

Włodzimierz KACZOCHA • Jan SIKORA

## ETHICAL VALUES AND NORMS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF ATTRACTIVE NATURAL AREAS

Włodzimierz **Kaczocho**, Prof. – *European Univeristy of Business in Poznan*  
Jan **Sikora**, Prof. – *University of Zielona Gora*

Correspondence address:  
University of Zielona Gora  
Licealna Street 9, 65-417 Zielona Gora, Poland  
e-mail: sikorajan@interia.pl

**ABSTRACT:** Because of their natural and anthropogenic values, attractive natural areas are protected by law. The protective activities are connected with the proper management of these areas. The paper proposes the thesis that ethical values and norms referred to ecology are not taken into consideration in the management of attractive natural areas, both in theoretical and practical terms. The study presents attractive natural areas as a valuable common good, and discusses a place of values and norms in ethics. The project of ethical concept of management in these areas containing the adopted values and moral norms that refer to ecology was also formulated.

The paper was written based on the scientific literature and official documents.

**KEY WORDS:** attractive natural areas; management; values and standards

## Introduction

Naturally valuable areas are one of the forms of nature protection in our country. They contain not only sociably acceptable natural values but also the anthropogenic ones. It can therefore be recognized that these areas are a common good which society and its authorities should be especially concerned for. An example of intentional and conscious caring for the conservation of nature-value areas is their proper management, taking into account specific ethical standards. The aim of this article is to present a design of the ethical concept supporting the management of these areas. In this concept, basic ethical values and specific moral standards are recommended, which should be followed by institutions and their employees dealing with the management of valuable natural areas. To write this article, the appropriate literature on the subject was used, both scientific and official.

## The areas of natural value as a common good

When defining nature-value areas, it can be stated that these are areas characterized by high biodiversity, where their resources must be managed in a well thought-out and sustainable way. They are geographically separated legally protected places due to an interesting landscape and distinctive natural values. The currently established forms of protection of the countryside in Poland are: national park, landscape parks, nature reserves, protected landscape areas, Natura 2000 areas, nature monuments, documentary sites, ecological sites, nature and landscape complexes as well as areas of plant, animal and mushroom species protection (The Act of 16 April on nature conservation). Naturally valuable areas are created in order to stop the degradation of the natural environment, maintain ecological balance, conduct scientific research and environmental education as well as to maintain recreational and natural values to ensure the conditions of good recreation (Sikora, 2010). According to the Act on Nature Conservation of 2004, the task of valuable natural areas is to: 1. maintain ecological processes and ecosystem stability; 2. preserve biodiversity; 3. preserve the geological and paleontological heritage; 4. ensure the continuity of existence of plant, animal and mushroom species and their habitat, by maintaining or restoring them to an appropriate conservation status; 5. protect landscape values, greenery in towns and villages and trees; 6. maintain or restore of natural habitats, as well as other natural resources, creations and components of nature to an appropriate state of protection; 7. shape appropriate human attitudes toward nature

through education, information and promotion in the field of nature protection (Art. 2 p. 2, The Act of 16 April on nature conservation).

Therefore, naturally valuable areas have these values in question, which are subject to legal protection and are socially desirable and respected. Therefore, one can agree with the statement of K. Zimmiewicz that all forms of natural areas are a common good (Zimmiewicz, 2014). If so, it is up to society, local communities and individual people to preserve and protect this common good.

According to W. Kaczocho, caring for the common good, understood as a set of social and ethical values, under democratic conditions, depends on the acceptance of these values by the majority of citizens and by a sovereignly elected political power, because these are purposeful values, which are important for society. Citizens and political authority seek to realize the common good through appropriate democratic policy principles that relate to the various spheres of social, economic and political activity in accordance with established and valid values (Kaczocho, 2015). Therefore, if we include naturally valuable areas as part of the common good as a physical value, we must, as it has been previously stated, manage properly (professionally) taking into account certain ethical values and standards.

## Values and norms in ethics

In the article we try to present a design of an ethical concept, containing a set of values and norms regulating attitudes and actions of people managing areas of natural value. If we find that a state of affairs is valuable, we consciously or unintentionally adopt certain values indicating the value of this state of affairs, which we respect in our actions. The adopted values become the goal of human life or professional activity, around which norms are formulated indicating the ways to act in pursuit of these values. Values contain general objective and subjective content, while norms are drafted in the form of directives (as obligations and prohibitions), have specific content, recommend appropriate behavior or prohibit specific behaviors. If a state of affairs is valuable to us because of the value we respect, it means that it is adequate, or in other words it objectifies (or materializes) the content of values. Thus, the values are determined by goals – the meaning of life and action, and are the basis for our appreciation (evaluation) of people, social relations, cultural products and the world of nature.

When, in order to realize a given value, we act in the same way as moral or professional norms dictate, our actions are evaluated positively in a moral and professional sense. In such situations it is said that the very content of

values is valuable to us (in its intellectual sense), as well as its objectification (or implementation) as well as our actions, which make a value come true.

Here the question arises of where come from the values and norms in the ethical doctrines that relate to the “whole of life”, i. e. all its aspects and the question about the origin of values in professional codes of ethics. In answering this question, it should be noted that the authors of such codes take over certain values from ethical doctrines. That is to say that a set of values is derived from theological doctrines or from a philosophy developed by a particular thinker, or within a specific philosophical school. Without going into detailed considerations about the important issue of how values are understood and how they exist, we can conclude that heteronomical (or religious) schools of ethics take over values that are theologically justified, that they have been passed on by God (in the same way also moral norms) and by virtue of the divine message they should be respected by all believers of a given religion. It can be metaphorically said that heteronomical ethics have a “strong” meaning in the sense that they do not allow values and norms to be relativized, i.e. their relative validity depending on the particular goals of people.

In autonomous (secular) ethics, values are justified philosophically so that free human reason is the source of all values and norms (such was a view of I. Kant in the eighteenth century) or experience and reason together are fundamental attitudes to devise norms and values (this assumption was and is still proclaimed in utilitarian ethics). Once again it is useful to use a metaphor here that autonomous ethics have a “weaker” effective power, because values and norms in practical life are usually relativized due to particular individual or group interests.

An autonomous ethics without assumptions, which does not refer to philosophy, includes Tadeusz Kotarbiński’s “independent ethics”. He developed, among other things, the concept of a “trustworthy guardian”, who, led by the obligation of conscience, helps others in a situation of distress, without claiming compensation, for his or her conscience commands to provide help to other people if they are in need (Kotarbiński, 1966). Such an attitude of a guardian as a value and a norm is suggested in our ethical theory, addressed to people managing goods, especially valuable in culture and natural assets. We therefore broaden the understanding of a trustworthy guardian, who also directs his or her care towards goods of value in culture and nature. We are convinced that this broadening of caring remains in the “spirit” of this Polish philosopher, ethicist and logician who demanded human respect for all creatures in the world within the scope of our activity (Kotarbiński, 1966, p. 34).

In view of the recommendation of the described attitude for people managing valuable natural areas (i. e. national and landscape parks, nature

reserves, etc.), next to the name of managers of employees with appropriate education (technician, engineer, etc.) or employees in appropriate positions (manager, forester, gamekeeper, guardian, etc.), we propose to adopt a general name for all employees – nature conservation officers or park/reserve guardians, etc., of course, with the official preservation of professional titles, degrees of education and position held (for example, in the working environment it would be well heard, especially when visitors or tourists are present, when we introduce ourselves as the manager of the reserve or a park, forester, park guardian, etc.).

## A draft of the ethical convention on the management of valuable natural areas

### A set of three ethical values

A set of three ethical values, which we recommend within the framework of our project, is based on heteronomical ethics – Catholic ethics. These values have, as it has been mentioned above, a theological justification. The four further values that we take from autonomous ethics, with the exception of Kotarbinski's ethics, are philosophically justified. To avoid the accusation of merging values derived from different ethics into a single concept (such mergers are called eclecticism and they are done to formulate a position that suits us subjectively), we explain that the recommended values, although they are justified differently, may be understood as identical or close to meaning in terms of their content.

In every ethical doctrine that defines (standardizes) the whole of human life, and in every ethical conception concerning an appropriate fragment of human life or action, some fundamental value is assumed. We suggest to accept such a value from Catholic ethics, which is the existence of nature as a "integral system", as Pope Francis states in the encyclical *Laudato si*. It is an integral whole in material meaning, because it exists objectively; at the same time, it also exists in the subjective (spiritual) sense as a *misterium*<sup>1</sup>, which should be "admired in a leaf, in a path, in dew ..." (Franciszek, 2015). He writes that "The human ecology is inextricably linked to the concept of the common good, to which every human person belongs, "social welfare and security and social peace" (Franciszek, 2015, pp. 136-137). It should be emphasized that such an approach to ecology, which assumes the protection and development of nature as a common good, was formulated so clearly for

---

<sup>1</sup> Misterium in Latin means mystery. In theology, a term referring to a salvific event – the coming to earth of Christ the Son of God.

the second time in Catholic ethics and theology. For the first time, the approach of the Catholic Church to nature as a common good was presented in the Catechism that “animals as well as plants and inanimate beings, are destined for the common good of humankind in the past, present and future. The enjoyment of wealth (of nature) ... cannot be separated from the observance of moral requirements” (Katechizm, 2002).

It should be remembered that John Paul II in the encyclical entitled *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (Jan Paweł II, 1994), while dealing with the moral aspects of contemporary social and economic development, wrote that “in respect of the visible nature we are subjected not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be crossed with impunity”. He formulated a moral norm requiring “respect for the creatures of the visible nature” (Jan Paweł II, 1994, p. 64-65), which requires respect for these natural and necessary biological laws.

Because of the presented views we assume that the primary value, let us repeat it, is to preserve the existence of nature as an integral system created by God. The next two values are that nature is a common good for people and that nature is a moral object demanding ethical recognition, as John Paul II wrote.

Four values are recommended in autonomous ethics, which are close to Catholic values in terms of content. In the 1980s J. Aleksandrowicz developed the concept of “ecological conscience” as the expression of the “new humanism of tomorrow”, which obliges people to protect all ecosystems to “preserve ecological balance” i.e. to guarantee the existence of natural harmony. He wrote that what serves the preservation and development of ecosystems is “good” in an ethical and biological sense (Aleksandrowicz, 1988). Therefore, it can be considered that such an understanding of ecological conscience is an ethical value.

Hans G. Gadamer (co-creator of philosophical hermeneutics) wrote that “in the face of modern science with its range of technical applications that generate both benefits for people and evil, and “decompose nature –we must take on an increased responsibility”, because it is now a question of “the whole human existence in nature, the task of controlling the development of human potential and human control over the forces of nature, so that it has not been ravaged and destroyed, but remained together with our existence on this earth. Nature can no longer be seen as an object of exploitation. It must in all its forms appear to be experienced as a partner, but this means that it must be understood as the other one, with whom we live together” (Gadamer, 1992). The first sentence is a warning and demands responsibility on the part of people for the preservation of nature as a whole, and it also presents an ontological view that the whole of human life (existence) from

birth to death is situated in nature; therefore, if we consider human life to be a cultural and existential value, we must take the view that nature is also a value in this dual sense. The second sentence of the philosopher should be understood in the anthropological sense, being a partner of humans, is this "other one" in the subjective sense, although it does not have a subjective consciousness. The author did not explain in detail the content of the quoted second sentence. He was probably aware that it was we who were responsible to create partnership relations with nature, in the same way as we create them with others, and the understanding of the other one is to learn its laws of development and accept the right to maintain life. Thus, learning about the laws of nature development is not only a cognitive value (i.e. the goal of science), but it is also an ethical value, because without recognizing the laws of nature we will not understand its richness and preserve its substance, i.e. its existence.

At the end of the second paragraph it is also developed the idea of a trustworthy guardianship in relation to valuable natural assets, which is also the value of the autonomous ethics. In our subjective opinion, this value and also a norm of professional activity is accepted and implemented "on a daily basis" by almost all employees responsible for the maintenance of valuable natural assets, when in situations of danger – natural or caused by humans – they protect these assets without asking for payment and promptly repair the damage caused, without knowing that Kotarbinski formulated an ethical concept of a guardian. At the same time, the ethical imperative of guardianship as a professional duty, in most such situations, takes the issue of remuneration for saving nature's assets to the background. To put it more forcefully, when repairing damage, we are dealing with a traditional understanding of employee dedication, for which above all ethical praise is expected (as it is known the employees' superiors usually forget about it).

We have adopted seven values, accompanied by appropriate justification, including the principal value, i.e. the maintenance and protection of nature as an integral state. As can be seen, these values refer to the whole natural ecosystem, except when some goods are used. Then it is the user's ethical duty to rebuild or reproduce an ecosystem that is depleted by its exploitation, as it is done by foresters after cutting down a fragment of a forest. What remains, however, is the issue of using non-renewable natural resources, which cannot be recreated. We are not dealing with this issue because it is not the subject of our deliberations (Devall, Sessions, 1994).

When it comes to valuable natural areas, there is no doubt that all described ethical values refer to them, in other words, the whole pool of seven values is realized on their territory through the activity of appropriate institutions managing them and individual people. It can be said that it is the

institutions and people who act as trustworthy guardians. Thanks to the material realization of values by institutions and people valuable natural areas exist at all (of course, valuable areas of any form are created according to appropriate biological, natural and legal criteria). In the first part of the article we have written that values contain abstract and objective content, without any indication of how to implement them. Values generally define goals – the meaning of life and general objectives, as in the case of described values of professional activity. If we accept values for religious or intellectual reasons (or for both reasons together), so if we are convinced of them, we accept an ethical obligation (often called duty in ethics) to implement them through the implementation of commandments, i.e. moral norms, which determine how we should act. Due to such a nature of the norms, their content is not justified, but it is edited in the form of orders as to how to deal with specific situations, what partial tasks should be performed in order to realize the respected values. In short, norms are formulated because of the intention to realize values.

### A set of recommended moral norms

Specified norms have a subjective and objective scope of application, i.e. they should manage the activities of institutions and at the same time the actions of individual employees and volunteers, dealing with the management, protection and maintenance of valuable natural areas.

1. We suggest that prudence should be accepted as a prime norm (it was recommended by Aristotle), which obliges anyone who accepts these values to consider carefully in-depth analysis of the proposed actions, whether as a result of their implementation there will be any damage or threat of damage; if damage is expected to occur, it is a moral obligation of the person designing individual, group or institutional actions to refrain from implementing or redesigning actions aimed at eliminating potential hazards.
2. The second norm recommends systematic vocational education in the sense of having appropriate theoretical competences, or acquiring knowledge and skills from experienced people (preferably from both sources), competences necessary to practice professional prudence.
3. The third norm requires that the common good, which is valuable natural areas as an integral whole (systems), must be preserved in the best state of existence; the realization of the first (prudence) and fifth norm (individual and collective professional activities) is a prerequisite for the fulfillment of this norm.
4. The fourth norm obliges employees who maintain valuable natural areas to publicly disseminate these values, in particular the view that all



nature, including its valuable areas, are material and cultural values as a common good.

5. The fifth norm requires continuous professional activity to maintain the existing natural balance in areas of natural value and the principles of their sustainable development.
6. Another norm obliges individual employees to form an ecological conscience, which requires the protection of natural assets in the areas mentioned above and obliges them to accept individual responsibility for the damage caused, despite the practice of the norm of prudence.
7. The subjective (individual) expression of ecological conscience is the attitude of a trustworthy guardian towards the whole and particular natural assets. However, the attitude of such a guardian cannot be commanded by anyone from outside because it is a sovereign decision of the individual. Thus, this norm does not have prescriptive status and it can only be voluntarily approved and applied.
8. The eighth norm prescribes subjective treatment of individual natural assets in a valuable area as if they were like us humans, entities that live and die according to their own biological laws; through such subjective treatment it is expressed the ethical "respect for beings of nature".
9. The last norm requires employees to practice personal courage (in Greek ethics there was the virtue of bravery) in any situation where there is a danger from people that there will be some kind of destruction in a valuable natural area; the implementation of this norm must also be applied to employees in case of threat from institutions, especially economic ones, which, due to their particular economic interests, seek to limit territory and assets of valuable natural areas.

## Conclusion

At the end of the discussion, we would like to point out that the formulated project of the ethical concept relating to the management of valuable natural areas overlaps in part with the values of ecological ethics proposed by the authors (Kaczocha, Sikora<sup>2016</sup>). Among other things it is the same understanding of the values of ecological conscience and natural ecosystems, which are an important element of the idea of sustainable development. The values of ecological ethics covered in the article, as well as moral norms helpful in the management of nature in general, and especially valuable natural areas, should be accepted and implemented not only by institutions responsible for these areas, but also by every employee and by all intelligent people. Therefore, it is extremely important to raise the ecological awareness of the

society towards understanding, assimilation and dissemination of appropriate values and norms of ecological ethics. Such educational activities should be supported not only by employees of state forest institutions, national parks, landscape parks, nature reserves and other protected landscape areas, but also by educational institutions and social ecological organizations.

## Literature

- Aleksandrowicz J. (1988), *Sumienie ekologiczne*, Warszawa
- Dewall B., Sessions G. (1994), *Ekologia głęboka*, Warszawa
- Franciszek (2015), *Laudato si*, Wrocław
- Gadamer G.H. (1992), *Dziedzictwo Europy*, Warszawa
- Jan Paweł II (1994), *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, Wrocław
- Kaczocha W. (2015), *Filozofia społeczna*, Warszawa
- Kaczocha W., Sikora J. (2016), *Ecological Ethics: Values and Norms in Local Rural Communities*, "Journal Agribusiness and Rural Development" No. 1(39), p. 69-78
- Katechizm (2002), *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego*, Poznań
- Kotarbiński T. (1966), *Medytacje o życiu godziwym*, Warszawa
- Sikora J. (2010), *Możliwości rozwoju turystyki na obszarach przyrodniczo cennych w Wielkopolsce*, in: M. Jalinik (ed.), *Turystyka na obszarach przyrodniczo cennych*, Białystok
- The Act of 16 April on nature conservation (2004), Dz.U. no. 92, pos. 880
- Zimniewicz K. (2014), *Czy park krajobrazowy jest dobrem wspólnym?*, "Biuletyn parków krajobrazowych Wielkopolski" Vol. 20(22), Poznań