THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ETHICS OF CARE FOR THE ETHICS TEACHER

Andrea Klimková

Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Department of Applied Ethics, Faculty of Arts, Slovakia

Abstract

Teachers and scientists have long been interested in ecological and eco-ethical attitudes and their connection to behaviour. A pilot survey carried out among the university students of applied ethics shows that environmental cognition (cognitive aspects of attitudes) and sensitivity of secondary school graduates do not correlate with their interest in environmental problems and nature-centred behaviour. Theoretical framework of the ethics of care (EoC) is introduced here as a new and concrete eco-ethical approach to the development of ecological consciousness, nature-centeredness and active citizenship. The aim of this study is to justify the place of this approach in pregradual training of ethics teachers, i.e. the education towards nature-centeredness based on the ethics of care.

Key words: eco-ethical attitudes, ethics of care, nature-centeredness; Ethics, environmental education, ethics teacher

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS AND AN OUTLINE OF THE ISSUE

The current empirically and morally relevant data depicting classroom practice in environmental education at the Slovak primary and secondary schools point towards an evident absence of nature-centeredness in the teacher training. This has severe consequences for the current ecological morality and environmental literacy in children and young adults. We need a useful educational tool to cultivate the nature-centred consciousness and attitudes.

At our Department of Applied Ethics, Faculty of Arts in Košice (Slovakia), where we educate future teachers of ethics, we carry out a critical analysis of the current ethics education model. There are several reasons for this criticism. The current Slovak ethics education model is targeted solely towards interpersonal relationships. It focuses primarily on the pro-social issues of nature-centeredness. Our relationship towards our environment, values and evaluation of nature are still only some of the many cross-curricular topics that lack an instructional framework or a comprehensive model that would guide the ethics teachers in the nature-centred education. The fundamental question is, whether we are under current conditions able to “model nature-centeredness” and environmental literacy and cultivate students’ moral attitudes. If we consider the fact that it is by the means of education that a student establishes and cultivates I – I, I – You and I – Though relationships, then it is indeed necessary to cross the grounds of interpersonal relationships in ethics and consider the inter-connectedness of the biological, psychological, social, spiritual and planetary wellbeing (health, good) and good living conditions in our global era.

Another equally important reason for this is that ethics in the classrooms is psychologically saturated and designed (pro-sociability)¹ and lacks a connection to the practice. The ethics curriculum should correspond with real life and civil society. Ethics should take into account the tendencies stemming from the scientific progress, the direction of the current society, risks and threats that it faces, but also the differentiation between private and public and stories of the so-called ‘good practice’. In approaching older, secondary school, students, the school subject ethics should be more interdisciplinary, oriented towards the problems brought about by the new scientific findings. It should expand on the topics of bioethics, (high-) technology, ecological and environmental ethics, genetics,

¹ Many Slovak scholars and authors, e.g. M. Zelina (1992), V. Gluchman (1999), Korim (2008, p. 308), Kaliský (2009), Klimková (2014), consider the concept of ethics (the school subject) to be solely pro-social, as presented in the R.R. Olivara’s publication (1992), and have reservations about whether such psychologically reduced education without theoretically-philosophical and ethical foundations is able to fulfil its goals.
media ethics and of course professional ethics, depending on the type of school and its specialization. It is evident that professional training of eco-ethicists and competent teachers of ethics should in this ecological day and age be concerned with ecological morality and environmental literacy. That is why the educational challenges targeted towards the **eco-ethical competences** should be included in their vocational preparation. The term eco-ethical involves metacognitive and meta-ethical framework, conceptualization, reasons and grounds for the unity of the ecological and ethical – for the cognitive (content-focused), attitudinal (value) and competence-focused (processual, conative) dimensions of eco-ethical literacy.

In our study we (1.) work with the concept of nature-centeredness and use it as our starting point; (2.) examine the theoretical framework of ethics of care (EoC) and find within the innovation potential for ethics and environmental education; (3.) aim for its application in pregradual training of ethics teachers, i.e. seek such strategies that could work as a sound foundation for the cultivation of the human – nature relationship.

By nature-centeredness we mean the attitudes towards nature, the meeting point of the cognitive, affective (evaluative, volatile) and conative spheres. Our concept of nature-centeredness mirrors that of Vladyková, who perceives it as broadening of pro-sociability and its application to nature. (Stekauerová, 1999, p. 86-87) We implement the concept of nature-centeredness in the ethical and environmental education by identifying the theoretical framework and the foundations of EoC. Teleology of the research activities comprises of the following interconnected levels: (1.) the methodological level (2.) the epistemological level (3.) the practical (conative) level, which also represents the ecological, environmental, didactic and ethical (moral) level.

### 2. SLOVAK MODEL OF ETHICS IN THE CLASSROOM PRACTICE

How does ethics actually look in the classroom practice? Ethics is a compulsory elective subject of the National Educational Programme for the ISCED levels 1-3A. Its main aim is to work on the students’ personalities so that they have form own identities and value orientations, highly valuing respect to other people and nature, cooperation, pro-sociability and national cultural values. The benefits and overall quality of the Olivar – Slovak concept of moral education are still being discussed twenty years after introducing ethics to Slovak classrooms. Although this concept (and especially the fact that it is taught as a separate school subject) has been accepted by a majority of society, it still has its critics, who point out its shortcomings and mistakes in the implementation of ethics as a school subject and in its classroom practice.

The critique of the current ethics concept in Slovakia could be summarized as follows: a) the decision to implement ethics as a school subject was more or less political, as it was created as an alternative to the school subject religion; b) some critics question the very concept of ethics, debating whether or not it is correct to reduce moral education to its pro-social aspects. The school subject ethics lacks firm philosophical framework and a theoretical ethical basis (if a theory needed to be specified here, dialogical personalism would perhaps be the closest one), on the contrary, it is based on psychological theories. One could claim that the Slovak school subject ethics is in fact applied psychology. (Kalíský 2008) c) the subject has been taught in Slovakia for the past 20 years, but university training for ethics teachers was not available from the beginning. Teachers were only retrained in courses and this led to mistakes in their classroom practice.

Missing curriculum and instructional framework, lack of vision, terminology issues and the concept of nature-centeredness – these are the obstacles ethics is facing in the Slovak classrooms. That is why a transformation of the didactic theory and its connection to practice is currently more than desirable. Epistemological and methodological foundations and grounds for nature-centeredness in the programme of pregradual training for the ethics teachers require new metacognitive processes, new strategies and their practical application. Didactic transformation in teacher training at the Department of Applied Ethics, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, Košice, is determined by the new discourse in
applied ethics and involves new strategies in bringing theory to the practice of ethics didactics. The new competences of the future ethics teachers serve as a relevant output of these activities.

Our theoretical and practical investigation is targeted at the students of ethics teaching programme and a broader community of primary and secondary school teachers. Since our research required teachers’ preparedness for the environmental cross-curricular topics as well as didactic support, the project directly supports the educational needs of its target group and also serves as a multiplication tool.

3. NATURE-CENTEREDNESS AS A VIRTUE AND ITS CONNECTION TO ETHICS

Environmental education is currently the subject-matter of a large number of analyses, attempts at definition, researches, educational and practical activities in the pedagogic theory, practice, literature and in many other contexts. The initiatives and principles of sustainability are gradually transposed into the education itself. Cultivation of ecological attitudes is an important component of moral attitudes and development of environmental literacy and morality is as necessary and important as the development of literary and information literacy.

Studies and assessment reports point out such issues in environmental education as the very implementation of cross-curricular topics in school educational programmes, its thematic and organizational endlessness, lack of curricular framework, but also teacher’s unpreparedness and the very implementation of environmental education in the classrooms, which is often spontaneous, uncoordinated and dependent solely on the teacher.

As surveys and reports from Slovak school institutions suggest, the implementation and development of environmental education is often spontaneous and uncoordinated, sometimes without adequate theoretical background and usually lacking overall formality (while some issues are discussed at length, others remained neglected) (Kancír – Suchá 2013) Furthermore, as The Association of Environmentally-Educational Organizations Špirála states in its Správa o stave environmentálnej výchovy [“A Report on the State of Environmental Education”] (2011), ecological attitudes of secondary school students are inadequate. (see e.g. Klimková 2007, 2014) It also appears that many schools do not have a coordinator of environmental education – a teacher (an expert), who would be able to answer the whos, whats, wheres, whys and hows of the subject. This is the missing tool in cultivating nature-centred attitudes and consciousness in relation to the current ecological morality and environmental literacy among children and young adults. It is indeed the missing link without which there is no connection between the principles of ecological and environmental ethics, ecological responsibility and animal ethics. We can no longer prioritize the human needs and ignore the toll they claim on nature, welfare of animals and the state of biodiversity. It appears that environmental education exists here without environmental ethics and ethics of care.

If we are to answer the question of what environmental education is really like in today’s schools and today’s conditions, we have to explore the ways in which it is being taught, however, we also should attach importance to what lies beyond: to the epistemological, axiological and ethical bases of what is – or what ought to be – taught. Such a multidimensional, multidisciplinary project would have an ecological, an economical, a social and a moral component and thus necessitate a whole new approach – a new view and understanding of nature. The acknowledgement of nature as our existential habitat and an acceptance of the inherent value of nature could become a mediator that, hand in hand with an education that teaches what is useful and relevant, would motivate to explore, experiment, restructure and rebuild ideas and ideals. Worded differently, what we need is a new concept of nature, new values and a different worldview. This form of environmental education would not only retain its trans-subject character, but would become a continuous process, aiming towards raising environmentally responsible pupils as well as a youth respectful toward all (human and non-human) life, a youth capable of forming an emotional relationship to the environment, of actively creating and protecting our environment – a youth defined by an awareness of the Earth and a pro-natural way of thinking.
Education, especially moral education is a process that should cultivate people and leave them able and motivated to actively apply moral requirements in various situations that include their relationship to the world as well as nature and all that is not human. Therefore moral and ethical education has to teach that which is relevant for our life and our existence as part of society – now and in the future, whatever it might be like. Mirroring what is called aprosocial approach and giving it a pro-natural design is an effort to co-construct a new environmentally ethical orientation.

Ethical education, as taught today, is largely understood as a process aimed at cultivating and motivating prosocial behavior reflected in moral stances and a general prosocial behavior. It encourages the development of social skills (the ability to communicate openly, a positive self-image and image of others, empathy, self-control as a way of guiding one's own behavior, mental hygiene and others). Additionally, a considerable number of new approaches have been proposed in the recent decades. Among those is creative-humanist education, character education dealing with three aspects (consciousness, feeling, behavior), personal and social education. Pro-natural approach (natural-centeredness), however, remains an overlooked virtue and stands largely neglected. Ethical education includes it as one of its applied themes, a theme neither precisely formulated nor conceptualized. That being said, why seek the common points of environmental and ethical education? Put down simply, we experience the world through the medium of emotions and we think about it using the brain. Our acts are therefore conditioned by rational and emotional forces alike. Our ecological awareness is a matter of the whole, not merely one of intellect.

In this age of plurality, multidisciplinarity of knowledge and, consequently, of education it is important to realize the importance of environmental education. An effective environmental protection cannot, however, be based solely on the environmental and natural knowledge. Environmental education should not be solely in the focus of natural sciences. The notion of environmental literacy is used quite freely and can be approached from a number of different perspectives. Here we will define it as a complex of knowledge, abilities, skills, attitudes, convictions and values related to the environmentally responsible action. As J. Činčera states, some scholars emphasize that the key is not in the mere understanding of the environmental concepts, but in the readiness for environmentally responsible action and in the responsible action itself. (Disinger & Roth, 1992; Disinger, 1997; Morrone, Mancl & Carr, 2001; Wright, 2008; Negev et. al., 2008; Hsu & Roth, 1998; In: Činčera, 2012).

4. ETHICS OF CARE AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICS, NATURE-CENTEREDNESS IN ETHICS

We already know that ecological and environmental practice requires more than just the application of technological solutions and execution of power. What does it mean to actually take care of nature? What conceptual framework does the EoC offer? When we in fact strive to search for strategies which would effectively apply nature-centeredness in political, social and moral practice, we must think critically and establish the relationship between knowledge and care specifically in finding our way to nature, which we, despite our vast knowledge on the subject, still seldom take care of.

Ethics of care offers a number of interpretation tools and concepts, which prove to be useful and effective in reconstructing, redefining and reconceptualising our relationship to the world, the Earth and the biosphere. They provide us with models of participatory practice, key principles of relatedness, situatedness and different notions of identity. Ecological thinking is considered to be multidimensional and approached as a new way of connecting epistemology and knowledge with subjectivity, politics, ethics, science, citizenship and institutions, which pervade and configure theory and social practice. Ecological thinking is not a mere sum of these areas, but lies in their interconnectedness and mutual influence on one another (Code 2006). The foundation of these interpretational and new conceptual tools lies in the ethics of care. They involve a crucial analysis and a reflection of the notion of oikos/household (Young 2010), as well as the concept of polis/the public. All of these are relevant arguments for transposing ethics of care into the school subject of ethics and nature-centeredness. The following four central and fundamental values comprise the foundations of
ethics of care not only as its moral orientation, but also as a social practice: attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness. If supplemented by the relatedness and connectedness, context and empathy orientedness, they become important elements of participation techniques, which do not suppress the ethical dimension and try to achieve a positive change in the life of people and their relatedness to the world. These values play a significant role in the context of environment as well. And generally speaking, care involves several participants: we take care of ourselves, of others and of the world. By taking care of others and the world (in this case, of the nature) we build reliable relationships with other people.

Selma Sevenhuijsen (2003) recognizes four interconnected dimensions of care, each connected with a particular value. The first dimension is the care about something or someone, which is typical for recognizing the need of care. This dimension is connected with attentiveness. The second dimension is taking care of somebody or someone. This dimension depends on the willingness and capacity to take responsibility to ensure care in a situation that requires it. The third dimension is that of care-giving. This consists of the competence to perform activities which ensure the fulfilment of the need of care. The last dimension is care-receiving. It refers to the interactions between a care-giver and a care-receiver and their reciprocal responsiveness. Despite the fact that care plays an important role at different levels of our society, the values of care have yet not, according to Sevenhuijsen, became a stable standard in our world.

To easily transform Ethics of Care into didactics and to make use of the cultivation of nature-centeredness in ethics, we justify the EoC concepts on the following grounds:

1. Care and nature versus the oppressive conceptual framework;
2. Care and the public sphere;
3. Models of participatory practice: relatedness, empathy, attentiveness;

Ethics should mirror the new paradigm, that survival lies in the human competence for the world, and the urgency, underlined by the issues of humankind. Eco-ethics should become a part of our every-day life but not as a science, but rather as a means of communication with nature, of coexistence, of our relatedness to the world. One of the possibilities is educating our children and setting their morality to the so-called nature-centred level.

**Care and nature versus the oppressive conceptual framework**

What are the prevailing tendencies in understanding nature? Why do we instrumentalise nature and the environment? An ecofeminist philosopher Karen J. Warren researched patriarchal justification of the superior and conquering position of the western man above nature, woman and other forms of ‘otherness’. She claims that it is being maintained and legitimated by an oppressive conceptual framework. She describes the conceptual framework as “a set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which shape and reflect how one views oneself and one's world.”

The conceptual framework is according to her “a socially constructed lens through which we perceive ourselves and others” and one that is shaped and affected by many other factors, e.g. “gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, affectional orientation, marital status, religion, nationality, colonial influences, and culture.” The Slovak concept of the school subject ethics involves contemplative, analytical, cogitating and critical cognitive processes and first and foremost the enhancement of “good practice” suitable for coexistence with self and the others. The “good practice” in the coexistence with our world shall be implemented into this concept as well.

**Care and the public sphere**

If we consider social practice to be a moral practice (Tronto 1993) and realize that although we do know nature, we do not care enough about it, we will be directed towards the concept of care of nature, the environment and our home. It may be beneficial to supplement the commonly used nature protection (the duty to protect nature) with the concept of taking care of nature. Ethics of Care provides us with a good framework if this is the case.
Care is practical and is becoming (in a shift from the private to the public sphere) a public issue. Many EoC scholars talk about the EoC values infiltrating the public sphere and a shift of care into the (political) decision-making processes. (Sevenhuijsen 2003, Tronto 2013) This in practice means that care is turning into an involved care and that democracy is becoming a caring democracy (Tronto, 2013) Involved practice bound by the community and local society, is simpler. A care that is lived through and applied in practice is more direct and more responsive to the particular needs of humans or nature. Smaller structures allow for a freer spread of care, more flexible decentralized knowledge and also for the establishment of different kinds of relationships. Decentralized power also allows for a much more effective correction of the decision-making processes and their frameworks (Kiczková 1998).

Models of participatory practice: relatedness, empathy, attentiveness

There is a number of different approaches to care, but for the purposes of this work it will not be understood as a biologically determined quality or a trait, but rather as a process, an activity with social and ecological aspects. These result from the cyclical, rather than cumulative, nature of care (taking care of children, seniors, nature/oikos), the fact that care is not instrumental (instrumentality is a mere addition, a support) and that its results cannot be easily quantified, marked with market and monetary value.

This may come across as a paradox at first but it is the very lack of certain features that causes the underestimation of care activities and undervaluation of its social status in the modern western society. Many theoreticians disavow all kinds of determinism in Ethics of Care and stress that, although care has biological, social and historical foundations, it is a rather peculiar fusion of all three of these aspects. That is why care can be found in both, men and women, but presents in different forms. EoC contrasts with many traditional approaches to ethics, e.g. utilitarianism or deontological ethics. Many call this particular case of feminist criticism the moral “image of justice” and to understand it, one must understand the relations within it. Each of us has a different set of values and our reactions to others are formed based on our individual hierarchies and value structures. For EoC to actually be implemented (not just in theory but in practice as well), we must: (1.) rehabilitate the meaning of feelings and continue in criticism of the feeling-suppressing rationalism; (2.) implement the holistic understanding of the world and avoid the pitfalls of all reductionism (Kiczková, 1998).

When approached as a normative ethical theory, EoC involves the following key principles which regulate behaviour and influence: (1.) relatedness – a different understanding of autonomy – autonomy is in this case understood as self-determination, always linked with the effects that relations and contact with others have. It hence does not represent an absolute independence but rather the ability to be self-sufficient, which is different from being completely independent; (2.) a different understanding of identity – relational, social identity, formed by the relations with the environment and other beings; (3.) situatedness – the morality of behaviour always depends on the particular situation the moral subjects find themselves in.

Ethics of care therefore creates a theoretical concept which could serve as a framework for formulating nature-centred strategies – for nature-centeredness in the ethics classrooms. It is not only a starting point but also a point of view from which we may create and implement community nature-centred projects in practice. In connection to place-based education it may be an important tool for the cultivation of nature-centeredness.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In my personal practice (which is at the same time voluntary, educational, ecological and takes place in the classrooms as well as the communities) I support my students and young adults in their active and positive influence on the others and in taking care of their local communities. This may help them

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2 For further details see: the pilot eco-ethics educational programme Viac, než len ľudský svet [More than human world] (Klimková 2014)
to become active citizens, who take care of their homes, nature and the world, which we are all a part of. Innovation of the programme for ethics as a school subject and implementation of nature-centred principles into didactics is a complex process and it is one of the areas of the didactic research and development within the meta-practice of ethics didactics. Innovative didactics, unlike the traditional one, prefers projects which include essential, decisive and expected changes in the following target areas of theory and practice: a) educational model design for school programme graduates; b) time-management of the goals included in the didactic module or in other content unit of the study (topic, problem and others); c) design of the teaching tasks series in the lessons; d) application of the principles and criteria in the curriculum selection – a didactic analysis of curriculum; e) application of the methods of goal achievement mapping and monitoring in didactic modules and lessons; f) feedback – quality assessment of the so-called “good practice”.

Ethics of care is a source of many interpretational tools which are useful and effective not only in the re-interpretation and re-conceptualization of our relationship with (not only) the nature, but also in formulating the practical nature-centred strategies to be used in classrooms practice, a practice which will build our moral competences and influence the future moral, political and social practice. Ethics should mirror the new paradigm, that survival lies in the human competence for the world, and the urgency, underlined by the issues of humankind. Eco-ethics should become a part of our every-day life but not as a science, but rather as a means of communication with nature, of coexistence, of our relatedness to the world. One of the possibilities is educating our children and setting their morality to the so-called nature-centred level.

Thus I am contending that despite the profusion of ecological discourses across the academic and social- political landscapes of the early-twenty-first-century western world, where the world are on everyone’s lips and the rhetoric enlisted to serve diverse, even antiecoligical purpose; and despite contestations in the politics of ecology, the creative possibilities of ecological thinking for interrupting and restructurining the dominant social and philosophical imaginary have yet to be adequately explored. We need ecological thinking and Ethics of care for building nature-centeredness in schools and in the classroom practise and in the Ethics.

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