

**A Wanted Environment – Alive or Dead\***

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**Abstract**

My paper offers a special approach of the environmental thought: an analysis of the possible parallels between the protection of our terrestrial and extraterrestrial environments. The first problem is the status of the objects of dead nature on Earth and in outer space, in three regards: (a) the dangers of the effects of a human activity for other humans; (b) our obligation to preserve an object for a research in the future; (c) preserving an object because of its inherent beauty. In this article I will interpret some elements of the reasoning of the environmentalist regarding the cosmic pollution as analogies of similar ideas about the protection of the biosphere. By my analysis the basis of this analogy has its roots in an element of the tradition of the western philosophy, the parallelism of the description of humans as parts of the macrocosm, mesocosmos, and as microcosms in the Stoical philosophy. Finally, I will reason for the impossibility of any value which is independent from human interests.

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The word *environment* in our contemporary discourses, both in scholar and popular ones, refers almost exclusively to the biological human environment that is the biosphere, or living nature, at least its

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\* The topic of this writing is connected with my recent lecture on the 8<sup>th</sup> Lošinj Days of Bioethics (May 18–20, Mali Lošinj, Croatia, organised by the Croatian Philosophical Society, and the Croatian Bioethics Society), titled *The Human Nature and the Nature Itself*. In my lecture I focussed on the bioethical aspects; here I will discuss the problems of relationships of humanity and the so-called “dead nature”.

non-biological conditions, for instance the state of the ozone-shield of the Earth. However, out of the focus of our regard in the last epoch, there is another meaning of the expression *human environment*, which refers to the humans not as biological, but as cosmic beings; it is the concept of *the outer space as a human environment*. Surprisingly, in the year of astronomy (2009), this point of view is an almost hidden approach in front of the contemporary public. Despite some practical consequences, showing their relevance nowadays better than earlier, this approach met more the trends of the second half of the twentieth century. I will discuss in the present article some consequences of this hidden approach, the environmental problems of the relationship between the humankind and the universe.

My point of view is appearing as a practical consequence of the space researches: humans and human products meet the space directly, and it has become their environment. It is the surface of this problem, only. Our topic is actually independent from space research; it is based not on practical consequences of the modern, scientific human activity, but on the anthropology, expressed by another network of relationships between humans and their environment more than a contemporary biological paradigm. It roots in the ancient philosophical question of the relationship between humans and the *outside world*, or humans and *reality*, with a connection of the well-known problem of the relationship of *subjects* and *objects*. In this context the relationship of the universe and the humankind appears as a general connection of an active subject (*humanity*) and a passive *object* (*universe*). What is different in this topic from the general problem of every philosophical activity theory – that is the relationship between the acting person and an object as an end or an instrument of her or his activity – is its *ethical* content. However, the effects of our activity concerns only things, and no other persons, or similar entities (e. g. animals), our acts have always moral content in this approach. This condition is not clear in every case, because *humanised* arguments are often used in this discourse.

Let us see an example for *the terrestrial origin* of this approach and another for this secondary humanised argumentation. The relationship between the inorganic (terrestrial) environment and the humankind appears in this discourse in a similar way with that of the outer space. (Of course, the terrestrial one is the earlier.) A strange, rare geological formation could appear as a part of the (protected) environment, as something, which is needed to keep clear from any pollution. The value of a terrestrial stalactite, worthy of our protection

from the grime of torches, is similar to a Moon crater, worthy of our protection from any accident or calculated explosion. In both cases, terrestrial and cosmic, appears as an imagined value of a hardly definable *intactness* of the “dead nature”, as a rule of our (right) moral activity. The humanisation of this special phenomenon – with an inherent essence of inhumanity – can follow different ways. The first, simplest way is a directly consequentialist argument: touching the protected objects is dangerous for other people by any way. (This argumentation is frequently used concerning the semi-terrestrial space trash, which is really dangerous for the vehicles and satellites.) In most cases the humanisation of the argumentation is more indirect. There are often used arguments borrowed from ethics of scientific research: an intervention could make impossible the repetition of an experiment, needed for any scientific effect. (It is a good, but a *post festum* argument to protect the very thin atmosphere of the Moon, disappeared because of the human visitors of this celestial body.) The most beautiful, but at the same time the obscurest argument refers to aesthetical values: we have a simple obligation to protect the human-less beauty of particular things of the (dead) nature. The ambiguity of all these arguments is well mirrored in the case of Armstrong’s footprint on the Moon. It is clear that his footprint is a modification of a part of the extraterrestrial universe, the surface of the Moon. It is hard to argue that it was dangerous for other people, or made impossible any experiments in the future. What has remained the aesthetical value of Armstrong’s footprint and that of the same place before his visit on the Moon. It is a question of a judgement of the human taste, which should choose from the values of a human and an inhuman beauty. Consequently, our problem is: a discourse about the human valuation of the inhuman values exists – how can it be possible.

### **From the Space Trash to the Ethical Codex of a Citizen of the Cosmos**

One can interpret the history of the debates about the dead (terrestrial and extraterrestrial) nature as a conceptual continuum from the affairs connected with humanity to the absolutely inhuman things.

The first, current well-known approach of the question of the protection of the cosmic environment focuses on the dangers concerning the human activity, only. The dangers caused by the (semi-terrestrial) cosmic trash – mainly fragments of satellites – for the human activity in space, became commonplace in the literature of this field. In this case the responsibility of the owner of the satellite is ethically simple; he has an

analogous obligation such as the owner of a crashed car on the road: to dislodge this dangerous object. Our problem is not ethical, just practical: we are lacking police from the roads of the space. It should be mentioned, that the phenomenon of the space pollution is a very practical problem in the semi-terrestrial outer space (within the area dominated by the gravitation of the Earth); but out of the *sublunary sphere* it is an almost merely academic problem, yet. The first case of the space pollution was the first artificial object in the space (October 4, 1957, Sputnik-1), and the pollution of the near-Earth sphere of the space became a serious risk for the working satellites.

The second approach, which uses the *intactness* of the dead nature as a value in the scientific research, is more sophisticated from an anthropological point of view. Its argument is based on a special need of the scientific cognition of the nature. The scientific research of the nature is a *human activity*, which always needs parts of the nature *untouched by any human activity*. In this case the absence of any antecedent human activity has a special value for a would-be (scientific) human activity. The best instance for this approach is the debate regarding the problem of *light pollution* and its disadvantages for astronomy. In this case a phenomenon in the terrestrial environment has emerged as a danger for the cognition of the outer space. The argumentation for the intactness of the dead nature, worthy for protection often uses the concept of our limited knowledge. By this argumentation we need to preserve some objects or areas of the dead nature for a research with more developed tools than we have at the moment.

The argument of the danger and the argument of the preservation of the environmental circumstances of a research in the future go often hand in hand. The case of the light pollution *prima facie* is a part of the latter problem. However, it has emerged as a problem of the researchers, and it is mainly a topic of the astrological lobbies; it is often completed with additional arguments of the argument of the danger. (Light pollution causes ethological problems; it has dangerous influence on the behaviours of the animals and humans, etc.)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The argument of a distinguished protagonist of the fight against the cosmic pollution in Hungary, Iván Almár, the president of the (Hungarian) Scientific Council for Space Research shows this mixed reasoning excellently. He draws parallels between the protection of the terrestrial and extraterrestrial, live and dead nature, emphasizing both the direct dangers of the cosmic pollution, and the needs of the science of the future for the intactness of the nature. His manifestations mirror both of some proposals for practical arrangements, and an

The value of this intactness of the dead nature nowadays has emerged as a *value-in-itself*, without any connection with the needs of a human activity in the future. One cannot find easily clear instances in this regard. The usual arguments for the preservation of a part of the dead nature – generally geological objects, e. g. stalagmites and stalactites in a cave –, or a previous, “more natural” state of a part of the dead nature – e. g. the darkness of the nights – mix the reasoning by the possible dangers concerning humans, by the needs of an imaginary human scientific activity of the future, and some aesthetical regards. The aesthetical values of the objects of the research are inseparable, regarding the usual argument for the protection of the dead nature. In the case of the protection of a terrestrial or extraterrestrial geological formation we usually cannot decide, whether the possibility of a research in the future or the beauty of the concerned objects should have priority in a particular argument. It is not an accidental phenomenon that the aesthetical values do not appear in their clear forms. The environment in the outer space, protected *ad analogiam* the humanised part of the universe, can have additional aesthetic values, only, *ad analogiam* the earthly objects with their relationship with the humanity. The ambiguity of the beauty of the extraterrestrial objects is clearly mirrored in the case of Armstrong’s footprint on the Moon. We automatically refer to the only sign on the Moon’s surface, which we are familiar with. It is a human footprint, which – by a special meaning of this word – is beautiful, especially in a comparison with an object out of the sublunary sphere. One needs a highly sophisticated mind to say seriously that it is the first example for the pollution of the surface of the Moon. The aesthetical meaning of this statement is that this part of the Moon was nicer before the visit of Armstrong. If we can see only natural objects, without any human signs, the beauty of the dead nature can appear seemingly as an independent phenomenon. Let us see a fictional instance, the protection of the well-known ‘face’ of the Moon in a case of a planned mining. In this case we can evaluate the present ‘face’ of the Moon as a beautiful and natural state, and the ‘face’ after the mining activity as an awful and artificial state. After a more detailed analysis we can recognise that the crucial factor was the present ‘face’ the Moon has preserved in the human minds, as a part of our familiar world.

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endeavour for creating a completely new ethical thinking suitable for the age of the space.

Despite the high – however, ambiguous – rhetorical worth of the argument that the protected parts of the dead nature have aesthetical values, it is not enough to introduce the concept that the intactness of an object of the dead nature has a *value-in-itself*. It seems it is a hidden, hardly reasonable, but frequent element of the argument in public speech about the cosmic pollution. In my opinion it is an effect of the use of a confused analogy with the terrestrial environmental and bioethical thought. Our thinking in connection with the Earth can introduce the *value-in-itself* of the intactness of the live nature based on our community as the earthly living beings with the beings of the biosphere of the same planet. It seems that the extension of the circle of the entities having a *value-in-itself* is a risky project out of the sublunary sphere. The familiar ‘face’ of the Moon is a symbolical, hardly transgressable boundary of the human (personal) experience, since Aristotle’s natural philosophy.

This hardly sustainable extension of a terrestrial concept to the extraterrestrial spheres is not an accidental error of the environmental thought; it has deep roots in the tradition of European thinking. The confusion of the human being as a part of the cosmos, as a part of the biosphere and as a part of the society, and the ethical consequences of these relationships is an old topic in the history of the western philosophy. In the following part of my writing an influential example for it, some *loci* of the well-known work of Marcus Tullius Cicero, titled *De finibus bonorum et malorum* (*The End of Goods and Evils*) will be added.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Human Being as a Biological, Social and Cosmic Entity in the Stoical Tradition**

We can analyse from Cicero’s text three different and – in my opinion – incommensurable images of the human beings. Cicero’s first approach is based on a Stoical term, *oikeiōsis*. As a scholarly word it is a special form of self-consciousness, actually a capacity of every living being (mainly the animals) to feel and obtain themselves. Cicero here speaks in Latin about the *diligentia* of the self, explicating the *oikeiōsis*

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<sup>1</sup> The third book of his work is a crucial source of Stoical ethics. The significance of this ancient philosophical school in the tradition of the western philosophy became clear in the last decades in the circles of the historians of philosophy. I must acknowledge the assistance of my colleague, Ákos Brunner, whose several lectures on the interpretation of *De finibus* in the Research Seminar of our Institute in the last years were helpful for me.

in the § 16-17 of the Book III: “Ex quo intellegi debet principium ductum esse a se diligendo. [This leads to the conclusion that it is love of self which supplies the primary impulse to action.]”<sup>1</sup>

We can see that human condition is rooted in this approach in the definition of the human being as a biological being, an animal. This part of *The Ends of Goods and Evils* uses a correct explication of the Stoical ethics. We are waiting for a moral system, built on the *diligentia* of the self; probably it was an eudaemonic ethics, but Cicero offers another, strange image of human beings later, in the § 63-64 of the Book III: “unum quemque nostrum eius mundi esse partem; ex quo illud natura consequi, ut communem utilitatem nostrae anteponamus [each one of us

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<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum* (London–Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, MCMLXVII, 232–235, with an English translation by H. Rackham. For the correct Latin version of the text I have consulted a new edition: M. Tulli Ciceronis, *De finibus bonorum et malorum* (Oxonii: E typographeo Clarendoniano, MCMXCVIII), recognovit, brevique adnotatione critica instruxit L. D. Reynolds. (All the quotations from Cicero in this writing are based on these editions. In the following the key-expressions only will be added in the main text; the detailed quotation will be available in the footnotes.)

The quotation in Latin and in English in details:

“Placet his” [Cato] inquit “quorum ratio mihi probatur, simul atque natum sit animal (hinc enim est ordiendum), ipsum sibi conciliari et commendari ad se conservandum et ad suum statum eaque quae conservantia sint eius status diligenda, alienari autem ab interitu iisque rebus quae interitum videantur adferre. Id ita esse sic probant, quod antequam voluptas aut dolor attigerit, salutaria appetant parvi aspernenturque contraria, quod non fieret nisi statum suum diligerent, interitum timerent. Fieri autem non posset ut appeterent aliquid nisi sensum haberent sui eoque se diligerent. Ex quo intellegi debet principium ductum esse a se diligendo.”

He [Cato] began: “It is the view of those whose system I adopt, that immediately upon birth (for that is the proper point to start from) a living creature feels an attachment for itself and an impulse to preserve itself and to feel affection for its own construction and for those things which tend to preserve that constitution; while on the other hand it conceives an antipathy to destruction and to those things which appear to threaten destruction. In proof of this opinion they urge that infants desire things conducive to their health and reject things that are the opposite before they have ever felt pleasure or pain; this would not be the case, unless they felt an affection for their own constitution and were afraid of destruction. But it would be impossible that they should feel desire at all unless they possessed self-consciousness, and consequently felt affection for themselves. This leads to the conclusion that it is love of self which supplies the primary impulse to action.”

is a part of this universe; from which it is a natural consequence that we should prefer the common advantage to our own”<sup>1</sup>. The nature – both of the nature itself and our human nature – , instead of *diligentia* of our selves, teaches us to live in a civil society (*civitatis*), whose rules come from another human condition, to be a part of the cosmos (*mundus*). Human being as natural being, as a part of the society (*polités*), and as a part of the cosmos (*kosmopolités*) within two short sentences, without any detailed explication. *Ex quo illo natura consequi* [from which it is a natural consequence] – Cicero wrote. It is clear, that in these sentences nothing follows from anything, naturally or artificially. A human being as a *kosmopolités* cannot have any effect on the human being as a *polités*, and both of these conditions have a very troubled connection with the *diligentia* of the self of the “natural being”. The word “*natura*” in the Ciceronian text does not refer to the biosphere or to the human nature; it is just a rhetorical element, instead of a philosophical argument. It is the voice of Cicero, the speaker, lawyer and politician, and not that of Cicero, the philosopher.

A few paragraphs later, in the § 67 of the Book III, he follows his chains of ideas in this merely rhetorical manner: “*hominum inter homines iuris esse vincula putant, sic homini nihil iuris esse cum bestiis* [man is united with man by the bonds of right, so they consider that no right exists as between man and beast]”<sup>2</sup>. In here the human society

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<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *De finibus bonorum...*, 284–285.

“Itaque natura sumus apti ad coetus concilia civitates. Mundum autem censent regi numine deorum, eumque esse quasi communem urbem et civitatem hominum et deorum, et unum quemque nostrum eius mundi esse partem; ex quo illud natura consequi, ut communem utilitatem nostrae anteponamus.”

“It follows that we are by nature fitted to form unions, societies and states. Again, they hold that the universe is governed by divine will; it is a city or state of which both men and gods are members, and each one of us is a part of this universe; from which it is a natural consequence that we should prefer the common advantage to our own.”

<sup>2</sup> Cicero, *De finibus bonorum...*, 286–287.

“Sed quomodo hominum inter homines iuris esse vincula putant, sic homini nihil iuris esse cum bestiis. Plaeclare enim Chrysippus, cetera nata esse hominum causa et deorum, eos autem communitatis et societatis suae, ut bestiis homines iuri ad utilitatem suam possint sine iniuria.”

“But just as they hold that man is united with man by the bonds of right, so they consider that no right exists as between man and beast. For Chrysippus well said, that all other things were created for the sake of men and gods, but that these



appears as a phenomenon, absolutely independent from the other living beings of the nature, and without any connection of the whole of the cosmos. We can remember that a few paragraphs before he derived our sociability from our biological nature and from our status as parts of the cosmos. *Ius* and *iniuria* can work only within a particular human society, in a well-defined state, in a world, where animal rights do not exist and where a concept of a human being as *kosmopolitēs* is unthinkable.

At the bottom of Cicero's intellectual failure, solved by his rhetoric only, there is a hidden contradiction of the Stoical philosophy, interpreted by him, which was not his personal opinion. The Stoical philosophy – similarly to the other branches of the Greek philosophy – can use the three above-mentioned approaches for the explanation of human affairs. With other more familiar terms: humans, as *microcosms*, humans in *mesocosmos*, and in the *macrocosm*. By the original system these approaches have been made parallel, but isolated and incommensurable descriptions of the same topic, the human being. However, in this system of descriptions there is not a causal relationship between the elements of the different descriptions, Stoical philosophers and their followers often have used parallels between them for establish an ethical theory. Their inconsistency was maintainable by a hidden supposition, rooted in the Stoical philosophy, able to offer a link between humans and animals, dead and living nature. It was the Stoical doctrine of the *pneuma*, working both in the macrocosm as a whole and in the microcosms – individual human beings –, causing cosmic and individual rationality and morality.

This hidden link between beasts and humans, dead and live parts of nature are easily observable in another quotation of the third book of the same work: “*ea quae secundum naturam sunt ipsa propter se sumenda sint* [things in accordance with nature are »things to be taken« for their own sake]”.<sup>1</sup> Cicero's Cato here, following his Stoical masters, uses a concept of *nature*, which refers to the dead and living nature and the social world of the people, at the same time. (It is an interesting detail that Cicero uses here the concept of nature to establish his term *officium*, referring a highly embedded idea in the Roman cultural tradition.) A value of the *naturalness* of an object is interpretable for humans in a conceptual frame; where the common naturalness of humans, animals and non-biological objects is evident. If we suppose a concept of

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exist for their own mutual fellowship and society, so that men can make use of beasts for their own purposes without injustice.”

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *De finibus bonorum...*, 236–237.

*naturalness*, which is equivalent with *inhumanity*, this evidence will evaporate, as we shall see in the last part of my article.

**A New Regard: the Inhumanity as a Value-in-Itself**

The previous point in our chain of ideas, before this historical instance of Cicero, was that the intactness of the objects of the dead nature – especially in outer space – has a *value-in-itself* within environmental thought. An aspect of this idea, which cannot be derived from the misuse of an element of the western philosophical tradition, is mentioned above. According to this aspect one can establish our obligation to protect our cosmic environment without using any analogy between the terrestrial and extraterrestrial environment, or supposing any common element in humans and in the objects of the outer space. In this reasoning a new element has appeared, *the absolute value, or value-in-itself of the intactness*. In this case the content of this value, which makes worthy the actual object for the protection, is its absolute inhumanity; it is valuable, *because* it is free from any human interest or regard.

Seemingly it is a radical environmentalist reasoning, better and more consequential than the argument of the “natural beauty” of a particular object of dead nature, discussed above. In a more detailed analysis it can be recognised that the value of inhumanity or intactness from human touching or regard is a culturally embedded idea in the European thinking, which is rooted in the idea of the *virginity of (living) nature*, as a (cultural) value of the nature in the natural philosophies of Romanticism.

Instead of a conclusion we can state that we should give up the inquiries for an inhuman regard or value of the objects of the outer space worthy of our protection, because the humanity and the cultural background of any effects is probably observable by an adequate inquiry. Protection of – dead or living – nature from the effects of the human activity is possible based on the *humanity* of the values of the protected object only.