

AN ECOLOGICAL CRISIS AND AN ECONOMIC CRISIS

1. SUBJECT AND CONCEPTS OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Within the scope of reflections on the adverse changes in the natural environment that started in the second half of the last century a philosophical trend was identified, known as the philosophy of the ecological crisis. This concept was proposed by Vittorio Hossle (1994). Currently, within the framework of this philosophy, we can speak of two currents. The first is a critical reflection on developments of civilization, culture, society and economy in the context of the problems that arise on this occasion, and which are tried to be solved within the existing social order and civilization (Delorme, 2001). The second trend is more radical because within this current it is assumed that radical changes are necessary in the way modern world is functioning. The present model of civilization, according to the authors representing this trend, is already exhausted and the current problems cannot be solved within the framework of this movement because it constitutes a problem in itself (Devall and Sessions 1996). Regardless of the views propounded in the two currents, the philosophy of the ecological crisis provides an interesting interpretation of the contemporary economic crisis.

The creator of the philosophy of the ecological crisis described its object as follows:

- a reflection on the essence of the ecological crisis: what are its characteristics and what is its uniqueness,

- reflection on the causes of the crisis: the result of the existing phenomena of the crisis,
- reflection on the conditions that must be met to overcome the ecological crisis.

Hossle believes that a reflection on the ecological crisis is, in its essence, a reflection on human civilization and its weaknesses. He is convinced that its essence is to strive for meeting social and ethical challenges of the world so that it could operate more harmoniously. In his opinion, it is impossible to achieve absolute and unchanging harmony between man and the natural environment, but it is important to strive for this balance and to minimize those features of culture and resulting from them behaviour that are most destructive to the natural environment.

Other authors, associated with the stream of the so-called deep ecology represent a different view (Devall and Sessions, 1996). They consider that the ecological crisis is a proof of the exhaustion of the developmental capacity of modern civilization. Therefore, they believe that there is a need for a profound and radical change in the functioning of humanity: the idea is not to reform the existing world, but to completely change it, on the ruins of the old world an entirely new order of civilization would be created.

All the authors cultivating the philosophy of the ecological crisis and formed on the basis of its results the philosophy of ecology in the broadest sense of the word (Papuziński 1999) believe that today's crisis is a unique phenomenon, unprecedented in the history of mankind. Its following features are to prove this theory:

- the crisis has, for the first time in human history, a global character: the whole biosphere is threatened by it and all its components are affected by human activities; in the past there were local and regional crises;
- the risk for the biosphere is accompanied by barriers related to scarce non-renewable resources (it is said explicitly about the end of the era of fossil fuels), occupying the space, limiting the possibility of increasing food production;
- ecological crisis is closely linked to existing social problems (poverty and economic inequalities between countries and regions, overpopulation), political (wars, political conflicts between countries, conflicts of purposes of environmental policy) and economic (in itself, it is also an economic problem; we have to sort out the thorny problem of costs of the environmental protection to be incurred, e.g. the fight against global warming);
- environmental problems generate social problems: damage to health, and even a direct threat to life, a decrease in quality of life in a devastated and polluted environment;
- the threat is accompanied by public indifference, reluctance to bear protection costs, and a tendency to deny the status of certain problems (Kiełczewski 2001).

An interesting picture of the ecological crisis has been presented by the German Federal Government's Advisory Council for Global Environmental Change (Table 1).

Table 1
Syndromes of global change in the environment

syndromes of global change	features
Sahel	Excessive use of essential resources
Robbery	Conversion (excessive use of forests and other ecosystems)
Urbanization	Degradation of the environment by giving up traditional forms of land cultivation
Bust Bowl	Non-durable industrial management of soils and groundwater
Katanga	Environmental degradation by the exploitation of non-renewable resources
Aral Lake	Destruction of the environment within the project of transforming the nature on a large scale
Small Asian tigers	No account of environmental standards in the processes of economic growth
Favela	Chaotic urbanization
Suburb	The expansion of cities and infrastructure, leading to the destruction of landscape
Green Revolution	Environmental degradation caused by dissemination of foreign agricultural production methods
Mass tourism	Environmental degradation associated with mass tourism development infrastructure
Trash	Storage of increasing quantities of waste
High chimney	The environmental impact of pollution distribution over a huge area
Old Load	Local accumulation of pollutants in areas of heavy industry dominance
Chernobyl	Ecological disasters of anthropogenic nature
Burned earth	Environmental degradation caused by the military use

Source: Kośmicki (2009).

The originality of this approach is firstly a very precise and synthetic approach of major negative changes in the natural environment, and secondly it depends on a connection between environmental problems with economic issues. Various syndromes of adverse changes in the environment are associated with certain economic activities: applied techniques and technologies of production, ways of consumption, exploitative approach to environmental resources. This demonstrates the close connection between the way the economy is functioning and the state of the natural environment, as well as the roots of the ecological crisis lying in the economy. B. Poskrobko (1997) suggests that this negative view also includes a lack of interest of economists in issues concerning management of environmental resources. He states that until the mid-sixties, the number of economists dealing with these issues was comparable to the number of sci-

entists perceived as candidates for the Nobel Prize in economics. So it was just a few dozen researchers in the world.

This example shows that in the philosophy of the ecological crisis, after all, researches have always perceived the relationship between environmental issues, political, social and economic. Therefore, within the framework of this concept, we can, in a definite way, interpret the economical crisis of the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. The most important findings, which can be formulated in the language of the philosophy of the ecological crisis we should include the following.

Firstly, the economic crisis was not anything unexpected. The authors representing the current of broadly based ecology (including the economists who write about the problems of the natural environment) warned against continuing of the current path of development as unsustainable, which had led to a deep crisis (Jastrzębska-Smolaga 2001, Kiełczewski 2008). The instability was to result from excessive pressure on the environment, overexploitation of natural resources, as well as an excessive preference for the present needs at tomorrow's costs, which leads not only to environmental degradation, but also to undermining of the ratio between the current and future consumption (savings).

Secondly, the economic crisis is "a natural continuation of" the ecological crisis because both are manifestations of the multidimensional crisis of civilization. In fact, proponents of the philosophy of ecological crisis emphasize that modern civilization is a civilization of domination, hierarchy and exploitation. A belief in the superiority of man over the whole world and his limitless rights to exploit this world are an integral part of contemporary civilization consciousness: the environmental degradation is the result of such a mentality which is due to the consciousness structure of modern man. Some authors go even further in the proliferation of similar analogies: the dominance over the environment is in their opinion, the logical sequence of continued domination of some nations over other nations, men over women, etc. (Kochan and Łoś 2007). An interpretation of the causes of the contemporary mortgage crisis is included in this way of thinking: perhaps there is no better form of a bank's domination and control over their customers than making them dependent through long-term credits.

Thirdly, the sources of the economic crisis are the same as the sources of the ecological crisis, which will be indicated further on in this article.

Fourthly, it seems that after all the economic crisis is a chance for humans and the economy, should it be related to a kind of return to traditional ideas about management, especially the relationship between consumption and saving (which, however, is not obvious). However, in environmental issues the economic crisis will probably be a period of decline: a loss of interest will likely affect environmental policy as it happened in the mid-seventies of the last century. At the same time, however, less of an interest in further unlimited growth of consumption may for some time limit pressures on the environment.

2. SOURCES OF THE CRISIS

The causes of the ecological crisis are classified very differently. At this point, will be presented those that are cultural and, therefore, they are the result of the very essence of the functioning of civilization, since they refer to the foundations of the underlying values.

The first cause of today's environmental problems is ethics based on the values of ethics of anthropocentrism. It is a belief that only man is the subject of values, and the surrounding natural world is the only instrument in his hands, the object of his actions. This world is nothing: it is amoral, any approach to it is ethical only if it possibly threatens the man himself.

Anthropocentrism is deeply rooted in the consciousness of modern man. It affects the practical morality in which a great deal of openly cruel behaviour toward the environment is justified on religious (offerings of animals), scientific grounds and the good of mankind (experiments on animals), aesthetic (garments), and pleasure (circus, taming animals, wild land joyriding by the quads, etc.). Theoretically, everyone supports the goals of environmental protection but in practice, it often turns out that this support ends with the appearance of any conflicts of interest. Good examples are conflicts emerging constantly in Poland about economic activities versus the protection of nature, such as the dispute over the Augustow ring road, the dispute about the extension of Białowieża National Park or local community efforts to reduce the size, and even liquidation of the Tatra National Park.

Has anthropocentrism had anything to do with the current economic crisis? This relationship can be seen in the attitude of modern man to meet the "here and now" of their own needs with completely carefree perception of long-term prospects for sustainable management. In fact, modern anthropocentrism, is currently an egocentrism of this generation, who has decided to live on credit: the literal one, contracted with financial institutions and the symbolic one, but also painful, in a form of devastated environment, and depleted resources. It is true that it often emphasized that anthropocentrism should incorporate concern about future human generations, but until now it has been considered to be a slogan, which is not taken seriously.

Consumerism, or the belief that self-realization is made by achieving a progressively higher degree of satisfaction of material needs and by achieving higher and higher positions in the social hierarchy, is another source of ecological crisis, but it is also probably a very important source of the current economic crisis.

Pro-ecologically minded economists use, in the context of development and the natural environment, the formulation of sustainable consumption (also called "sustainable consumption"). They believe that the processes of consumption must satisfy several conditions necessary to meet the needs of the processes to be able to be consid-

ered as permanent, i.e. the ones that can be continued in the future and would not result in a sharp decline in satisfying those needs. These include the following:

- keeping of the ratio between the current and future consumption, current expenditure on consumption may not lead to a permanent lack of funds for future consumption and a sharp drop in living standards;
- maintaining balance between satisfying the material and immaterial needs of the consumer;
- current consumer choices should not lead to a deterioration of situation of other consumers, and in no circumstances can contribute to preventing meeting their fundamental needs;
- level of consumption should be within the limits of the capacity (resistance) of the natural environment (Kiełczewski, 2008, pp. 75-92).

These conditions are not met now, and consumerism seems to be the main reason for this fact.

Modern society is a society of prosperity and mass consumption whose desirability no one denies and which are particularly important pillars of the value system of modern society. This system is strengthened through education aimed at competition, a desire for success and abundance of possessed specialized skills; it is also strengthened through politics and economics acknowledging a growth in the economy and an increase in the quality of life as determinants of social development and also through marketing and advertising that openly promote the ethos of satisfying all needs and desires. The financial system has become an element of pressure on the growth of consumption offering countless financial products and payment facilities. They led to unceasing indebtedness of consumers who had used those products and facilities wanting to immediately benefit from the goods, which formerly they had to accumulate earned money for. Social policy whose size and cost became higher and higher in an increasing number of countries gave a sense of security and stability which tempted to more risky decisions to take up a credit, a further loan, etc. The relationship between consumption and work has loosened. Earning and spending money became separate realities between which an increasing number of people did not see a direct relationship (Bauman, 2006). The current economic crisis is a crisis of functioning of that mechanism of the economy.

Pro-ecologically minded authors have been warning of the fulfillment of the black scenario for many years, the collapse of the viability of the economy due to excessive stimulation of consumeristic expectations (or simply greed). It was to be the result of the accelerated devastation of the environment and the disappearance of the tradition of saving, which replaced the limited rationality of financial services; limited due to the fact that those who have offered these services, were also led by greed (Jastrzębska-Smolaga 2000, Rifkin 2003).

Undoubtedly, degradation of the natural environment is a dramatic result of excessive consumption. For this reason, a German philosopher Jonas defines contemporary consumption as a “creeping apocalypse”: *What concerns is that everyday peaceful use that we make with our power on which is based, after all, our civilized existence with all the facilitation (driving your own car, plane flight, etc.), with all the incredible abundance of goods at our disposal. These are all things which should not come in for criticism from the moral point of view, but from what we do every day there is no escape. It runs its own course. This means that the creeping apocalypse becomes more dangerous than sudden and violent apocalypse.* (Greisch, 1992, pp.105-106). What is this “creeping apocalypse? Now, all the consumer needs are met by using natural resources. The higher the level of material consumption, the more intensive the exploitation of these resources. Virtually, every consumption process is accompanied by the waste as well as pollution contributing to the deterioration of natural environment. The current level of consumption is particularly high. This results on the one hand, from the pressure to have more and more material goods, on the other hand on their ever more rapid rotation. The result is that still tangible goods are replaced by others and become a waste only because their technical deaths occurred. For example, the average household in Western European countries emit almost three times as much waste as households in Poland. Yet, the problem of waste emissions in our country is considered particularly urgent and difficult to solve.

Thus, in the context of the natural environment consumerism and mass consumption are the main causes of degradation, because the modern man aimed at unlimited meeting his needs exerts pressure on the environment. This is illustrated by a simple measure of the pressure of consumption on the environment, which is the ecological trace. This concept is used to define the average area of arable land and coastal waters appropriated by one person as a source of food, water, energy, and also as a living, commercial, transport space and the space needed for storage of generated waste. Ecological trace corresponds to the biologically active surface area needed for the sustainability of human development by present living standards. This ecological trace is measured in global hectares per person. Permissible size of the ecological trace of the current state of the environment and its resources is approximately 2 hectares. Meanwhile, the average person now leaves a mark size of 2.5 ha, and the highest value it has in developed countries reaching, as in the U.S., up to 9 hectares. This implies a complete lack of balance between consumption and environment caused primarily by consumers in developed countries (Poniatowicz 2009, pp 281-282). Similarly, the current economic crisis can be interpreted in terms of imbalances in the economic sphere of consumption (household indebtedness, “bubble” boom due to overheating rush to consumption) and in the social sphere (depletion of a large part of society, the excessive reactions of the economic crisis phenomena) caused by the mechanism of consumerism.

These distinctively new economic and social problems join the existing adverse social and economic consequences of consumerism. In this context, contemporary consumption was for many years regarded as unstable because it has created two types of risks so far, of which management is necessary but exceptionally difficult and it requires changes in the way the economy operates. The current crisis phenomena complicate the situation even more – they increase the scale of existing problems and create new ones.

So far, the main social problem has been the fact that consumption growth on a global scale has been patchy. The current crisis will deepen the scale of the problem. Only a part of consumers have access to the most recently produced goods and services, and problems such as poverty, hunger, lack of access to education and medical care are still common throughout most of the continents. Worse, in recent years there is a perceptible tendency to extract the extent of poverty also in developed countries (the so-called fourth world), and the crisis that has expanded even more. This situation is all the more sad that our production capacities are sufficient to meet needs of all humanity. We have to do with a painful paradox. On the one hand, the economy can satisfy every whim of consumers, on the other hand many consumers do not have access to basic goods and services. Man has learned to treat the most complex diseases and also continue to allow that people are starving.

The uneven growth of consumption is described in the category of the effect of opening scissors. It is the increasing gap in income between the richest and the poorest societies. And, since the flow of information about lifestyles is more perfect, we can observe growing dissatisfaction with living conditions to which the consumers have access to in developing countries. This translates into an increase of frustration, violence and socio-cultural isolationism. We can speak of a global conflict between the rich North and the poor South which has economic background, but gradually becomes a dangerous confrontation of civilizations. The likelihood of such confrontation in terms of the economic crisis has increased.

The high level of consumption in the countries of the North causes the appearance of specific social problems. E. Fromm wrote about them back in the 1960s and 1970s. He believed that the rapidly increasing consumption does not make people happier, because it shapes the attitude of not satisfying his desires. The consumer is not satisfied with the achieved level of living, because he is aware of the fact that even higher level is possible and more modern consumer goods are accessible. This increases the number of social pathologies. First of all, they are additional forms of addictions. Nowadays there are therapies for shopping addictions, for the use of computers and the Internet, for work. Excessive consumption of food gives rise to specific social problems, like diseases caused by inadequate diet containing too much sugar, fat, chemicals, obesity, diseases associated with dietary obsessions, such as bulimia and anorexia. Serious social problem are also significant dimensions of consumption of pathogenic

goods : alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, doping, porn industry products. Unknown are the effects of psychological fact that the contemporary economic crisis indicates the finiteness of human aspirations and consumerist desires.

Attention is also given to negative psychological consequences of consumerism. It is seen as a style of living radically hedonistic and lacking in respect for higher values and, at the same time, widely recognized in practice. Less and less important is the spiritual self-realization of man, and increasingly important the consumption of multiple goods. Shopping is no longer necessary to meet the needs and has become a form of spending free time, besides, regarded to be very attractive. Technical death of individual goods and services occurs faster and faster, resulting in a further increase in consumption resulting from the accelerated rotation of products. Gadget-based consumption is becoming increasingly popular, based on purchasing of cheaply made, disposable goods, bought on impulse evoked by the reduced price, promotion, etc. However, even sustainable goods are used less and less frequently. Repair services associated with the used products are disappearing, because a damaged product is replaced with a new one. Consumerism also applies to immaterial services. Highly consumed cultural services (movies, soap operas, game shows, press) are usually shallow in content and shoddy. They often promote lifestyle based on a particularly high material consumption based on the authority of sports, television and show business stars. In promoting radical hedonism excel youth television stations such as MTV.

Under conditions of economic downturn and the ecological crisis increasingly noticeable becomes the discrepancy between awakened desires and expectations and possibilities to satisfy them. This is a huge social problem in itself.

Other cultural sources of the ecological crisis usually include (Kiełczewski, 2001):

- technocratism, an approach based on a desire to subordinate nature to science and technology, which are to be the means to create a fair and efficient model of society; nature is treated as a set of elements useful to technical creations, additionally it should be continuously supported by technology to be efficient,
- economism, ie. the conviction that the most important goal of the development of society is economic growth measured by quantitative growth of production and consumption and an increase in national income in a given society,
- mass culture, which is the primary mechanism for disseminating of cultural consumerist lifestyle.

The above listing of other (the author highlights that these are crucial, but you can probably replace them by the other reasons) cultural reasons for an ecological crisis associated with the above mentioned two. In fact, they perpetuate both myopic anthropocentrism and the preference of consumptive values. It has to be added that especially cultural economism attitude proved dangerous for the stable functioning of the economy. Having a fetish about economic growth, a growth in output and consumption resulted in a tendency to disregard the alarming social and economic phe-

nomena, as well as to marginalize opinions warning against shaking the economic stability and the viability of human civilization as a whole.

This brief description of the ecological crisis and its sources show the existence of relationships and dependencies between this crisis and the crisis phenomena in modern economy. If you look at both from the perspective of philosophy of ecological crisis, it appears that perhaps they are two manifestations of a much broader crisis of civilization. Given the diagnosis of philosophers dealing with the ecological crisis on the future of society and culture, it appears that they were surprisingly accurate and penetrating. A regret can be expressed that they were not treated seriously: it comes from the sources of the ecological crisis that they could hardly be considered fully seriously. Even now, when trying to find adequate responses to current challenges, it is difficult to resist the impression that these are ad hoc measures, searching for the source of problems in the simplest of market mechanisms, psychological, and even the alleged determinism of economic processes. Philosophers of the ecological crisis are still calling for transformation of civilization, and the economic crisis seems to confirm their arguments, but it seems that instead of profound changes in the functioning of our civilization, we should rather expect a lack of interest in ecological issues and the preservation of the stereotype that the best remedy for problems resulting from economic growth is even faster growth.

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