⁶ They are not absolute, not subjective and not relativistic.

²⁷ Reverence understood in the Schweizer sense (Albert Schweizert claimed that there will be no renewal of civilisation without ethical renewal), and deeper yet, in Buddhist and Franciscan sense it is a key ecological value.

²⁸ Eco-ethics in Skolimowski’s concept is based on the recognition and execution of the idea of the sacredness of life.

²⁹ Synthesis of ecological values: reverence, responsibility, compassion, self-restraint (moderation). Traces of ecological philosophy: global, universal, holistic, healing, morally accountable and intellectually coherent.

³⁰ World and nature as a sanctuary.

³¹ According to Skolimowski, “patriarchal revolution” made women live in humility for centuries.

³² According to the anthropic principle (formulated in 1981), the whole structure of the Cosmos is balanced (if it were any other than that, life could not appear).

reverence for life and values created by the evolution over billions of years of existence” (Skolimowski, 1991a, p. 93).

Eco-ethics in Skolimowski’s concept is based on the idea of the sacredness of life. In the process of humanisation, the new ecological imperative is to become a pure moral imperative³³ (close to Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative), because ecological human being in his evolution is made more sensitive. When analysing this issue, Skolimowski was reminded of the attitude of Mohandas Gandhi (called Mahatma, the Great Spirit), who fought through passive resistance - without violence (for Gandhi, the fundamental value was avoiding violence), and also Albert Schweitzer’s reverence for life.

The concept of ecological humanism constitutes the philosophical foundation of pro-ecological upbringing and shaping the ecological culture in the 21st century, so as to - as professor Henryk Skolimowski put it - creatively transform and continue the evolution, shape reliable knowledge of the world and make people sensitive to the life-rendering beauty of it, which is an element of a more general issue: the attitude of human beings to their existence in the cognitive, emotional and application-wise aspect.

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³³ This moral imperative is both secular and religious, rational and sacral - in which human being is never the instrument (means), but the end.

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