

Environmental Virtue Ethics and Sustainability

Etyka cnót środowiskowych a zrównoważony rozwój

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Abstract

In Environmental Virtue Ethics by Louke van Wensveen, the scientist puts forward an idea to link ecosystem sustainability with environmental virtues. Ecosystem sustainability is understood here as a criterion of genuine environmental virtue. On the one hand, such an idea presents an interesting theoretical postulate, since it connects morality with ecology. Thus, it can become a very powerful tool in stimulating environmental activities. On the other hand, the idea of linking environmental sustainability with aretology is a little bit problematic. Thus, the aim of the article is to analyse ecosystem sustainability as a criterion of environmental virtue.

Key words: environmental ethics, environmental virtue ethics, sustainable development

Streszczenie

W ramach etyki cnót środowiskowych pojawił się postulat, żeby powiązać cnoty środowiskowe z trwałością ekosystemów. Louke van Wensveen zaproponowała, aby trwałość ekosystemów stała się kryterium cnoty środowiskowej. Z jednej strony pomysł jest interesującym teoretycznie postulatem, przede wszystkim dlatego, że wiąże sferę moralności ze sferą działań służących ochronie środowiska. Co więcej, może stać się skutecznym narzędziem motywującym do działań na rzecz ochrony środowiska. Z drugiej strony pomysł powiązania trwałości ekosystemów z problematyką aretologiczną jest nieco problematyczny. Stąd celem artykułu jest analiza postulatu uczynienia trwałości ekologicznej kryterium cnoty.

Słowa kluczowe: etyka środowiskowa, etyka cnót środowiskowych, zrównoważony rozwój

1. Introduction

Deterioration of the natural environment initiated in the second half of the twentieth century has become an object of interest, among others, for humanists, including ethicists. A widespread and growing interest in the issue led to the development of a new, specific branch of ethics, namely, environmental ethics. Since 1970-ties, this philosophy has been addressing the issue of human relations with the natural environment and striving to develop norms and principles that have or may have an impact on this relationship (Tyburski, 1999). Within the scope of environmental ethics, various attempts have been made to answer the question about human moral obligations to the natural environment. This ethics has often taken the form of deontological or consequentialist ethics. However, due to insufficiency of norms

formulated on the basis of these two approaches, environmental ethicists became interested in the renaissance of virtue ethics which this philosophy has enjoyed since the 1950s, thanks to the publication of G.E.M. Anscombe's article (Anscombe, 1958). Virtue ethics combined with environmental ethics, took the form of a new discipline – environmental virtue ethics.

Thomas Jr. Hill's article entitled *Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environment* (Hill, 1983) is commonly assumed to constitute a point of departure for ontological reflection on natural environment. However, representatives of the discipline argue that the discussion on virtues has accompanied environmental ethics from the very beginning (Cafaro, 2010), and that it can even be traced back to American transcendentalism whose representatives are among significant philosophers devel-

oping the ecological thought in the United States (Tyburski, 2006). Environmental virtue ethics has so far developed four independent concepts. Its authors include Henry David Thoreau (interpreted by Philip Cafaro)¹, Louke van Wensveen (2000), Ronald Sandler (2007) and Brian Treanor (2014). An interesting idea appearing in the debates of environmental virtue ethicists is the proposal to adopt sustainable development as a criterion of virtue. Due to the fact that sustainable development is a very broad concept covering various spheres of human life and that there are manifold ways and levels of its application, an idea emerged to narrow down the criterion of virtue to ecological sustainability. The concept of ecosystem sustainability as a prerequisite for the development of virtue appears in the thought of Louke van Wensveen. Although interesting, it still raises some doubts, hence the purpose of the present article is to answer the question whether ecological sustainability can become a criterion of virtue. In the first part, the article concentrates on the concept of environmental virtues, mainly in the context of the language of virtues and methods of defining the nature of environmental virtues. The second part presents the relation between virtues and the issue of ecosystem sustainability.

2. Environmental virtues

A proposal to link ecological sustainability with virtue ethics was put forward by a Dutch ethicist, Louke van Wensveen whose main area of interest refers to the analysis of the language of environmental virtues. As the scientist contends, the purpose of her research is to restore the language of virtues in the ethical discourse, while she focuses mainly on issues related to environmental protection. Van Wensveen points to the fact that the very term *virtue* is somewhat problematic due to its homiletic character, hence it was often replaced in ethics with such words as *attitude* or *habit*. The term *environmental virtue* is, according to the philosopher, even more problematic since, apart from the homiletic reverberation of the word *virtue*, it links it with the environment which further complicates the situation. That is why, instead of the term *environmental virtues* (or *ecological virtues*), van Wensveen proposes to use the term *dirty virtues*. Why dirty? For two reasons. First of all, they involve working in the soil, and that means physical contamination. Secondly, the issue of ecological virtues is problematic since *ecological virtues would have been considered not particularly praise-worthy, or even vicious, during most of Western history (read: dirty = bad taboo)* (van Wensveen, 2000). What is more, they have even become a taboo subject, passed over in silence in culture, and

it is this silence that builds up this lack of purity that one would like to push aside.

Various attempts have been made to replace the word *virtue* with other terminological counterparts, such as *attitude* or *habit*. These terms, however, do not render the richness of meaning contained in the technical ethical terms, i.e. *virtue* or its opposite, *vice*. Hence, efforts are being made to restore the etological terminology in ethical debates (van Wensveen, 2000), and in particular to give proper rank to terms denoting virtues and vices. Van Wensveen provides the following arguments in favor of using the virtue ethics terminology: first, she emphasizes that the language of virtues means linking intent and action. It expresses the commitment that environmental issues require at the moment. People dedicated to the conservation of the environment recognize the necessity of undertaking active initiatives to protect it, hence the classic language of virtues best reflects the commitment and willingness to act in this area (van Wensveen, 2000).

Van Wensveen refers to L. White's article, *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis* (White, 1967) which postulates directing the ethical debate at changing attitudes towards the environment. This text immediately provoked and still provokes great controversy due to fact that it put the blame for the degradation of the natural environment on the orthodox Christian doctrine. By attributing extreme anthropocentrism to the Christian thought, the author of the article blames it for the contemporary ecological crisis. According to van Wensveen, this text had a great impact on the debate related to the changing attitudes towards the natural environment as it criticized the approach adopted so far and postulated modeling this attitude on that of Saint Francis of Assisi. Thus, it encouraged the use of the language of virtues in the debate about the character of man's moral obligations to the natural environment.

Moreover, the language of the ecological debate abounds in terms denoting virtues and vices. This facts was meticulously, though in a way that surprises us in the philosopher, documented by van Wensveen (2000), who on the basis of ecological literature published after 1970, worked out a comprehensive catalogue of ecological virtues and vices listing 189 of the former and 174 of the latter. The author not only provides a simple list of moral skills, but also organizes them according to the frequency with which they appear in the ecological discourse as well as groups together their synonyms. Consequently, van Wensveen creates a specific catalog which begins with such virtues as *care*, *respect* and *love* based on the frequency of these terms' use. A specific character of this catalogue referred to by van Wensveen as a kind of beauty contest, consists in the

¹ Thoreau is one of the most important figures of the ecological movement in the United States, but his output is more literary than philosophical. Hence, a key role in in-

terpreting Thoreau's texts and developing the concept of ethics of environmental virtues was played by Philip Cafaro (Cafaro, 2004).

use of methodology which is unusual for the philosopher (van Wensveen, 2005). Although, such a metric methodology is not the best way to obtain data for a philosophical analysis, it allows to gather interesting information about the directions towards which the discourse of ecological virtues is developing. Moreover, the abundance of virtues is a very positive aspect, since it enables better understanding of the various ethical contexts experienced by man (van Wensveen, 2000).

The multitude of virtues listed in the Dutch researcher's catalogue gives rise to the question whether each of them might be identified as an ecological virtue. Another question refers to the criteria according to which a specific virtue might be categorized as one related to our responsibility towards the natural environment. According to Ronald Sandler, there are four strategies for recognizing an environmental virtue (Sandler, 2005). The first, most common, is to expand the meaning of the standard interpersonal virtue. Consequently, we learn that a virtue might be applicable in the non-human world, and its implementation has a positive effect on our way of functioning in the natural environment. Sometimes, this approach is controversial, because it leads to a situation in which some virtues which have so far been considered as interpersonal are used with reference to the non-human world. Discussion on the virtue of friendship in the environmental context may serve as an example here (Frasz, 2001). The second strategy refers to the benefits gained by the moral agent. Environmental virtues are characterized by their positive influence on the moral agent. Natural environment cannot be brought down to the source of material goods as it also provides space for physical, intellectual, moral and aesthetic development of man. This in itself justifies environmental protection and our concern for the virtues which contribute to the environment's welfare. The third strategy refers to the moral agent's excellence, i.e. to his striving for the utmost personal development. This approach is based on the assumption that *what establishes a particular character trait as constitutive of environmental virtue is that it makes a possessor a good human being* (Sandler, 2005). The term *good human being*, is understood here in a naturalistic way and it implies having specific features and dispositions that allow the moral agent to function as a representative of his species. The fact of his having proper relations in social groups is one manifestation of this good functioning of the moral agent. However, understanding of the human community from the perspective of environmental virtues, is similar to the understanding of the biotic community as it was defined by A. Leopold (Leopold, 1970). Consequently, a virtue can be considered as an environmental one if it serves to maintain the biotic community. The fourth strategy is related to the category which is characteristic of virtue ethics, namely, to the

concept of a model moral character. It involves analyzing character traits of people who were recognized as ecological role models, i.e. they were found to have an excellent moral character as regards protection of the natural environment. Due to the fact that virtue ethics is highly concentrated on the moral agent and, more precisely, on his internal endowment, it is difficult to formulate general ethical norms within its framework. Therefore, harking back to character analyses of people whose behavior was recognized as exemplary provides an additional tool for virtue ethics. Such role models among authors of American literature dealing with environmental protection include, among others: Henry David Thoreau, Rachel Carson, John Muir and Aldo Leopold (Cafaro, 2011). Therefore, tracing the achievements and character traits of these ecological heroes is one of the strategies to define an environmental virtue.

3. Sustainability as a criterion of environmental virtues

Although, the third of the above-mentioned strategies refers to the excellence of the moral agent, nevertheless, as it befits the green nature of environmental virtue, it refers to good functioning in the community, which is understood as a kind of biotic community. It seems, that the third strategy has been completed and refined in the thought of L. van Wensveen. In Sandler's view, this strategy is connected with the effort to provide the best conditions for the development of the community and to achieve excellence. Van Wensveen formulates a similar assumption and at the same time a criterion of virtue, when she recognizes ecosystem sustainability as a criterion of genuine virtue or virtue associated with ecological sustainability (ecosustainable virtue). Thus, virtue related to ecological sustainability is a genuine one aimed at ensuring ecosystem sustainability (van Wensveen, 2001). This aim, in turn, involves the normative use of the concept of ecological sustainability.

Ensuring ecosystem sustainability is, therefore, the goal of our activity as a moral agent, and ecosystem sustainability is the desired state we aspire to achieve. Our activities in this area have a moral dimension and can be evaluated in terms of moral good and evil. Thus, our typical practices, e.g. in the area of agriculture, may require necessary corrections to achieve the desired state of the natural environment. The scope of these corrections depends on the ecosystem in which the moral agent lives and his sensitivity to his own actions.

The term *ecosustainable virtue* needs further clarification. As regards understanding of the term *virtue*, the discussed approach assumes that, firstly, the concept of virtue refers to people and involves their ability to think, feel and act. Secondly, virtues are assumed to have certain constancy in time, which re-

fers to Aristotle's statement that a single action does not make a virtuous man (Aristotle, 1999). Thirdly, it is assumed that virtue is associated with the pursuit of a goal, *For example, insofar as we cultivate compassion because we believe it contributes to the flourishing of others, or to our own flourishing, or simply because we feel a strong motivation to be compassionate, we are engaged in goal-directed endeavors* (van Wensveen, 2001).

In the context of ecological sustainability, the concept of virtue will acquire a specific meaning and it will be understood differently than the terms denoting virtue known from other approaches. Above all, it will imply a communal context. If one practices ecological sustainability virtues, he must realize what effect a given activity will have on ecological sustainability, and other moral agents will practice the same virtue in the same way (van Wensveen, 2001). It may happen that the cumulative impact of practicing a given virtue is detrimental to ecosystem sustainability, which is a sign that the practiced virtue is not genuine. Cleanliness may provide an example here, although it is in itself desirable and propitious for the environment as well as for all living in a clean environment. If, however, we use chemical agents to achieve the effect of clean surroundings then, on a large scale, our actions will harm the natural environment. Thus, if the cumulative effect of a particular activity is detrimental to the environment and its sustainability, it does not serve virtue. Each activity should be subjected to a certain hypothetical universalization to discover its true nature and the nature of virtues associated with it.

As pointed out above, a genuine virtue involves a situation when a particular activity is beneficial, regardless of whether it is practiced by one or many moral agents. The only question here regards the meaning of the term *genuine* in relation to virtue in this concept.

A virtue which can be defined as genuine is one that differs from semblances and counterfeits. A semblance of virtue is an erroneous interpretation of virtue (or vice). Van Wensveen refers here to Aristotle's example of soldiers who feel invincible and who underestimate the danger posed by the enemy troops. Although, these soldiers may seem courageous to an external observer, in fact they cannot be regarded as such (Aristotle, 1999). This example is complicated by its interpretation within the category of ecosystem sustainability. Van Wensveen links here genuine courage with concern for securing ecosystem sustainability. Although, the example is controversial, because concern for the environment is usually not taken into account in military operations,

the very link between courage and ecosystem sustainability is not explained here at all, apart from a brief mention that in military operations we are ready to sacrifice certain ecosystems, but not courage.

Van Wensveen devoted a part of her other work to the concept of *courage* (van Wensveen, 2000) trying to interpret it in terms of the feminist discourse and thus striving to purge it from associations harking back to characters presented in action movies (virtue of courage) or, as van Wensveen puts it, with the bravery in the style of Rambo. This type of courage leads to self-satisfaction, pretentiousness and the desire to control, while genuine courage serving ecosystem sustainability should be characterized by concern for the earth, imaginative channeling and sensitivity. According to van Wensveen, only such a conceptualization of the virtue of courage makes it compatible with the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition, and at the same time is free of patriarchal elements present in this tradition. In the context of ecosystem sustainability, courage would often require rejecting the will to control and abandoning warfare.

In turn, virtue counterfeits involve a situation in which we mistakenly perceive a moral agent as virtuous (or as having moral vices). As an example, the author mentions the virtue of focusing on otherworldly values, which is considered by many people associated with ecological thinking as a counterfeit of virtue. This statement is subject to the criterion of ecosystem sustainability, because the focus on otherworldliness sets man apart from the world and its values observed in the immediate natural environment, which does not contribute to the flourishing of the natural environment. So, focusing on otherworldly values is not a genuine virtue. This differentiation is designed to help us choose genuine virtues and avoid semblances or counterfeits of virtues.

The concept of ecological sustainability also needs further clarification. The very idea of sustainable development has become subject of numerous analyzes carried out from the perspective of different sciences. Through decisions of politicians and decision-makers, this concept is being introduced at various levels of society's functioning. Van Wensveen² emphasizes that the very term *sustainable* has been attributed to so many areas and concepts that its meaning is often interpreted in various, sometimes contradictory, ways. Above all, however, the very concept of sustainable development is understood in a very broad sense. It refers to the social, ecological and economic spheres, which influences the plurality of its application and sometimes these contradictions are already noticeable in the very use of the word *sustainable*. Hence, the Dutch researcher decides to

² Louke van Wensveen, in addition to scientific work in the field of environmental virtue ethics, corporate social responsibility, environmental ethics, sustainable development and research on religion, has also dealt with practical activity aimed at implementation of sustainable develop-

ment principle. Since 2006, she has been addressing the issue of implementing the principles of sustainable development in the Knowledge Center for Religion and Development and in the local government (Brummen).

focus only on one aspect of the concept of sustainable development, namely, on ecological sustainability.

Van Wensveen takes over her understanding of the definition of a sustainable ecosystem from Stuart Chapin, Margaret Torn and Masako Tateno. A stable ecosystem is for them one that *over the normal cycle of disturbance events, maintains its characteristic diversity of major functional groups, productivity, soil fertility, and rates of biogeochemical cycling* (Chapin et al., 1996). According to the above-mentioned studies, man can influence ecosystem sustainability, what is more, human activities carried out so far have led or are leading to serious disturbances in the climate, soil water resources or disturbances of the regime (change of soil use, control of fire) as well as functioning of organisms (introduction and extinction of species).

Van Wensveen assumes that man, apart from having a negative impact on the environment, can also contribute to exerting a positive influence on it, due to his having a huge impact on the shape of the surrounding environment. This anthropocentric assumption about man's significant influence on the natural environment, reveals the link between morality and ecosystem sustainability, since human activities related to ecosystems and their functioning usually open up many possibilities for the moral agent, including those that provide an area for the application of environmental virtues. This context of virtue application requires a broader view of environmental virtues and considering the essential elements of the social context which are related with the application of the sustainable development principle to the various spheres of the moral agent's life. Focusing on ecosystem sustainability is a strategy that is the starting point for a wider application of virtues, because ecological sustainability is linked to both the sustainability of bioregions and the biosphere as well as sustainability of human society and cultural structures (van Wensveen, 2001). Thus, such an approach allows us to focus on one part of a larger reality and, at the same time, it influences its changes as a whole. Van Wensveen's aspiration is not only to create an ethics that refers to ecosystem sustainability, but one that also has a wider scope of application. Therefore, the author postulates that her concept should increase the level of the moral agent's awareness in the area of caring for good in other systems related to ecosystem sustainability, such as the social and economic systems. An essential factor of exerting an impact in this area is strengthening or change of social conditions and economic models. This strengthening of society is one element of striving for a sustainable society and, according to van Wensveen, her concept links this idea with the ethics of environmental virtues. What is more, it allows for broadening the scope of virtues, and perhaps ultimately leads to the development of not only the virtues of ecological

sustainability, but also the virtues of socio-ecological sustainability. Needless to say, such a plan seems to be very ambitious.

Van Wensveen derives the criterion of ecosystem sustainability from the following syllogism (van Wensveen, 2001):

1. Ecosystem sustainability is a necessary condition for the cultivation of a virtue.
2. A genuine virtue includes the goal of ensuring necessary conditions for its cultivation.
3. A genuine virtue includes the goal of ensuring ecosystem sustainability.

The first premise is explained by the following argument: *The cultivation of a virtue involves a person's ability to feel, think, and act in certain ways. Any feeling, thought, or action is made possible thanks to physical conditions that sustain the person as a living being. Many of these essential physical conditions – such as oxygen, water, food, and fiber – derive from ecosystems (...)* *The cultivation of a virtue also requires that a person can continue to feel, think, and act in certain ways over an indefinite period of time. Therefore, it implies that the supporting ecosystems must also endure over time, which is exactly what the notion of ecosystem sustainability conveys (ibidem).* The second premise is closely related to the first one. It assumes that virtue means pursuing a goal, and we can only pursue a goal if we provide conditions that are necessary to attain it. Therefore, a genuine virtue implies the goal of ensuring ecosystem sustainability. Implementation of virtue compels the moral agent not only to cultivate moral skills, but also to ensure optimal conditions for the development of virtues. Concern for securing ecosystem sustainability is propitious for that goal. It is an element of developing proper moral attitude of the moral agent, however, not free from flaws. According to van Wensveen, this approach has two major drawbacks. Firstly, her concept can be undermined by an accusation of bearing an anthropocentric character which is implied in the assumption that ecosystem sustainability is an indispensable condition for cultivating virtue. In this sense, *ecosystem sustainability is only brought in as a means for human moral agency* (van Wensveen, 2001), while ecosystem sustainability is an important factor for non-human beings and for their functioning in the natural environment. Van Wensveen emphasizes that her intention is to look broadly at ecological sustainability and to take into account in her assumptions the benefits brought to non-human beings. At the same time, she emphasizes that sustainable development itself will always be treated instrumentally, because it never constitutes a goal in itself as the goal is sustainability beneficial for man. Thus, the very concept of sustainable development entails the risk of its being limited to serve anthropocentric purposes.

It is difficult to agree with such an interpretation, because the concept of sustainable development rests on an attempt at going beyond the anthropocentric worldview and considering it in various types of environmental choices. Serving human goals can be discerned, for example, in the economy or politics. However, taking into account the non-human world in choices regarding human activity is still motivated by the idea of broadening the perspective that takes into account the natural environment. As opposed to traditional economic concepts, sustainable development to a greater extent addresses the needs of the non-human world, for example, it influences decision-making in politics. Therefore, serving human goals reveals itself on the plane of implementing the principle of sustainable development into areas related to human activity. At the same time, the very formulation of the principle of sustainable development creates opportunities for its implementation in ways that take into account the interests of non-human beings. Anthropocentrism, therefore, is not inscribed in the principle of sustainable development in the way that van Wensveen suggests, its main purpose consists in expanding the scope in which it is taken into account in human choices with the non-human world³.

The anthropocentrism objection is somewhat mitigated by van Wensveen with the assumption that striving for ecosystem sustainability implies that we will try to provide conditions for that ecosystem's best possible development. Thus, our activities will go beyond just serving human goals and they will take into account the best possible development of the ecosystem. In this sense, ecosystem sustainability becomes an end in itself, and not just a means to achieve a goal.

In my opinion, the anthropocentrism objection, rather than being raised against the concept's assumption that ecosystem sustainability is a prerequisite for the cultivation of a virtue, might be applied to its statement that human beings can influence the ecosystems in a negative way or through positive feedbacks. This kind of approach assumes a rather mechanistic view of the world in which a virtuous man regulates the state of the environment on the earth. This puts man in the position of an engineer supervising the ecosystem. Indeed, it is difficult to question the impact of human activities on ecosystems, however, often the best solution is to desist from exerting any influence on the environment or to minimize the impact of our activity on it. The postulate of exerting influence on the environment contained in this concept implies exercising by man some kind of supervision over ecosystems on the earth and, thus, assumes human agency in the natural environment which may lead to the desire for excessive control. In fact, this control would not significantly dif-

fer from the negative changes in the environment caused by human technological activity.

The second drawback of this approach is associated with motivation because the arguments based on internal consistency do not have sufficient influence on human motivation; they require people to possess prior information and do some reasoning. According to van Wensveen, this objection can easily be rejected. The author believes that the syllogistic reasoning proposed above is based on the knowledge that many people are already familiar with, namely, an intuitive conviction that harming ecosystems is at odds with being truly virtuous. Hence, there is no need to be apprehensive about lack of motivation to protect the environment.

Undoubtedly, such a concept can provide inspiration for people trying to protect the environment as well as for those who want to do well in different areas of life. Its value consists in its pointing out that environmental protection has a moral dimension and can be treated in terms of moral good and evil. It also shows ecosystem sustainability as a certain goal that a moral agent can aspire to achieve, which in itself is a very interesting idea. Despite its ideological value, this approach is difficult to apply in everyday choices. We often undertake activities whose impact on the natural environment is not known or understood by us. What is more, most of us live in an urban environment and most of the time do not have contact with nature and the natural environment. Therefore, this type of approach seems inadequate in many situations of our everyday life. Furthermore, without proper preparation, it is often impossible for a person to envisage the link between a specific activity and its impact on the natural environment. It is, therefore, difficult to evaluate certain activities of the moral agent in a negative way, in a situation when bad choices are made due to lack of knowledge in the area of environmental protection.

An implied assumption about the man's agency and his possible impact on ecosystem sustainability is also questionable, since most of activities undertaken by a single moral agent do not have a large impact on the condition of the ecosystem in which he functions. Unless one is an engineer implementing projects from the area of, for example, climate engineering, his actions will have a very limited or even minimum impact on the natural environment. Thus, it is difficult to link the moral prowess of such a person with the impact on ecosystem sustainability.

Ecosystem sustainability is defined as being analogous to the good functioning of other analogous systems, namely social and economic systems, which makes the action plan even wider and even more difficult to implement. Nevertheless, it is in these areas that the appeal for introducing changes in social conditions and economic models appears, which may be

³ To read more on the issue of considerability in human choices, including moral ones, see Birch (1993).

a step towards implementing ambitious ideas put forward by van Wensveen. A frequently raised objection against the concept of environmental virtue ethics is that it does not address the social sphere (Dzwonkowska, 2016). Holmes Rolston III overtly defines the ethics of environmental virtues which omits the social sphere as a dangerous half-truth (Holmes Rolston III, 2005). Van Wensveen managed to avoid this accusation and, at the same time, by outlining the direction of change, make the proposal of concern for the social sphere and implementation of changes in the economic sphere more realistic than other concepts. However, linking those proposals with the virtue ethics does not seem to have a strong theoretical foundation, since van Wensveen proposes that the reference to social issues should imply expanding the presented concept of virtue and striving to develop the virtue of socio-ecological sustainability. Although this is an interesting concept, it still requires further theoretical elaboration. Most virtues refer to interpersonal relations, MacIntyre points out the communal dimension of virtue, its reference to the society in which the moral agent lives (MacIntyre, 1981). What would then such a virtue of socio-ecological sustainability be? Would it approach the standpoints known from the mainstream virtue ethics, or rather the ecological ways of interpreting the category of virtue? It would be interesting to elaborate and refine this postulate. Lack of outlining the basic categories makes Van Wensveen's concept interesting, but at the same time prevents it from becoming more than a declaration. The intended scope of a virtue's impact is too wide for the theoretical development of the category of virtue measured by the criterion of ecosystem sustainability. From this perspective, it seems that the greatest value of the author's proposal lies in its ideological dimension, in its role as a motivating tool for the protection of ecosystems, not in its being a fully-developed aretological theory.

4. Summary

An assumption that ecosystem sustainability is a prerequisite for environmental virtue is an interesting theoretical idea. According to van Wensveen, ensuring ecosystem sustainability is an area in which linking virtue ethics and environmental ethics can produce practical benefits. In this way, these two scientific disciplines can in practical life facilitate cooperation for the welfare of the natural environment. Focus on a selected aspect of the principle of sustainable development, namely, on ecological sustainability, is supposed to facilitate implementation of ethical principles and provide a possibility to attain the intended goals in practice. Nevertheless, ensuring ecological sustainability influences implementation of sustainable development assumptions also in other areas of this principle's functioning, because

they are analogous to the sphere of ecological sustainability.

Van Wensveen's concept has many strengths, especially, it provides a perfect tool for inspiration as regards environmental protection. However, its main weakness consists in its failure to refer to the possibilities of its application, and its implications are sometimes inadequate to the reality around us. First of all, it gives an illusive picture of human agency in areas where man has but a slight possibility to act. The program of linking virtue ethics with ecosystem sustainability is too ambitious compared with the chances of its implementation. Moreover, the very concept is developed in the form of a declaration containing well-explained terminology, but van Wensveen fails to refer her bold concept to a well-refined theory. Nevertheless, the article can be treated as a kind of ecological manifesto, which outlines a broad plan of concern for the ecosystem. This ideological value, binding moral man's prowess with concern for ensuring ecosystem sustainability, can be an important element in creating a new quality of ecological culture based on the awareness that human activities resulting in environmental damage (even slight) can be considered as morally wrong, and most of them require a broader analysis taking into account non-human beings and the entire natural environment. This concept can thus become a cornerstone for the development of the ecological ethos.

Translation: Ewa Sawicka

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