

Ethics and Ecoethics by Josef Petr Ondok: Between the Sciences, Philosophy, and Theology

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Abstract:

This article analyzes one part of the theoretical works by J. P. Ondok related in particular to his book called *Člověk a příroda: Hledání etického vztahu* (Man and Nature: In search of an Ethical Relationship). Special attention is devoted to defining Ondok's contribution to considerations on ethics and ecoethics, as well as to the link between these reflections to the philosophy of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas.

Keywords:

agathocentrism; Aristotle's ethics; bioethics; ecoethics; ethics; ethics of Thomas Aquinas; Josef Petr Ondok; man and nature; values

Etika a ekoetika Josefa Petra Ondoka: mezi přírodními vědami, filosofií a teologií

Abstrakt

Článek *Etika a ekoetika Josefa Petra Ondoka: Mezi přírodními vědami, filosofií a teologií* analyzuje část teoretického díla J. P. Ondoka, zejména na základě jeho knihy *Člověk a příroda: Hledání etického vztahu*. Zvláštní důraz je kladen na vymezení Ondokova přínosu etickému a ekoetickému myšlení a na vazbu (tohoto myšlení) s aristotelsko-tomistickou filosofií.

Klíčová slova

agathocentrismus; Aristotelova etika; bioetika; člověk a příroda; ekoetika; etika; etika Tomáše Akvinského; hodnoty; Josef Petr Ondok

J. P. O. – the inconspicuous initials commonly used by Josef Petr Ondok to sign the textbooks donated to students of the Faculty of Theology of the University of South Bohemia. His own modest self-identification with the three letters was a fitting expression of his overall manifestation, pedagogic in the broadest sense of the word. However, his lack of pomp and his plain style were backed with exceptional erudition and commitment to the mission that he had assumed. It is ten years since his death in 2003, and it has been an occasion to remember as well as rethink the work of this Czech theologian, philosopher and biologist.

Due to the focus of Envigogika, let me present an analysis of the portion of his work on ecoethics. The basic data on Ondok's life and understanding of his mission are provided by Karel Skalický in his article "Josef Petr Ondok – učitel a svědek"¹ (Josef Petr Ondok – teacher and witness); more details of Josef P. Ondok's key life events can be found in his autobiographical book *Muklovský Vatikán*², describing life in the communist labour camps at Mírov, Jáchymov, Leopoldov and Valdice – he experienced all of them, yet remained spiritually unbroken and thanks to the ingeniously (secretly) organised teachings that he obtained from his fellow priests-prisoners in the camps, he could later write fresh philosophical and theological treatises, including books such as *Důkaz, nebo hypotéza Boha?*³, *Bereme smích vážně?*⁴, *Čmelák asketický*⁵, as well as publishing numerous articles in professional journals abroad and receiving a degree in ecology from the Faculty of Biology at the University of South Bohemia⁶. He dealt with ethical questions notably in his works *Člověk a příroda. Hledání etického vztahu*⁷, *Bioetika*⁸ and the follow-up monograph *Bioetika, biotechnologie a biomedicína*⁹. In his work *Přírodní vědy a teologie*, he demonstrates how a methodological starting point for theology may arise from the dialogue between theology and natural sciences.

In 1996, Josef Petr Ondok wrote in his textbook *Obecná etika (General Ethics)* for full-time second year students at the Faculty of Theology of the University of South Bohemia: "The present-day ecological crisis... includes an ethical dimension. Its roots are

¹Skalický, Karel. Josef Petr Ondok – učitel a svědek. Available in the WWW:

<<http://www.teologicketexty.cz/casopis/2004-1/Josef-Petr-Ondok-ucitel-a-svedek.html> >

²Ondok, Josef Petr. *Muklovský Vatikán*. 1st edition. Brno: CDK (Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury), 2005. 135 pp. *Historia ecclesiastica*; sv. č. 13. ISBN 80-7325-040-3. 2nd edition ibidem in 2007: Ondok, Josef Petr. *Muklovský Vatikán*. 2nd edition. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury (CDK), 2007. 135 pp. *Historia ecclesiastica*; sv. č. 13. ISBN 978-80-7325-106-2.

³Ondok, Josef Petr. *Důkaz nebo hypotéza Boha?*. 1st edition. Svitavy: Trinitas, 1998. 155 pp. *Studium*; sv. 104. *Studie Teologické fakulty Jihočeské univerzity*; sv. 2. ISBN 80-86036-05-7.

⁴The author had this book in the highest esteem according to his own words. ONDOK, Josef Petr. *Bereme smích vážně?*. 1st edition. Svitavy: Trinitas, 2000. 118 pp. *Studium*; č. 140. *Studie Teologické fakulty Jihočeské univerzity*; sv. 15. ISBN 80-86036-46-4. 2nd edition in 2003: ONDOK, Josef Petr. *Bereme smích vážně?*. 2nd edition. Svitavy: Trinitas, 2003. 118 pp. *Studie Teologické fakulty Jihočeské univerzity*; sv. 15. *Studium*; sv. 140. ISBN 80-86036-81-2.

⁵Ondok, Josef Petr. *Čmelák asketický = Bombus asceticus: úvahy o křesťanské spiritualitě*. 1st edition. Svitavy: Trinitas, 2004. 144 pp. *Studium*; sv. 181. ISBN 80-86036-90-1.

⁶Modern-day Faculty of Science of the University of South Bohemia

⁷Ondok, Josef Petr. *Člověk a příroda: hledání etického vztahu*. Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 1998. 110 pp. *Studie Teologické fakulty Jihočeské university*; sv. 4. *Studium*; sv. 108. ISBN 80-7192-239-0.

⁸Ondok, Josef Petr. *Bioetika*. 1st edition. Svitavy: Trinitas, 1999. 134 pp. *Studie Teologické fakulty Jihočeské univerzity*; sv. 11. *Studium*; sv. 126. ISBN 80-86036-24-3.

⁹Ondok, Josef Petr. *Bioetika, biotechnologie a biomedicína*. 1st edition. Praha: Triton, 2005. 214 pp. *Studie Teologické fakulty Jihočeské Univerzity*; č. 24. ISBN 80-7254-486-1.

primarily in the uncontrolled exploitation of nature by man and the technocratic attitude of society. ... An analysis of the emergence of the crisis has shown that one of the fundamental sources of the crisis is an incorrect understanding of human ethics. The human being has moral obligations and duties not only to itself and society, but also other living creatures and inanimate nature with which it co-creates its living environment."¹⁰ In addition, he quoted Van R. Potter: "We need a new wisdom that would be cognition about how to apply cognition."¹¹

Here, Ondok hints at the lack of the modern-day subject-object perception of the man-world relationship. The human being can no longer consider itself the only subject in the world, even if it feels itself to be gifted with the best of abilities. There is a need to again learn to see the human being – oneself – as a part of the world, a part that is gifted with exceptional talents but also tasked with (exceptional) responsibility for maintaining world order as a whole. The role of the human being is indeed unique, but it is one of service, not mastery in the sense of superior and unlimited power; thus, the human being is invited by its abilities to create not technocracy but rather a home – a place in which life can be developed. In Ondok's writing, this "incorrect understanding of ethics" ultimately refers to an incorrect understanding of the action to which the human being is called, which ultimately also refers to the human being's incorrect self-concept and incorrect perception of the goal of human action. According to Ondok, the human being is obliged not only to its own existence but to the existence of the human species as such, and thus to maintaining its own living environment as a precondition for the preservation of life on Earth: an obligation to future generations. Ethical values cannot be separated from ecological ones. The anthropological concepts established before the 20th century have to be expanded to include the human being's relationship to nature.

The five conclusions made in Van Potter's¹² book are quoted with urgency: "1. I recognise the need of immediate action for healing the world affected by crises. 2. I recognise that the future survival and evolution of humanity, both biological and cultural, is strongly conditioned on man's current activities and plans. 3. I recognise the uniqueness of every individual and their instinctive need to contribute to the improvement of some of the larger units of society in a way compatible with long-term needs of society. 4. I recognise the inevitability of some human suffering that arises from the natural order of biological species and the physical world, but I do not accept passively the suffering that arises from the inhuman treatment of people by people. 5. I recognise the finality of death as a necessary component of life, respect to life, faith in brotherhood of people and my own obligation towards future generations."

Van Potter's conclusions themselves indicate a certain anthropology that emphasises the uniqueness of every human being, the natural order of biological species including mortality, man's calling to act humanely, and people's alliance within existing society and towards future generations.

Authors such as S. Gorovitz and T. A. Shannon had already distinguished bioethics from ecoethics, and developed ecoethics as environmental ethics, whereas bioethics was conceived as the ethical theory of biological and medical issues, like healthcare ethics¹³.

¹⁰Ondok, Josef Petr. *Obecná etika. Jednosemestrový kurs pro 2. ročník denního studia*. Unedited text. Teologická fakulta Jihočeské univerzity. Č. Budějovice, 1996. S. 40.

¹¹ Ibid. Reference to: Van Potter, R. *Bioethics. Bridge to the Future*. New Jersey, 1959.

¹² Ibid, p. 41.

¹³ See B. M. Ashley and K. D. O'Rourke.

This differentiation between ecoethics and bioethics can be seen as a mere practical definition of specific topics, but compared to Van Potter's concept and appeal for a realisation of man's position within the single world order, not above the world or detached from the world, the later separation of ecoethics from bioethics can appear as a new splintering of the world order concept, where the human being again sets itself up as the one who decides about the division of the order into eco- and bio-, and this position may again be the starting point for man's self-concept as the one who has the power as master and governor, the only difference being that he is now aware of the dilemmatic situation that he faces.

Ondok does not classify ecoethics as a discipline within applied ethics, because general ethics – from which applied ethics arise – was traditionally developed from the perspective of man, or society. Aristotle already considered ethics to be part of political science. To Aristotle, man was in fact defined by the definition of his life for communal life¹⁴ (ethics were of course a communal matter too). The community precedes the individual just as the whole precedes its parts.¹⁵ According to Nicomachus' Ethics, the human being is also defined for living in a community.¹⁶

However, ecoethics poses problems today that cannot all be solved under general ethics, which focuses on the human being or the community, because this relationship is towards nature: "Ecoethics have to be based on an analysis of the man-nature relationship..."¹⁷ That is why ecoethics is more an extension of general ethics, or otherwise traditional general ethics would have to be extended to the concept of nature and the human being's relationship to nature. Thanks to new cardinal questions concerning the whole of life and a world raised by ecoethics, some refer to philosophical ecology or ecological philosophy instead of ecoethics. Philosophical ecology or environmental philosophy then contains not only ecoethics in the concrete sense of the word but also ontological questions (ontology of animate and inanimate nature). Ondok quotes from A. Brenman's book *The Ethics of the Environment*¹⁸, which in the introduction deals with environmental philosophy, which is the general theory of relationships between man, nature and values, and has "four components: (1) the theory of what nature is and what components and basic processes it contains; (2) the theory of human beings and some general perspectives of man's life and the context in which it is experienced; (3) the theory of the value and evaluation of human activity with respect to both the preceding points; (4) the theory of the method that specifies what standards are used to test, confirm or refuse ethical claims at which the general theory arrives."¹⁹ The first two components (theories) would involve ontological questions; the third is axiology and the

¹⁴Aristoteles. Politika. 1278 b 19: "est in anthrópos zoon politikon" ("man is naturally destined for a communal life"). Cf. Aristoteles. Politika. 1253a 2. 9: "ho anthrópos fysei politikon zoon" ("man is naturally destined for a communal life"), "politikon ho anthrópos zoon" ("man is a being naturally destined for a community life").

¹⁵Aristoteles. Politika 1253 a 19.

¹⁶Aristoteles. Etika Nikomachova. 1097b 11: "fysei politikon ho anthrópos" ("man is naturally destined for life in community"). Here, Seneca translated the Greek word "politikon" using the Latin "sociale", meaning that man would be of a social nature, but Aristotle had in mind rather the determination for life in community in the sense of a purpose. Cf. comments by A. Kříž in Aristoteles. Etika Nikomachova. S. 253.

¹⁷ Ondok. Člověk a příroda, p. 15.

¹⁸Brenman, A. [ed.] *The Ethics of the Environment*, pp. 15-26. Cited in Ondok. Člověk a příroda, p. 17.

¹⁹ Ondok. Člověk a příroda, p. 17.

fourth is meta-ethics (meta-theory of ethics or, more specifically, meta-theory of ecoethics).

Ecoethics can also be perceived as criticism of traditional ethics, which was anthropomorphic and individualist, underestimating or ignoring man's relationship and obligation to nature. The expression "anthropomorphic" notes that traditional ethics concentrated on the human being's objective or obligation to itself and other people and society (not humankind as a biological species) – ethics were (and still are, in a sense) cultivated based on the human being and its notion of the purpose and goal of life (this is related to its classification by Aristotle among the political sciences and its modern-day status as a humanity). Nevertheless, traditional ethics have been not only anthropomorphic but also anthropocentric since no later than the beginning of the modern era – the human being was presented as the apex of evolution and the life of mankind as the ultimate purpose or goal of global evolution. Although people have come to realise the dependence of their life on the environment – and the anthropocentric notion has transformed into a biocentric one, in which the human being is perceived at the same level as other living species of the world – this position still lacks the human being's relationship to inanimate nature. Even though this biocentric model plays an important role in numerous scientific disciplines today, Josef P. Ondok points to another orientation within ethics, which he sees in the works Erazim Kohák²⁰, namely agathocentrism (i.e. a focus on good).²¹ It should equilibrate the biological and ecological aspects of human existence as well as the dimension of spiritual activity and creation (culture), inherent to the human being, which participates not only in the "biosphere" but also in the "noosphere", to use Teilhard de Chardin's term.

In her overview of concepts of the status of value brought about by the evolution of philosophical thinking so far, Jolana Poláková mentions the inspiring contribution of the agathocentric concept other than the ontocentric and anthropocentric ones: "Here, the value awareness of the modern human being is driven out of its 'narcissistic blindness', and the fundamental autonomy of values is elucidated: Values are independent of the human being and transcend existence; we perceive them as *valid* independently of what is, and independently of human will. The status of value thus defies both anthropological and ontological categories. However, that does not in any way interrupt the link of values to existence and the human being – it is only unambiguously obvious that the agathological order is not defined from the part of existence or man. Value is understood as *what is offered to the human being for active participation as good by itself.*"²² Even though Jolana Poláková's article does not make any reference to Kohák's work, the similarity of the concepts is evident. Nonetheless, it must be noted that Poláková does not describe or perceive of the "evolution" of the axiological concepts in the sense of historic development, but that these concepts are only separated as part of a systemisation: in reality, the notion of 'the good' (agathon, bonum) has been the source since the beginning of ethical thinking, and has even denoted value as such. The eudaimonistic ethics are only

²⁰ Notably. cf. KOHÁK, Erazim. *Zelená svatozář: kapitoly z ekologické etiky*. 1st edition. Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství, 1998. 203 pp. Studijní texty; sv. 17. ISBN 80-85850-63-X. KOHÁK, Erazim. *Zelená svatozář: kapitoly z ekologické etiky*. 2nd revised edition. Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2000. 204 pp. Studijní texty; sv. 17. ISBN 80-85850-86-9. Among articles, notably Kohák, E. *Za agathocentrickou ekologii*. *Vesmír* 2, 1992, pp. 92-93.

²¹ Ondok. *Člověk a příroda*, p. 19.

²² Poláková, Jolana. *Hledání dobra: Odkazy a výzvy filosofické axiologie*. *Teologické texty*. 2009/4, Praha, 2009. ISSN 0862-6944. Available in the WWW: <<http://www.teologicketexty.cz/casopis/2009-4/Hledani-dobra-Odkazy-a-vyzvy-filosoficke-axiologie.html>>. The term "agathology" is also used by other authors, incl. its continuous use in works of Radim Palouš.

a specification thereof, where it is conceived as the good for man, similarly to utilitarian concepts, where the good is "for something". The good is what adds desirability to 'the existing' – which ancient and medieval metaphysics did not see as utility for human needs but rather desirability in an ontological sense: "With this general agathological-ontological dynamics, it is also good (ethically) 'for us' to head for a full realisation of our ideal nature – our human value – and within it, to help develop the valuable existence of other beings..."²³. Thomas Aquinas describes this desirability as the natural sensory appetitive forces (*appetitus concupiscibilis*), in contrast to undesirable disharmony within the person (*concupiscentia*).

His really thorough familiarity with Aristotle's and Aquinas' texts, along with the analytics²⁴ method (which he did not associate with only positivist or neo-positivist thinking), to which he always professed, helped Ondok mediate the results of very subtle philosophical and theological thinking in a well-organised and comprehensive form.

It is the potential benefit of the Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy for ecoethics in connection with Josef P. Ondok's heritage on which I concentrate, leaving aside all the twelve different starting points and variants of ecoethics with which Ondok deals in his *Man and Nature*.²⁵

Even though the Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy did not ask ecoethical questions as such, Ondok did strive to examine whether the principles and categories of this philosophy can be applied to solve the ecoethics problem. This is related to the other task assumed by Ondok in connection with studying scholastic philosophy in relation to ecoethics, namely to determine whether man's absolute dominion over nature can be derived from scholastic philosophy: whether the philosophy is explicitly or implicitly in favour of man's dominance over nature.²⁶

First of all, the ecoethical bindingness is demonstrated in the Aristotelian-Thomistic notion of man's nature (*natura*). Here, it holds that action is qualified as ethically good as long as it concurs with nature and if the action undertakes the possibilities and abilities contained in man's nature. The notion of man's nature should encompass all that necessarily belongs to the issue, and what is its definition and differentiation from other existences. When defining man's nature, Thomas Aquinas refers to Aristotle's reference to human reason; that is, rationality is the specific difference (*differentia specifica*) between the human beings and other animals. Nevertheless, neither Aristotle nor Thomas emphasised the body and human corporeality as what necessarily belongs to man as his nature. However, corporeality would be the vehicle to demonstrate how man is literally dependent on soil, nature and the environment, and where "nature" in scholastics meant the movement for realisation – "movement towards unity and good" in ethical terms – it is impossible to see this realisation of the human being without its living environment.

²³ Ibid. Cf. Ondok. *Člověk a příroda*, p. 9.

²⁴ analysis – from Greek "analyó": untie, take apart, deconstruct (complex into simpler)

²⁵ Here, I only refer to the sequence and names of the variants of ecoethics, the description and reflection of which are found in Ondok's *Man and Nature*: the anthropocentric, biocentric, pathocentric concepts, as well as deep ecology, holistic concept or ecocentrism, ontological concept; another starting point for ecoethics is the pre-experiential origin of ethical bindingness; also conventionalism and consensualism, ecofeminism, Heidegger's philosophy and ecoethics; other starting points reflected are intrinsic value, moral right and moral status; the overview concludes with a reflection of the pluralist concept of ecoethics. Cf. chapter three of Ondok. *Člověk a příroda*, pp. 21–68.

²⁶ Cf. Ondok. *Člověk a příroda*, p. 79.

Therefore, the traditional notion of nature would have to be complemented with a characteristic of man's biological dependence on nature – that is, the human being is not only of a social nature (Seneca), and not only is the community passed on to the individual (Aristotle), but the human being is also essentially a "soil thing" – the biblical Adam made of the earth's dust – depending on its living environment; this might be the starting point for deriving man's ethical relationship to nature. However, the viewpoint on man's dependence on nature is also valid for Aristotelian philosophy, since nature is the whole of which man is a component – and if the whole precedes the part as per Aristotle, then nature precedes man, and then nature is man's nature (implicitly).

The other method used by Ondok to derive some of the ecoethical principles from the terms of Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy is the derivation of the intrinsic value of nature²⁷ by applying the ontological theory of the transcendental attributes of existence. In this Aristotelian-Thomistic, it holds that all that exists is good (i.e. value) to the degree to which it is existent.²⁸ Therefore, the opposite of good – evil – has no existence of its own, but is a corruption of the integrity of the existent. Thus, all that exists is the transcendental attribute of good, which is why all that exists is valuable.²⁹ This orientation towards the good – Ondok points out – cannot be thematised further philosophically. Therefore, the first, most universal ethical imperative is: aim towards the good. Thomas of Aquinas termed a being's natural movement towards the good as the primary conscience – *synderesis* (primordial conscience, non-thematised conscience).

Josef P. Ondok solves the other task in examining the relationship of scholastic philosophy and ecoethics outlined above – the determination whether scholastic philosophy involves a statement of man's absolute dominion over nature – with a remarkable hermeneutics of Aquinas' statements, where on the one hand, man is identified as the highest level of creation and the purpose of creation because he has a rational soul, yet on the other hand, Aquinas says, the ultimate purpose of the whole world is to serve the perfection of man's cognition – man's rational soul is thus not only a gift but also a task. Still, the anthropocentric concept of nature is evident here. However, man is not the absolute ruler of the Earth, but – according to Aquinas – he is the custodian or delegate (*procurator* in Latin), namely the delegate of God, a custodian entrusted with managing the Earth in line with God's intent.³⁰ Therefore, Aquinas' overall concept is theocentric, not anthropocentric.

This responsibility, or ethical obligation of man towards nature is pursued by Ondok above all in his ecoethics – to perceive ecoethics as the establishment of an ethic theory that further provides fundamental terms and categories for justifying man's ethical obligation in his relationship to nature. Thus, Ondok defines himself in contrast to both ecoethics understood as a conventional set of policies, where ethical obligation is not justified but defined based on consensus, and ecoethics as an instruction to a certain attitude to nature – an attitude that is not substantiated with a comprehensive theory that would derive ethical responsibilities, and ethics in this concept is a worldview rather than a

²⁷ This intrinsic value is the starting point of all of ecoethics for many ecoethicians.

²⁸ Cf. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa contra gentiles*, L.III, c. 7 – referred in Ondok. *Člověk a příroda*, p. 82.

²⁹ It is important to note here that even great suffering, loss and pain are valuable (in the sense of being aimed towards the good) if they are sacrificed – i.e., borne as a sacrifice, even though the specific reasons for the suffering are frequently unknown (for example, the answer to why a specific young child dies is unknown).

³⁰ Cf. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa contra gentiles*, L. III, c. 112.

philosophical or scientific theory. Ecoethics truly philosophical as well as such that would stand the test of strict scientific criteria were pursued by Josef Petr Ondok in his works.

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