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Nature and intrinsic value

Przyroda i wartość samoistna

Summary

Questions about the intrinsic value of nature are not only an abstract philosophical speculation, they have a practical meaning, can inspire and motivate people to act. Environmental ethics attempts to overcome the anthropocentric and personalistic attitude of traditional ethics. It emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature, value, which is independent from humans.

Within non-anthropocentric environmental ethics there are individualistic and holistic trends. Biocentric individualism raises problems with resolving conflicts of interests of different organisms, with the hierarchy of beings, while holistic ethics does not count with the well-being of individuals. Ethical holism should be contrasted with practical holism as a methodological postulate.

The pragmatic current of ecological ethics acknowledges that the good of people and the intrinsic good of nature coincide. In a pluralistic, liberal society there should be a convergence of radical, biocentric and moderate, anthropocentric concepts of ecological ethics.

Keywords: intrinsic value, environmental ethics, anthropocentrism, biocentrism, holism, pragmatism.

Streszczenie

Pytania o samoistną wartość przyrody to nie tylko abstrakcyjna spekulacja filozoficzna, mają one znaczenie praktyczne, mogą inspirować i motywować do działania. Etyka środowiskowa próbuje przezwyciężyć antropocentryczne i personalistyczne nastawienie

tradycyjnej etyki. Podkreśla samoistną, niezależną od człowieka wartość przyrody.

W ramach nieantropocentrycznej etyki środowiskowej występują nurty indywidualistyczne i holistyczne. Biocentryczny indywidualizm rodzi problemy z rozstrzygnięciem konfliktów interesów różnych organizmów, z hierarchizacją istot, holistyczna etyka zaś nie liczy się z dobrem jednostek. Holizmowi etycznemu należy przeciwstawić holizm praktyczny jako postulat metodologiczny.

Na gruncie pragmatycznego nurtu etyki ekologicznej uznaje się, że dobro ludzi i samoistne dobro przyrody jest zbieżne. W pluralistycznym, liberalnym społeczeństwie powinna mieć miejsce konwergencja radykalnych, biocentrycznych oraz umiarkowanych, antropocentrycznych koncepcji etyki ekologicznej.

Słowa kluczowe: wartość wewnętrzna, etyka środowiskowa, antropocentryzm, biocentryzm, holizm, pragmatyzm

Dimensions of the instrumental value of nature

Homo sapiens exists thanks to nature. Nature gives human beings shelter; people live in and through it. Nature in many of its dimensions has an instrumental value and serves to satisfy human needs. The human uses the resources of nature, is dependent on it and, like other species, functions due to integration into food chains and cycles of energy and matter flow. Apart from sustaining our lives and providing us with material goods, Mother Nature is the basis of aesthetic values, inspires creative activities, inspires artists, architects, engineers, is the basis of spiritual and material culture, a place of recreation.

The natural environment, fauna and flora determine the specificity of local communities, habits and customs. A person's lifestyle usually consists of his or her interaction with the environment and use of natural resources. On the one hand, people transform their environment and on the other hand adapt to the requirements of local nature, which shapes their identity.

Nature is a source of scientific knowledge, provides many impressions and emotions, puts man before challenges and creates opportunities to shape his character. Not only does it fascinate and ensure existence, but it also terrifies with its destructive powers. In the old days, when the man was at the mercy and disfavor of the forces of nature, he worshipped it, admired its majesty and enormity, fearing it, he held it in high esteem. However, since the origin, our species has benefited from precious natural resources in abundance, transforming, destroying, controlling and fighting against nature. In a word, we have an ambivalent attitude towards nature, sometimes we treat it as a breastfeeding mother, sometimes as a mortal enemy.

Market unification of nature's values

The various dimensions of people's relations with nature and the values connected with that may conflict with each other. For example, agricultural development, urbanization, the exploitation of natural resources by transforming and destroying the natural environment prevents people from aesthetic or recreational values of nature. The disappearance of natural habitats and the extinction of species destroys the biodiversity of natural systems and impoverishes the genetic pool. In this way, we are deprived of the opportunity to connect with wild, unchanged nature. It may also hinder the development of science that could be used to benefit people and improve their relationships with the natural environment. Is it possible to reconcile people's conflicting expectations of the surrounding nature?

When resolving conflicts that have arisen, it is possible to try to find a common measure of the various values. Nowadays such a measure is achieved by reducing everything to market value. The market is a democratic way of comparing different human preferences and values. The most valued is what is in demand and what people are willing to pay the most for. Profit

and loss analysis dominate, accompanied by the hope that the most dissimilar things, their properties and what is valuable in them can be expressed in exchangeable units of money and compared. Then a hierarchy of socially accepted values can be defined. Economic rationality, therefore, consists in reducing what can have worth for people to a commodity that has interchangeable value. But can everything we are interested in be measured economically? We face insurmountable difficulties in calculating the costs of using the environment. How to express the market value of landscape beauty, and how to financially compensate for the deterioration of the quality of life and health of the inhabitants of an ecologically degraded area, not to mention the irreversible extinction of species or unique natural sites?

The hegemony of market rationality contributes to the creation of consumerist personality whose main objective is to maximize needs and satisfy desires. In today's mass societies, atomized individuals without any ties begin to recognize their desires and aspirations as the only foundation of life's principles. Other people and the world around them are just means of providing pleasure.

Thanks to the global market, the power of multinational corporations is growing, economic power is alienated, becoming independent from the local base of its operations and depriving local communities of control over the environment in which they live. Communities and even nation states are becoming powerless in the face of the powerful forces of international capital and are often condemned to marginalization. Corporations externalize the cost of manufacturing cheap goods and making profits, pass most of the harmful side effects of production on to employees, local communities and the environment¹.

¹ See R. Scruton, *How to Think Seriously About the Planet: The Case for an Environmental Conservatism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York 2012, p. 164-171.

Weak anthropocentrism as the attempt to overcome one-sided market rationality

It is hard not to agree that the short-sighted policy of exploiting natural resources and the extreme anthropocentrism, which treats human preferences as the only source of values should be rejected in the self-interests of the people. All the more so because such an attitude, in the long run, threatens the welfare of humanity, because it is a kind of undercutting of the branch on which we all as humans are sitting. Some ethicists and philosophers, therefore, propose an attitude of enlightened, weak anthropocentrism that does not deprive man of his distinctive position among other beings, but places him within a broader order of existence and value, an order that outlines the framework of human action and sets out the principles for evaluating human deeds, desires and needs. In this way, among the desires and aspirations of man, one can distinguish between rational and justified desires and irrational desires that are harmful to the environment and society.

This position is presented by John Passmore in one of the first works on environmental ethics, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*. Besides the attitude of tyrannical domination on nature and its ruthless dominance, Passmore also distinguishes an approach based on wise, economic management of nature's resources. This management can be based on cooperation with nature and lead to solving ecological problems and preventing threats related to the destruction of the natural environment. He states that there is no need for a new ethics or a revision of the principles of traditional Western ethics, as postulated by anti-anthropological supporters of ethics who bestow on nature intrinsic value². Similarly, the Polish eco-philosopher Henryk Skolimowski, who describes this issue like Passmore,

² See J. Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions*, Scribner's, New York 1974, p. 187.

propagates the so-called ecological humanism. According to him human appears as the most perfect product of evolution and stands at the top of creation. This entails responsibility and concern for the environment³.

Although Christian religion and philosophy are often blamed for man's hostile attitude to nature, which must be subjected to man, they also express weak anthropocentrism. In nature, as a work of God, there is an objective order; it is an ordered cosmos, the principles of which must be respected. John Paul II stresses in his *Encyclical Sollicitudo rei socialis*, "man must remain subject to the will of God, who imposes limits upon his use and dominion over things (cf. Gen 2:16-17)" and in *Encyclical Centesimus annus* states:

Equally worrying is the ecological question which accompanies the problem of consumerism and which is closely connected to it. In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day. Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him⁴.

³ See H. Skolimowski, *Living Philosophy: Eco-philosophy As a Tree of Life*, Arkana, London 1992.

⁴ John Paul II, *Encyclical Sollicitudo rei socialis*, p. 29; http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html (12. 12. 2019); *Encyclical Centesimus annus*, p. 37 <http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/>

We would, therefore, be cautious about the accusations made against Christian tradition concerning spiritual support for destructive human activity against nature. One cannot agree with Lynn White, who claims in her often quoted, seminal text *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis* that Judeo-Christian tradition forms the basis for an extreme form of anthropocentrism. According to White, in the period preceding the Middle Ages, the man was considered to be an element of the natural order. With the advent of the Middle Ages and the domination of Christian doctrine, man is excluded from the order of nature and placed in a supernatural perspective, which results in the desacralization of nature and the breaking of a relationship with it. In Christian thought we have to do with emphasizing the uniqueness of man, who belongs to the transcendent order of grace and not to the order of nature and whose task is to free himself from the domination of sinful matter, identified with the world⁵.

Rejection of anthropocentrism by environmental ethics

Weak or so-called enlightened anthropocentrism is rejected by many ethicists and philosophers as too moderate and merely a reforming traditional paradigm of thinking about nature. More radical currents of ecological philosophy and environmental ethics recognize that the fundamental causes of the contemporary ecological crisis lie in the spiritual attitude of contemporary people who do not take the effort of critical reflection on their place in nature and on realized values or lifestyle. Many environmental ethicists call for a change in the role of Homo

encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html (12. 12. 2019).

⁵ See L. A. White, *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, „Science“, March 10, vol. 155, 1967.

sapiens from the conqueror and ruler of nature to an ordinary member of the natural community. They point, that today a biocentric and ecocentric attitude should be required, which is in contradiction to anthropocentrism and breaks with human species egoism.

Environmental ethics is usually associated with criticism of anthropocentrism, seen as the basis for a dominant ethic in our civilization that gives intrinsic value and inherent dignity only to humans while denying it to other species and nature as a whole. Ecological ethics rejects the consumerism of modern societies and impoverished anthropology treating man only as a producer and consumer of material goods, who has liberated himself from the impact of nature. Environmental ethics postulates a revision of homocentrically and personalistically oriented ethics, which gives an intrinsic, inner value only to rational human persons. Within the framework of environmental ethics, questions are asked about the intrinsic value of nature, independent of its usefulness to humans, about the value of the extra-human world, about the value of the natural world, about whether nature, apart from its instrumental value, also has value in itself.

J. Baird Callicott, one of the main creators of environmental ethics, claims that Judeo-Christian tradition and humanism, which at best perceives man as a caring guardian of nature, cannot become the foundation of a coherent, adequate to contemporary environmental problems and practically oriented ethics⁶. Within shared by both Christianity and humanism framework, nature is treated as a source of resources necessary for the development and survival of humanity, and the worth of nature, although it can be understood multidimensionally, has only instrumental importance. Although the needs of peo-

⁶ J. B. Callicott, *The Search for an Environmental Ethic*, in: *Matters of Life and Death: New Introductory Essays in Moral Philosophy*, ed. Tom Regan, McGrawHill Inc., New York 1986, p. 393-395.

ple are not only material needs and the diversity of aspects of human relations with the natural world is recognized, the value of natural entities is the indirect value if we consider the benefit and survival of people.

*The intrinsic value of nature – source and location
of this value*

Callicot stresses the importance of showing and justifying the intrinsic value of natural beings and living creatures:

In addition to human beings, does nature (or some of nature's parts) have intrinsic value? That is the central theoretical question in environmental ethics. Indeed, how to discover intrinsic value in nature is the defining problem for environmental ethics. For if no intrinsic value can be attributed to nature, then environmental ethics is nothing distinct. If nature, that is, lacks intrinsic value, then environmental ethics is but a particular application of human to – human ethics (...). Or, putting the same point yet another way, if nature lacks intrinsic value, then *nonanthropocentric* environmental ethics is ruled out⁷.

He claims that the recognition of the intrinsic value of nature has significant consequences for the practice of nature conservation. In his eyes, it is not the defenders of the independent interests of nature are forced to legitimize their position, but those who treat nature as just useful resources. The moral truth is on the side of the defenders of nature, as once it was on the side of the abolitionists, who called for the abolition of slavery in the name of natural rights and human dignity⁸.

The intrinsic value is usually synonymous with a non-instrumental value. Something has instrumental value if it

⁷ J. B. Callicott, *Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1999, p. 241.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 244-45.

serves as a means to an end other than itself and someone/something has intrinsic value if they are an end in itself. The inner value of any being relates to the possession of moral status. It should be noted, however, that when something is assigned a moral status, it is considered that this something has not only an intrinsic value regardless of its usefulness to people or other beings, but also has its own needs, interests, good in itself or moral laws. For example, an object may be endowed with intrinsic, inner value, and at the same time, it may not have moral status, e.g. a work of art.

The classical meaning of intrinsic value was defined by George E. Moore. This value is closely related to the inner nature of the thing that possesses it. The inner value of an object results only from its internal, non-relational properties, without any reference to other objects⁹. It is worth asking yet whether it is possible to recognize such unrelational features in any object of the world around us. Does it make sense to regard natural objects and their properties in isolation, apart from their relations with the environment or other elements of the environment?

The concept of intrinsic value is also used as a synonym for objective value, which is independent of valuation done by agents. The subjectivism in the constitution of this value is rejected, especially the position that such a value exists only as an effect of human or other beings' preferences. We simply find and discover values in nature. In this way understood value is usually called inherent value¹⁰.

When we talk about subjectivity and objectivity, we think about a source of values, for example, the anthropogenic or

⁹ See G. E. Moore, *The Conception of Intrinsic Value*, in: George E. Moore, *Philosophical Studies*, Routledge, London 1922, p. 260.

¹⁰ J. O'Neill, A. Holland and A. Light, *Environmental Values*, Routledge New York, London 2008, p. 115; T. Regan, *All That Dwell Therein: Animal rights and environmental ethics*, The University of California Press, Los Angeles 1982, p. 199.

biogenic sources. When we take a stand on the issue of instrumental and non-instrumental treatment of nature's objects, we determine the moral significance (moral status) of objects of moral concern. Then we recall anthropocentrism, biocentrism or theocentrism. Subjectivism does not have to go hand in hand with the conviction that only human beings, their properties or mental states are internally valuable.

According to Callicott, the inner value is anthropogenic, i.e. it has a source in the consciousness of a man who can rise above the anthropocentric or rather homocentric valorization of nature. Due to the subjective source of the inner value, Callicott calls it "truncated intrinsic value". Such a position can be called a weak version of the theory of the intrinsic value of nature. Callicott writes:

I concede that, from the point of view of scientific naturalism, the *source* of all value is human consciousness, but it by no means follows that the locus of all value is consciousness itself or a mode of consciousness like reason, pleasure, or knowledge. In other words, something may be valuable only because someone values it, but it may also be valued for itself, not for the sake of any subjective experience (pleasure, knowledge, aesthetic satisfaction, and so forth) it may afford the valuer¹¹.

Within the framework of environmental ethics, we are also dealing with objective concepts of the intrinsic, inherent value of nature, which can be called strong concepts of the inner value of nature: the individualistic version is developed by Paul Taylor, the holistic version by Holmes Rolston III.

¹¹ J. B. Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1989, p. 133.

*The intrinsic value of living individuals –
biocentric individualism*

Taylor's biocentric individualism attributes to individual living beings an inherent good (inherent worth) that is distinguished from the intrinsic and inherent value given by conscious subjects (humans or non-humans) to specific experiences, conditions, events, or objects in the world. On the one hand, the intrinsic value, i.e. the value itself, is assigned to pleasant experiences and accompanying activities. On the other hand, inherent value is given, for example, to works of art, magnificent natural elements or living organisms, regardless of their instrumental usefulness or economic value. The inherent good, in turn, has an objective, biogenic status.

Biocentric ethics and personalistic ethics

Non anthropocentric environmental ethics rejects the way of thinking about morally significant beings, founded on Kant's philosophy, which is a model for our Western way of thought. Within Kant's concept, people are paradigmatic beings endowed with inner value and dignity. The Kantian model of thinking is the basis for the secular idea of contemporary liberal democracy, the idea of freedom and the rights of human beings. Humans as rational entities that respect each other, they create the so-called realm of ends. This realm is a community of autonomous persons who establish and respect their own moral rights:

In the realm of ends everything has either a price or a dignity. What has a price is such that something else can also be put in its place as its equivalent; by contrast, that which is elevated above all price, and admits of no equivalent, has a dignity¹².

¹² I. Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals*, Ed. and trans. A. W. Wood, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2002, p. 52

In accordance with the Kantian categorical imperative, persons cannot be treated solely as a means, but always as end in itself:

The beings whose existence rests not on our will but on nature nevertheless have, if they are beings without reason, only a relative worth as means, and are called things; rational beings, by contrast, are called persons, because their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves, i.e., as something that may not be used merely as means, hence to that extent limits all arbitrary choice (and is an object of respect)¹³.

In Kant's personalistic ethic, attention is drawn to the common realization of all people's rational nature, while Taylor's biocentric individualism emphasizes the aspiration of all living beings to realize the good of their own (*the good of its own*). Living beings maintain their existence, develop and grow, adapt to the environment in accordance with a typical pattern of their species. They are *teleological centers of life*.

The statement that living beings have their own good and pursue their own goals is morally neutral. In addition to this nonmoral *good of its own*, Taylor distinguishes inherent worth of living being, which is a normative characteristic¹⁴. As I have already mentioned, the inherent good has the status of objective good and is only possessed by beings who, as teleological centers of life, have their own good. The "inherent good" within biocentric ethics has the same meaning as it has within the anthropocentric Kantian ethic the "inherent dignity of the person". Therefore, the term inherent value could be translated as the inherent dignity of a being. Taylor's theory is an extension of Kantian ethics to all living beings, whether they are conscious or without consciousness. We are dealing here with

¹³ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁴ P. Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1986, s. 72.

a kind of Kantianism for all that is alive. According to Kant's thought, dignity is given to people with ability in reasoning, in turn, individualistic biocentrism gives dignity to individual living beings, regardless of their instrumental value, significance for the biological system or emotional value for humans. Thus, moral agents have a duty to respect, protect and support living beings.

It is worth mentioning that in the twentieth century ethical reflection, apart from environmental ethics, the extension of the moral universe by extra-human beings is manifested in the form of the ethics of liberation and animal rights. Whereas the consequentialist ethic of animal liberation which is based on the utilitarian principle of minimizing suffering, refers to our compassion for the representatives of other species, the deontological ethics of animal rights emphasizes the independent, inherent value of every *subject-of-a-life*. Therefore, respect is required for individual beings as *subjects-of-a-life* – Kantianism for animals¹⁵.

Limitations of biocentric individualism

Every living organism realizes its goals and goodness, but this does not result in moral postulates, norms or orders. Somebody might ask: Why if I recognize the inherent good of living beings, I should have some moral obligations towards them? According to Taylor, environmental ethics, going beyond personalistic ethics, gains its legitimacy in the philosophical worldview, which Taylor calls *the Biocentric Outlook*. This vision of nature gives meaning to the attitude of respect towards every living creature, it becomes the justification for this attitude. Taylor believes that any rational, competent, well-informed and reality-conscious subject who, under ideal conditions, eval-

¹⁵ See T. Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1983.

uates the biocentric view of the world, will certainly accept this view of the world¹⁶.

Biocentric ethics obliges moral subjects to give moral considerations for all living beings, which from a practical point of view seems to be impossible. That ethics can make us powerless in the face of real situations of choice and blocks practical action when it is necessary to compare the values of different forms of life. If the principle of egalitarianism were to be consistently applied among living beings, then during resolving the conflict between the goods of different species, it would be most fair to flip a coin. This would also apply when the welfare of people is at stake, which leads to absurd and unacceptable consequences.

How to respect the inherent welfare of different life forms? Which organisms should we sympathize with and feel connected to? How to fight diseases caused by living organisms, for example? How can you live without killing? There's no life without killing. It is related to nutrition or immunological protection against harmful organisms. Therefore, criteria are needed, which differentiate the moral significance of living creatures and introduce hierarchy in the moral sphere¹⁷. Indeed, Taylor is suspending the egalitarianism of his biocentric environmental ethics by proposing five priority principles to be the basis for resolving conflicts of interest. These are the principles of self-defense, proportionality, minimum wrong, distributive and redistributive justice¹⁸.

In the context of individualistic biocentrism, it is worth recalling the thought of Albert Schweitzer, the creator of *the reverence for life ethics*. Schweitzer points out that people are

¹⁶ See P. Taylor, *Respect for Nature...*, p. 161-168

¹⁷ Por. J. Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions*, Scribner's New York 1974, s. 122-124; T. Regan, *The Case for Animal...* p. 241-243.

¹⁸ See Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature...* pp. 263-306.

life amid life and combine in this experience with other living beings.

Ethics is nothing else than reverence for life. Reverence for life affords me my fundamental principle of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, assisting and enhancing life, and that to destroy, to harm or to hinder life is evil. Affirmation of the world, that is to say, affirmation of the will-to-live which appears in phenomenal form all around me, is only possible for me in that I give myself out for other life. Without understanding the meaning of the world I act from an inner necessity of my being so as to create values and to live ethically, in the world and exerting influence on it. For in world-and life-affirmation and in ethics I fulfil the will of the universal will-to-live which reveals itself in me¹⁹.

People move from egoism, through ethnocentrism and tribalism, from the recognition of the moral importance of only the members of their own tribe or nation to communion with all that lives.

There is a development under way by which the circle of ethics always grows wider, and ethics becomes more profound. This development has been in progress from primitive times to the present. [...] The circle described by ethics is always widening. Primitive man has duties only toward his nearest relations. All other living beings are to him only things; he mistreats them and kills them, without compunction. Then the circle widens to the tribe, to the people, and grows ever wider until at last man realizes his ethical association with the whole of humanity. This represents an enormous act of thinking²⁰.

Schweitzer's proposed biocentrism is a call for a kind of religious respect and reverence for life, what does not allow the

¹⁹ A. Schweitzer, *An Anthology*, ed. Charles R. Joy, The Beacon Press, Boston 1947, p. 259-260

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 238-39.

man to easily justify his actions and a clear conscience during using the resources of the biosphere. It is valuable in Schweitzer's concept to emphasize our relationship to living beings, our experience of participation in the process of life and the existence as a living being. This is a kind of primordial, pre-discursive sense of the value of life, sense, which is particularly important in today's world. Because people have lost their connection to what is alive and have ceased perceiving themselves as living beings. They lack personal experience of life. It is, therefore, necessary to renew human relations with life, to renew people's awareness of being a living being. For separating man from experiencing his existence as a living being leads to the instrumentalization of nature and necrophilic attitude. In contrary, Schweitzer's concept is based on a biophilic attitude, which is the basis of the so-called inner ecology, i.e. harmonizing various spheres of our existence, which is a condition for a pro-ecological attitude.

*The intrinsic value of whole biological systems –
eco-centric holistic ethics*

The proponents of the so-called ecocentric, holistic environmental ethics emphasize that individualistic biocentrism does not take into account the systemic character of biological interdependencies. It is unable to see the intrinsic biological value of communities, ecosystems or species. The holists postulate that the ecological system and all biological links should become a source of norms that require safeguarding the integrity, stability and beauty of biological communities. They emphasize the normative priority of the biological system as a whole over its individual parts. Individual organisms within an ecosystem have an instrumental role and can, therefore, be sacrificed in the name of a species or biological system. The natural community has an intrinsic value.

The moral sense and the biotic community

Callicott is a strong supporter of a holistic approach to ethics, and thus of assigning intrinsic value to biological systems. He refers to the so-called land ethic of Aldo Leopold, who attributes moral importance to the biotic community that includes living and inanimate beings. Callicott points out, behind Hume and Darwin, that ethics cannot be based on reason. Morality derives from the parents' relationship with their offspring, this emotional relationship and the feelings attached to it form the basis of moral behavior. The so-called moral sense, developed in the course of evolution, is a source of experiencing solidarity and sympathy with others. As far as humans are concerned, how broad a circle of beings which belong to the moral community will be, depends on upbringing. There is no automatic mechanism for broadening the sense of community²¹. Everyone is a member of many communities that define his or her moral commitment and sense of togetherness. It may cause conflicts of loyalty and responsibilities. The participation in various communities and circles of moral commitment generates other commitments. Callicott speaks of the so-called *multiple communitarianism*²².

Human's social attitudes were shaped in the Paleolithic era what tends to make men act virtuously only towards known fellow compatriots. Callicott wants to make these natural feelings the starting point for universal attitudes towards the biosphere. He is convinced that people can broaden the scope of their moral sentiments to include a biotic community, all the

²¹ See J. B. Callicott, *The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic*, in: *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, eds. M. Zimmerman, J. B. Callicott, G. Sessions, K. J. Warren, and J. Clark, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs 1993, p. 127; J. B. Callicott, *Thinking Like a Planet. The Land Ethic and the Earth Ethic*, Oxford University Press, Oxford New York 2013, p. 141-142

²² See J. B. Callicott, *Beyond the Land Ethic...*, p. 173-174.

elements of the biological system²³. The biotic community is a kind of organism in which every element plays its part. This community consists of beings of a completely different nature, definitely different from humans, and even inanimate natural objects. Parts of the biological system are interdependent, but their interests, if any, often come into sharp conflict with each other²⁴. Is it possible to harmonize these interests? According to Callicott, in order to do so, one should reject the “psycho-centric” model of ethics that leads to individualism and ethical atomism²⁵.

Nature as a matrix of system values

A different model of holism from the one proposed by Callicott is developed by the aforementioned Rolston III, who claims that living organisms have the intrinsic value. They are entities that value their own states and prefer a specific environment, because according to genetic programming they process information, perform self-repair and achieve goals. In a word, they are teleological subjects of life, self-organizing negentropic systems, which sustain their own existence as a value in itself²⁶. They have a built-in, objective normative system. We read in *Conserving Natural Values*:

(...) the genetic set is a normative set; it distinguishes between what is and what ought to be. The organism has a biological obligation thrust upon it. This does not mean that the organism is a moral system, or has options, preferences among which it may choose. Those are levels of value reached only much later, dramatically in humans. Nevertheless, the organism is an axiological, evaluative system. So the organ-

²³ See J. B. Callicott, *The Conceptual Foundations of...* p. 113-114.

²⁴ See J. B. Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic...*, p. 28-29.

²⁵ See J. B. Callicott, *The Conceptual Foundations of...*, p. 119;

²⁶ See Holmes Rolston III, *Conserving Natural Values*, Columbia University Press, New York 1994, p. 168-169.

ism grows, reproduces, repairs its wounds, resists death. The physical state that the organism seeks, idealized as its programmatic form, is a valued state. The living individual, taken as a »point experience« in the interconnecting web of an ecosystem, is per se an intrinsic value²⁷.

As I wrote earlier, in secular personalistic ethics, the source and habitat of intrinsic value are people who see themselves as an end in themselves, a value that is both anthropocentric and anthropogenic. In Callicott's concept, it is biocentric, or rather ecocentric, because it embraces biological communities, but stemming from the consciousness of the valuing human subject, so it is anthropogenic. In Rolston III's view, however, the intrinsic value of natural entities, just like in Taylor's ethics of respect for nature, is both biocentric and biogenic.

According to Rolston III, organisms with innate intrinsic value are located in biological systems. The value of living beings cannot be considered outside the context of their existence, in isolation from relations within the biological community. Looking at nature's existence from the perspective of natural systems, one can see a close relationship between intrinsic and instrumental value. Each organism has its own value and, at the same time, can satisfy the needs of other beings or play a servant role in maintaining the stability and harmony of the biological community²⁸.

When we move from the entities level to the ecosystem level, we discover the systemic value as the third type of value next to the intrinsic and instrumental one. An ecosystem does not have a center, it is not integrated around a target like a single organism. It does not seek to preserve itself, so it has no intrinsic value. It creates a framework where, under the guise of fighting and mutual destruction of units, species improve. It is a kind of paradoxical coordination because it relates to the

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

²⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 174-175.

struggle for existence, cooperation that drives evolution. The ecosystem is a creator of values, an axiological foundation that sustains life and the existence of species. It is an important condition for the development, survival of nature and humanity. It is a creative arrangement, an extremely important environment for the dynamics of nature. It cannot be reduced to an instrumental value, serving the organisms.

The systemic value generated by ecosystems is independent of humans and generates moral obligations towards biological communities. This value exceeds the values associated with the natural entities²⁹. Biosphere, terrestrial ecosystems are entities of value in their own right. They are the source and place of self-contained values, independent of man, which are objective and ontologically independent.

The dangerous consequences of ethical holism

According to Rolston III, nature as an ordered collection of ecosystems is a creative process, a matrix of values. The normative system within the biological system, except for human good and evil, has no moral character, it is amoral. Nature does not have a moral perspective, but only vital values count. There is a radical contrast between human culture, morality and the vital values of nature. Vital values seem to be something nobler than moral values and human culture.

This approach to the issue seems justified in the face of the weaknesses of nature contemporarily dominated by the expansion and destructive impact of human civilization. However, in situations of conflicts between the values of human culture and those of nature, this can result in cruel anti-humanism. We can deal with a kind of “revenge of nature” in the form of destruc-

²⁹ See *ibid*, p. 177; H. Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics: Values in and Duties to the Natural World*, in: *Ecology, Economics, Ethics: The Broken Circle*, ed. F. Herbert Bormann and Stephen R. Kellert, Yale University Press New Haven, London 1991, p. 78-81.

tive actions against the human culture and population, actions undertaken by “defenders of nature”, who assess vital values of nature higher than moral or personalistic values. It could be necessary to sacrifice of human values in the name of the higher good of the noble nature. Because we must surrender to a natural course of things, after all the nature knows better, what is better for us and the whole life. Individual organisms may be sacrificed in the name of a species because the species is a pattern of which the unit is only a copy. This pattern exists beyond the duration of individuals and is more important than individuals. The death of an individual is a natural element of the life process but the effects of the extinction of the species are destructive to the entire biosphere. As Rolston says, there is a breach in the stream of life, it is the end of both death and birth within a given species. We are dealing here with a kind of destruction of the essence, form, not with individual existence. The extinction of species is a kind of super-death³⁰.

Callicott, who exposes the value of a biotic community, at the same time emphasizes the necessity of linking the holistic ethics of communities with ontology, with metaphysical decisions that become the basis for a proper understanding about the position of man in nature. Significant interests that come into play when assessing the environmental performance of entities are defined and legitimized according to the holistic image of nature, according to metaphysics referring to biological sciences. Nature alone establishes a hierarchy of values, creates the highest level of principles and shows us how to compare and select values. That can lead to a kind of ecological paternalism and political perfectionism when an ecologically enlightened politician has knowledge of the order of nature,

³⁰ See H. Rolston III, *Philosophy Gone Wild: Environmental Ethics*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, New York 1989, p. 212.

and then derives and imposes political norms and rules of operation from this knowledge³¹.

In this respect, a distinction must be made between practical (methodological), ontological holism and ethical holism. Practical holism is something obvious and necessary in the contemporary sciences. It can derive from empirical knowledge, which leads to a systemic approach, to the thesis that the study of the components of nature or society should not be carried out in isolation. Context, interrelations and interdependencies within biological or social systems must be taken into account. The inherent properties of individual beings or elements of biological systems cannot be understood as if they did not depend on the environment in which a given individual functions. In turn, ethical holism, which places the good of the entire system above the good of the individual, leads to dangerous consequences, making the value of individuals dependent on their merits for harmony and integration of the whole. It can justify the harm to individual beings in the name of the overriding good of the system. The only thing that counts is the good of the system, which takes away the independence and value of single entities. As Regan says, this may lead to eco-fascism, which rejects the rights of individuals for the good of the whole³². It also results in some forms of mysticism or metaphysics of nature, where everything melts into a positively valorized biospheric unity, and whatever happens, is good and serves the system.

According to Callicott, we can avoid eco-fascism by applying additional rules³³. Our moral obligations to communities

³¹ See J. Bowersox, *The Legitimacy Crisis in Environmental Ethics and Politics*, in: *Democracy and the Claims of Nature: Critical Perspectives for a New Century* ed. B. A. Minteer and B. P. Taylor, Rowman & Littlefield Lanham, Oxford 2002, s. 75-89.

³² See L. Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*, trans. Carol Volk, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1995; T. Regan, *The Case for Animal...* p. 362.

³³ J. B. Callicott, *Thinking Like a Planet...*, p. 65-66.

can be assessed from the perspective of second-order principles. Callicott writes:

The first second-order principle (SOP1) is that the duties and obligations generated by memberships in our more intimate and venerable communities take precedence over those generated by memberships in the larger, more impersonal, and more recently evolved (or more recently recognized) communities. [...] The second second-order principle (SOP2) is that stronger duties and obligations take precedence over weaker ones. Members of family societies have an obligation to, say, observe the birthdays of fellow members, but that is a relatively weak obligation in comparison with the obligation to, say, care for infant and aged fellow members. No less than within communities, the relative strength of duties and obligations can be compared between communities. [...] Finally, I suggest applying a third-order principle (TOP) specifying the sequence in which the two second-order principles are consulted and which to honor if they give counterindications: first apply SOP1 to any given conflict among duties and obligations generated by multiple community memberships, then apply SOP2. If SOP2 countermands SOP1, the TOP requires that SOP2 trump the ruling of SOP1³⁴.

According to SOP-1, the holistic land ethic does not require from individuals to abandon their obligations to their home community. It encourages loyalty to the closest community treating as superior. Of course, if this were enough, we would not go beyond ethnocentrism. Thus, we need the second principle, which requires the subjects of morality to take into account the interests of all members of the biotic community and to compare the validity of those interests. It stems from this principle, that it is unacceptable to sacrifice such essential interests of beings as the preservation of life, for entertainment or culinary tastes of people.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 66-67; see J. B. Callicott, *Beyond the Land Ethic...*, p. 75-76.

The rejection of ethical holism is connected with the thesis that caring for the “prosperity” of the system serves the well-being of individuals, promotes their welfare. The system is not valuable in itself, whether or not it is against the well-being of the individual, but because it contributes to the welfare of the individual organisms that make up the populations and species. For example, controlling the number of forest herbivores by therapeutic killing does not have to be justified by the primacy of the good of the ecosystem as a whole. The welfare of individuals may be invoked, the welfare, which will be destroyed or deteriorated as a result of the degradation of the environment by an excessively large population of species.

In fact, in all holistic versions of environmental ethics, we see hidden anthropocentrism and the desire to safeguard the interests of our species. They usually stress the importance of diversity, integration and harmony of the current state of the biosphere and are interested in maintaining it. However, today’s form of the biosphere favors species that have evolved in recent millions of years, such as mammals or humans. In turn in the history of the development of life on Earth took place periods, when dominated completely different forms of life than today. There have also been periods when species diversity has been greater than today. It can be concluded that in order to ensure the existence of humanity and the bearable, rich and varied environment, it is necessary to protect biodiversity and guarantee the survival of ecosystems, which are characteristic of the current stage of development of the biosphere. Thus, the holistic models of environmental ethics are underpinned by an unspeakable normative conviction: the existence of humanity is good, and the maintenance of that existence and conditions conducive to it is the moral obligation.

*The alternative to biocentrism and ecocentrism –
the pragmatic version of environmental ethics*

The pragmatic current of environmental ethics considers that there is no need for conflict about the intrinsic value of nature and calls for a focus on the values associated with conservation practice. Bryan Norton, the leading representative of the trend, argues that discussions about the status of values in nature and the value of nature itself are the result of the *Environmentalists' Dilemma*³⁵, which consists in juxtaposing human interests with the interests of nature by emphasizing the contradiction between the anthropocentric and biocentric valuation of nature's entities. In accordance with this dilemma, we either value and protect nature based on human needs or on the basis of its intrinsic value. Norton writes:

Most participants in these discussions have subscribed to a crucial alternation in the theory of environmental valuation: either the value of nature is entirely instrumental to human objectives, or elements of nature have a »good of their own« – value not dependent on human valuations³⁶.

According to Norton, this dilemma is false and can lead to paralysis of both environmental activities and dialogue between different concepts of environmental ethics. It is generated by the pursuit of the moral monism and unification of ethical theories.

³⁵ B. G. Norton, *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York 1991, p. 3-13.

³⁶ B. G. Norton, *Searching for Sustainability: Interdisciplinary Essays in the Philosophy of Conservation Biology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, p. 48; see B. G. Norton, *Toward Unity Among...*, p. 3-16.

Moral monism and pluralism

The moral monism strives to create a coherent system of principles that would form the basis of our responsibilities and ways of valuing the environment. In its extreme version, it assumes that the moral system can be based on a single, fundamental norm or value from which the rules of our right actions and judgments are derived. It builds ethics from above, starting from the philosophy of being, metaphysics, from which the norms of conduct are deductively derived. Monism contributes to the coherence of an ethical system; it unifies the moral matter and reduces moral phenomena to a single denominator. It is characterized by reductionism in the way it deals with ethical issues and leads to polarization of positions. Norton stresses that moral monism becomes the basis of applied philosophy, which tries to subordinate practice to general, abstract principles³⁷.

Norton proposes moral pluralism, opts for building ethics from below by referring to phenomena and cases of moral significance, which are the basis for the creation of new rules and norms. Moral pluralism denies the possibility of creating a single, coherent theory based on simple, fundamental principles, a theory that guarantees the reliability of judgments and actions. Because human activity takes place in various contexts, we enter into different relationships with the world around us and with beings who have a changing moral status. Under these conditions, no single ethical system can claim to be self-sufficient. According to Norton, moral pluralism is connected with a practical philosophy that does not impose abstract rules in advance, but is oriented towards solving specific problems, takes into account the problem context of ethical issues, and is oriented towards dialogue and negotiation³⁸.

³⁷ B. G. Norton, *Searching for Sustainability...*, p. 48-49.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Transforming the value of nature

Norton stresses that environmental ethics should focus on *transformative values* rather than on the intrinsic value of nature³⁹. Such values are contrasting with values resulting from the direct human preference and serve to critically assess that preference. The transforming values are associated with weak anthropocentrism, which is contradicted to the attitude of uncritical realization of individuals' desires characterizing strong anthropocentrism as the attitude threatening both the behavior of the biosphere and the survival of humanity⁴⁰. The transforming value of nature contributes to the improvement of individuals and societies, which instead of succumbing to materialistic consumerism, achieve greater harmony with nature. In the light of those values, nature can be the object of admiration, mystical or aesthetic experiences that ennoble man and even entire societies. Although in Norton's view this value is anthropocentric, it is in line with the non-anthropocentric granting of intrinsic value to nature.

It is worth noting that the recognition of the intrinsic value of nature may play a role transforming human attitudes, inspire and motivate people to act for saving our Planet. However, if we go beyond the private sphere with the intention of reaching a consensus on the recognition of the intrinsic value of nature within the pluralistic society, we will probably have problems with this. Because in the issue of intrinsic value of nature, it is rather unlikely that a social consensus will be reached that could form the basis for collective action.

³⁹ See B. G. Norton, *Why Preserve Natural Diversity?* Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1987, p. 185-213.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12-13.

Convergence hypothesis

Rejecting moral monism, Norton accepts the so-called convergence hypothesis of radical and moderate ecological movements. This hypothesis states that the interests of humans and nature can only be divergent in the short term when the value of nature is measured only by the preferences experienced on an ongoing basis. However, when long-term human interests are taken into account and the preferences of individuals are judged rationally, the difference between representatives of weak anthropocentrism and more radical trends of biocentrism is blurred. This is particularly the case when specific nature conservation strategies are considered, rather than abstract arguments about the status of values in nature. It is not necessary to ask about the intrinsic value of nature, but about measures that will ensure the survival of humanity and the biosphere⁴¹. The aim is to find a common environmental policy within the pluralist, democratic society, and not to polarize positions.

*The pluralism of liberal society and the consensus
on the intrinsic value of nature*

It is right to believe that whether we support the anthropocentric or biocentric trends of ecological ethics or not, we recognize the environment as a necessary, key and fundamental element of social infrastructure. If we want a sustainable developing society, we must ensure that we preserve a healthy natural environment, which is a basic prerequisite for the survival and prosperity of humanity and for the well-being of citizens. Such an attitude is not at all dependent upon the unanimous acceptance of any moral doctrine; it can be accepted by

⁴¹ See B. G. Norton, *Searching for Sustainability...* p. 28, 78-87, 134, 38.

all⁴². This leads to the concept of sustainable development⁴³, which can be separated from any metaphysical and doctrinal entanglement⁴⁴.

We, therefore, have an open door so that environmental practice can be freed from ethical monism and move towards a pragmatic debate on environmental issues. In this debate, people who recognize often contradictory religious, philosophical or moral concepts can form a common basis for ecological projects. This environmental agreement has the same characteristics as those associated with John Rawls' idea of an overlapping consensus, which is the cornerstone of justice and just liberal society⁴⁵.

⁴² See Derek Bell, *How can Political Liberals be Environmentalists?* "Political Studies", 50 (4), September 2002, p. 705–707.

⁴³ See *Our Common Future. World Commission on Environment and Development*, Oxford University Press, Oxford New York 1987; R. W. Kates, T. M. Parris, A. A. Leiserowitz, *What is Sustainable Development? Goals, Indicators, Values, and Practice*, "Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development", vol. 47, Issue 3 2005, p. 8-21.

⁴⁴ There are major controversies about the understanding of sustainable development. For example, William Ophuls writes: "Sustainable development is an oxymoron. Modern political economy in any form is unsustainable, precisely because it involves »development« -- that is, more and more people consuming more and more goods with the aid of ever more powerful technologies. Such an economy produces nothing, it merely exploits nature. Such an economy reckons without the laws of thermodynamics and other basic physical laws: these ordain limitation as the price of life and guarantee that the invisible hand will generate the tragedy of the commons. To put it another way, such an economy is based on stolen goods, deferred payments, and hidden costs; it continues to exist or even thrive today only because we do not account for what we steal from nature or for what posterity will have to pay for our pleasures or for what we sweep under the ecological carpet. In sum, development as commonly understood is intrinsically unsustainable." (W. Ophuls, *Unsustainable Liberty, Sustainable Freedom*, in: *Building Sustainable Societies: A Blueprint for a Post-Industrial World*, ed. D. C. Pirages, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, London 1996, pp. 33-34.)

⁴⁵ See W. Achterberg, *Can Liberal Democracy Survive. The Environmental Crisis? Sustainability, liberal neutrality and overlapping consen-*

It is worth mentioning in this context the principle of saving proposed by Rawls. This principle constitutes the basis for intergenerational justice and determines the duties of contemporary people towards future generations.

Consider the case of just savings: since society is a system of cooperation between generations over time, a principle for savings is required. Rather than imagine a (hypothetical and nonhistorical) direct agreement between all generations, the parties can be required to agree to a savings principle subject to the further condition that they must want all previous generations to have followed it. Thus the correct principle is that which the members of any generation (and so all generations) would adopt as the one their generation is to follow and as the principle they would want preceding generations to have followed (and later generations to follow), no matter how far back (or forward) in time⁴⁶.

I think that in a liberal, democratic society, all those people who are not blinded by short-term benefits and consumption will agree that every generation can only survive and lead a dignified life if previous generations have left a good environment. It is therefore sensible to implement the principle of saving, regardless of whether nature is of intrinsic value or of value only for human purposes, of course, long-time purposes.

Summing up

The traditional, personalistic concept of ethics endows people with intrinsic value and nature in relation to humans has a servile and instrumental value. The anthropocentrism of this concept takes on a strong and weak version. Strong anthro-

sus, in: *The Politics of Nature: Explorations in Green Political Theory*, ed. A. Dobson and P. Lucardie, Routledge, New York 1995, p. 91-99.

⁴⁶ J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Columbia University Press, New York 1996, p. 274.

po-centrism makes individual preferences of individuals as a source of values and is the basis of modern consumerism. In connection with the dominance of market rationality, which reduces the value of nature to the value of commodities, it contributes to the destruction of the natural environment, to the degradation of nature as whole, treated only as resources satisfying human desires. Weak anthropocentrism, recognizing the distinguished position of our species, at the same time emphasizes the position of man in the wider, natural order of nature, the multidimensional relationship between man and the world of nature and the resulting limitations, obligations and various values. It can perform in a secular and religious version.

Environmental ethics, which together with eco-philosophy is a response to the challenges of the ecological crisis, tries to overcome the anthropocentric and personalistic attitude of traditional ethics. It emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature, independent of human needs. Like weak anthropocentrism, it rejects the narrow market concept of values and the associated reductionist approach to human existence.

Within the framework of non-anthropocentric environmental ethics, there are individualistic and holistic trends. The former assigns the intrinsic value to individual living beings, while the latter assign this value to entire systems, to biological communities. Biocentric individualism generates problems with resolving conflicts of interest between different organisms and the hierarchy of beings. By giving all living beings the same value, it may hinder action and fail to recognize the dependence of the welfare of individuals on the state of the entire biological community. However, it has worth, as the attitude which emphasizes the unique independent value of non-human life forms which should be respected. In turn, holistic ecocentric ethics may not consider the welfare of individuals at all and lead to a kind of eco-fascism. Nevertheless, holism as a practical holism, which should be contrasted with ethical holism, is the legitimate methodological postulate in

the approach to environmental issues. Natural entities must be considered in the context of mutual relations.

The pragmatic current of ecological ethics considers axiological questions about the intrinsic value of nature as philosophical speculations that polarize positions, hinder dialogue and practical actions. It suggests that within environmental ethics there is a false dilemma: either we care about the welfare of people, about the value of nature for human sake, or about the intrinsic, intrinsic value of nature. In the long term, the well-being of people and nature is convergent. Both radical, biocentric and moderate, anthropocentric ecological ethics have one enemy in common: short-sighted consumer individualism, coupled with the domination of economic discourse, which subordinates all spheres of human life to the criteria of profitability and effectiveness. The dominance of narrow, instrumental, economic rationality not only makes nature a commodity and an ordinary object of use but also deprives people of intrinsic, inherent value, treating them only as means to make a profit.

However, I believe that questions about the intrinsic value of nature are not only abstract philosophical speculation, but they are also important for shaping the attitudes of individuals, for inspiration and motivation to act. They force us to look at nature and its elements in depth, to notice the rhythm and goals of nature independent of humans. They broaden cognitive horizons, boost empathy towards extra-human beings and encourage to see the network of interdependencies of which we are an element. Finally, they contribute to breaking limits of human species egoism.

Nevertheless, when we move from the private sphere of inspiration to the public sphere of pro-ecological activity, it is very difficult to obtain consensus on the question of the value of nature. In a democratic society, often contradictory concepts of ecological ethics co-exist. In a pluralist culture, there is a permanent debate on important issues, and it is never de-

finitively decided which positions are the right ones. For no one can come into possession of the whole truth, we should accept reasonable disagreement⁴⁷. Therefore, for the success of pro-ecological activities in the interest of people and nature, a pragmatic approach is preferable, which leaves the question of the intrinsic value of nature open and focuses on what can combine in practice different trends of ecological philosophy and ethics. It seems that the idea of sustainable development is an idea around which a minimum consensus can be reached.

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