

RYSZARD F. SADOWSKI

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Poland

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5452-2168> • r.sadowski@uksw.edu.pl

Received: 2025-10-25; Revised: 2026-04-01; Accepted: 2026-04-07; Published online: 2026-08-28

CIVILIZATIONAL CHANGES AS A CHALLENGE TO EDUCATION: NURTURING HUMAN INTEGRITY

Abstract: This article seeks to diagnose the key educational challenges of contemporary civilization through the lens of Konrad Lorenz's *layered model of the human being*. At the core of this model lies the claim that the human consists of three interrelated layers or components: 1. the body, 2. the soul (psyche), and 3. the spirit (mind). Lorenz emphasizes that the biological components (body and soul) evolve at a much slower pace than the cultural component (spirit/mind). This disparity leads to a growing imbalance among these layers and, consequently, to what he termed *the waning of humaneness*. In this context, the article examines four of the eight so-called *deadly sins of civilized humanity*. Lorenz identifies these “sins” as lethal threats arising from the accelerated development of the cultural layer, which the biological layers are unable to match. From an educational and pedagogical perspective, the paper discusses the following “sins”: 1. the degradation of nature, 2. the neurotic pursuit of success, 3. emotional entropy, and 4. the erosion of tradition. Each of these phenomena is presented as a profound challenge to the process of education. The article does not propose specific pedagogical strategies but rather identifies these threats and encourages educators and philosophers of education to reflect on the necessity of addressing them within educational practice. In doing so, it advocates the preservation of *humaneness* as a central aim of education in a world increasingly shaped by dynamic and often dehumanizing civilizational transformations.

Keywords: philosophy of education, environmental education, educational challenges, anthropological foundations of education, Konrad Lorenz, layered model of the human being, human integrity, civilizational development, SDG 4

1. Introduction

Contemporary societies face civilizational challenges unprecedented in scale and complexity. According to Konrad Lorenz, these challenges stem from the *layering* or stratification of the internal structure of the human being, which has significant consequences across multiple domains of human life, including education. Lorenz locates the source of these challenges in the uneven development of human

dimensions and employs his *layered model of the human being* to explain this phenomenon.

Within this model, he distinguishes three interrelated layers/components: (1) the body, (2) the soul (psyche), and (3) the spirit/mind. The first two layers develop according to the dynamics of biological evolution, whereas the third layer evolves according to the laws and pace of cultural evolution. As Lorenz observes, the human body and psyche have remained relatively stable over millennia, while the spirit/mind transforms at an unprecedented rate (Lorenz, 1989).

Consequently, what is at stake is merely the biological survival, but the capacity to live *in a truly human way*—that is, to fully realize oneself not merely as a biological organism but as a being capable of creating, appreciating, and engaging with cultural goods (Łepko, 2018, pp. 76–78).

According to Lorenz, civilizational development contributes to a steadily widening gap between the biological and cultural components of the human being. This divergence results from their differing rates of development. The pace of cultural evolution—expressed through technology, urbanization, mass culture, and lifestyle—is considerably faster than the pace of human biological evolution. As a result, this stratification of the human components poses a threat to human integrity. The environment in which contemporary humans live differs radically from the environment for which biological evolution prepared them over hundreds of thousands of years. The biological component simply cannot keep pace with the cultural component, creating risks for human integrity and generating a range of challenges that constitute serious threats (Lorenz, 1989; Piątek, 1998).

This article aims to identify the key challenges facing contemporary educators. The author, who is not a professional pedagogue, does not propose concrete pedagogical solutions but, from an anthropological perspective, offers a reflection on the educational challenges arising from ongoing civilizational changes. This reflection is intended as a starting point for educators, enabling them to approach contemporary educational challenges from a new perspective. The foundation of this reflection is Lorenz's *layered model of the human being*, which allows for a better understanding of how the uneven development of human layers results in the stratification of human nature and, consequently, in *the waning of humaneness* (Lorenz, 1989; Lorenz, 1973; Łepko, 2018, p. 70).

In this study, the author focuses on four “sins” particularly relevant to education: 1. the degradation of the natural environment, 2. the neurotic pursuit of success, 3. the entropy of feelings, and 4. the erosion of tradition. These are areas in which contemporary cultural changes directly affect lifestyles and pose serious threats to young people. The author believes that recognizing the sources of these threats can help educators develop appropriate responses to the challenges their students face. Understanding the essence of civilizational processes allows educators to identify the roots of these threats and focus on their mitigation or at least reduction, rather than merely reacting to the “external symptoms” of cultural

change. Civilizational changes shape not only the natural environment but also moral, aesthetic, and spiritual attitudes, playing a crucial role in the formation of young people's identities.

The selection of these four "sins" is not accidental. They exert a particularly direct influence on the everyday educational environment in families, schools, and informal learning settings. Devastation of nature undermines the conditions for healthy physical development and the emergence of ecological sensitivity. The neurotic pursuit of success shapes the motivational climate in which children and adolescents grow up, often exposing them to chronic stress and instrumental attitudes toward learning. The entropy of feelings weakens the emotional foundations of perseverance, empathy, and the capacity to experience joy in effort. Finally, the devaluation of tradition deprives young people of cultural rootedness, making it more difficult to construct a stable identity and to participate responsibly in social life. Taken together, these four "sins" form a cluster of phenomena that directly affect the formation of the body, psyche, and spirit/mind of the younger generation, and are therefore of key relevance for pedagogy and the philosophy of education.

The structure of this study guides the reader from general theoretical frameworks (Sections 1 and 2), through analyses of selected *deadly sins of civilized humanity* and their impact on education (Sections 3–6), to a conclusion that gathers the findings which, in the author's view, should serve as a basis for reflection and inspire further research and interdisciplinary discussion in the field of education.

2. Konrad Lorenz's Concept of the Human Being

Konrad Lorenz, an Austrian zoologist, ethologist, and Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine (1973), is recognized as one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century in the study of human and animal behavior. However, his reflection on human nature extends beyond the strictly biological scope of ethology. Lorenz combines naturalistic observation with philosophical, anthropological, and cultural reflection. One of his key achievements is the so-called *layered model of the human being*, which underpins his critique of contemporary civilization and dehumanizing processes.

Drawing on Nicolai Hartmann's ontology, Lorenz distinguishes three main layers in humans: the body (*Ger. Leib*), the soul/psyche (*Ger. Seele*), and the spirit/mind (*Ger. Geist*). The *body* refers to the purely biological aspect, including physiology and evolutionary adaptive mechanisms. The *soul* encompasses emotions, social instincts, and the basic psychological mechanisms developed over the course of evolution in *Homo sapiens* and its ancestors. The body and soul are the components that humans share with the animal world (Lorenz & Kreuzer, 1983, pp. 69–71). By contrast, the *spirit/mind* represents uniquely human layer and includes rational capacities,

syntactic language, abstract thinking, cultural creation and reception, as well as ethical reflection (Lorenz, 1989; Lorenz, 1977, p. 167).

A key issue identified by Lorenz in the development of civilization is the disharmony between the pace of biological and cultural evolution. The biological components of humans (the body and the soul) develop extremely slowly, adapting to the environment over thousands of years. In contrast, the cultural layer (the spirit/mind) evolves at a radically faster pace, leading to the phenomenon of *human stratification* (Lorenz, 1973; Sadowski, 2023, pp. 3–5). Humans are evolutionarily adapted to life in small groups, in direct contact with nature, engaging in intensive physical activity, with a limited number of stimuli, and thus living at a much slower pace than is typical today. Contemporary living conditions—large metropolises, an excess of information, digital technology, social atomization, and accelerated life rhythms—differ radically from the environment in which our biological and psychological mechanisms evolved, creating dangers that humans have never previously faced (Wuketits, 2012, p. 9; Łepko, 2017, pp. 54–57).

In *Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins* (1973), Lorenz identifies eight civilizational phenomena that threaten human integrity. These sins are not moral transgressions in a religious sense but are symptoms of pathologies associated with the development of civilization, resulting from the stratification of human nature. Analogous to mortal sins in religious doctrine, which bring about spiritual death, the *deadly sins of civilized humanity* threaten human integrity. Lorenz points to the following phenomena, which constitute mortal threats to human well-being:

1. overpopulation;
2. degradation of nature;
3. man's race against himself;
4. entropy of feelings;
5. genetic decay;
6. break with tradition;
7. susceptibility to ideological indoctrination;
8. nuclear weapons.

Lorenz notes that the phenomena listed above are systemic in character, meaning they result from the accelerated pace of civilizational development and the human organism's lack of evolutionary capacity to adapt (Lorenz, 1981).

Lorenz's concept carries far-reaching implications for pedagogy and the philosophy of education. Firstly, it indicates that the process of human formation should take greater account of humans' evolutionarily shaped biological and psychological nature, as well as its relationship with cultural development. Ignoring or underestimating this aspect may lead to serious disturbances.

Furthermore, Lorenz's concept reveals that many educational challenges do not originate from individual mistakes of educators or educational institutions, but rather from broader cultural and civilizational processes.

Moreover, *the layered model of the human being* suggests the need to harmonize the development of all its layers. Education should therefore place greater emphasis on integrating all layers of the human being, that is, fostering both the intellect (spirit/mind) and supporting the development of the emotional (soul/psyche) and biological (body) dimensions, for example through physical education, contact with nature, cultivation of psychological resilience, and the development of ethical and aesthetic sensitivity (Lorenz, 1973, p. 20; Łepko, 2001).

Lorenz's concept thus provides a theoretical framework for understanding why contemporary education faces such serious challenges. The eight *deadly sins* are not only a diagnosis of civilizational pathologies but also a warning against the loss of humaneness, understood as the capacity to live in accordance with one's nature. Analyzing these "sins" in the context of education allows for the identification of four particularly sensitive areas that require special attention in order to protect the integrity of the younger generation and help humans live *in a human way*—that is, not merely to satisfy biological needs but also to create and engage with cultural goods (Lorenz, 1989; Łepko, 1999, pp. 269–271; Łepko, 2018, pp. 76–78).

Focusing in this article on only four of Lorenz's eight deadly sins therefore constitutes a deliberate narrowing of the analytical lens. From the perspective of his layered model of the human being, these four "sins" affect, in a particularly direct way, all three layers of human existence. The degradation of nature primarily threatens the bodily and affective layers, as it deprives humans of the environments for which their organisms and basic emotional mechanisms were shaped. Man's race against himself distorts the relationship between the psyche and the spirit/mind by transforming natural striving and competition into a self-destructive compulsion. The entropy of feelings directly affects the affective layer, weakening the capacity for deep emotions necessary for moral and spiritual growth. Finally, the break with tradition disrupts the cultural and spiritual layer, severing the continuity of meaning that links individuals to previous generations. From an educational perspective, these four "sins" are thus paradigmatic: they reveal how civilizational processes penetrate the everyday experiences of learners and educators and destabilise the balance between body, psyche, and spirit/mind.

3. Challenges Related to the Sin of the Degradation of Nature

One of the most important phenomena identified by Konrad Lorenz in *Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins* is the degradation of nature. Lorenz argues that the destruction of the natural environment and the loss of direct contact between humans and nature lead to profound changes in human psychology and culture. In the context of education, this problem acquires particular significance. The lack of interaction with nature—especially during childhood and adolescence—affects not only emotional and cognitive development but also the formation of aesthetic

sensitivity, imagination, creativity, and even ethical awareness (Lorenz, 1973, pp. 15–23; Sadowski, 2015, p. 205).

Lorenz points out that for millions of years; human beings have lived in coexistence with the natural world. Our perception, instincts, and emotional and cognitive mechanisms have evolved within natural surroundings that provided not only the basis for biological survival but also the foundations of spiritual development. The technological progress of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—especially urbanization, industrialization, digitization, and the creation of virtual alternatives to reality—has led to a radical rupture in the human bond with nature. Children growing up in large cities now have fewer and fewer opportunities for spontaneous contact with the natural world. Their experience of reality is often confined to virtual spaces or artificially designed urban parks (Łepko, 2017, p. 60).

This rupture is not only an ecological problem but also an anthropological one. Psychological studies confirm that interaction with nature positively influences the development of empathy, cooperative abilities, and creativity (Sadowski, 2015, p. 205). Conversely, the lack of such contact produces emotional deficits manifested as indifference to the suffering of other living beings and moral insensitivity to ecological problems. Lorenz warns that a human being alienated from nature can no longer truly understand themselves and thus loses an essential part of their humanity (Lorenz, 1981; Lorenz, 1989).

Lorenz also emphasizes the pivotal role of aesthetic experience while being close to nature. Engagement with natural landscapes fosters attunement to beauty, harmony, and the rhythms of life, which provides a foundation for the cultivation of ethical sensibilities. The aesthetic sense, nurtured through contact with nature, extends into the sphere of human relationships: a person who is sensitive to the beauty of nature is more likely to care for the well-being of others and to act responsibly toward the environment over the long term (Lorenz, 1989; Łepko, 2017, pp. 57–60).

It should be noted that nature itself performs an educational function, as it teaches patience and attentiveness to processes that unfold over periods far longer than the pace of everyday activity in modern civilization. This rhythm of life—rooted in biological and ecological cycles—serves as a counterbalance to the accelerated dynamics of contemporary societies. Education deprived of contact with nature becomes fragmented and superficial, reducing the child's growth to the intellectual sphere while neglecting the embodied and spiritual dimensions of human connectedness with the Earth and its ecosystems.

From an educational perspective, the degradation of the natural environment carries multiple harmful consequences.

- First, the loss of contact with nature during childhood negatively affects cognitive development and creativity. Neuropsychological studies indicate that natural settings stimulate brain development more diversely than urban spaces. Children who regularly engage with natural environments

demonstrate stronger problem-solving skills and higher levels of innovation (Vella-Brodrick, Gilowska, 2022; Liu, Green, 2023).

- Second, the absence of direct interaction with the natural world weakens emotional competencies. Children who lack experience with plants and animals tend to face greater difficulties in forming deep interpersonal bonds, and their capacity for empathy is reduced. In this context, education should also be understood as fostering a relationship with one's environment, which forms the basis for ethical awareness and ecological responsibility (Łepko, 2017, pp. 57–60).
- Third, the degradation of the natural environment encourages instrumental attitudes toward it. Humans disconnected from nature are likely to view it merely as a resource to exploit rather than as a living community to which they belong. Lorenz warns that such a mindset leads to global environmental deterioration and, ultimately, to a civilizational crisis threatening the very survival of the human species (Lorenz, 1973).

The above assessment of civilizational challenges proposed by Lorenz implies the need to address them within the educational process. Ecological education, for example, can be strengthened to restore or reinforce the weakened, or even severed, bond of younger generations with the natural world. Such an approach to education should encompass not only theoretical knowledge about the environment but, most importantly, direct experience with nature—i.e., outdoor activities, ecosystem observation, and active engagement in environmental protection. In this way, it is possible not only to expand knowledge but also to cultivate pro-environmental attitudes, which serve as a counterbalance to the destructive tendencies of contemporary civilization (Łepko, 2019, pp. 57–60).

Ecological education also has a spiritual dimension. Through contact with nature, individuals discover their place in the world, learn humility in relation to the laws of nature, and appreciate the value of harmony, which is often absent in social life. Ecological education thus aligns with Lorenz's appeal to safeguard humaneness by restoring balance between the biological and cultural layers within the human being.

The devastation of the natural world constitutes one of the key *deadly sins of civilized humanity*, with far-reaching implications for education. The loss of connection with nature weakens fundamental cognitive, emotional, and moral capacities. Education that ignores or underestimates this issue contributes to further stratification of the human being and the erosion of human integrity.

4. Challenges Related to the Sin of *Man's Race Against Himself*

According to Konrad Lorenz, one of the most visible traits of contemporary civilization is the excessive pace of life and the neurotic pursuit of success. These phenomena have become the hallmarks of the modern way of life, particularly in

the societies of developed nations. Lorenz diagnoses this phenomenon as the result of a rapid acceleration of cultural evolution, which has exceeded the adaptive capacities of the human being (Lorenz, 1973, pp. 24–30). The excessive pace of life and the neurotic pursuit of success are not merely matters of lifestyle. They are, in fact, phenomena that entail serious psychological, social, and pedagogical consequences, influencing the education and upbringing of the younger generation (Sadowski, 2023, pp. 7–8).

Lorenz observes that modern man, from an early stage of life, is drawn into a self-perpetuating mechanism of social competition that dominates both professional and educational spheres. Success is measured primarily in material terms—professional achievements, income, social status, and public recognition. At the same time, cultural pressure imposes upon the individual an obligation of constant self-perfection and self-optimization, regardless of the consequences (Lorenz, 1973, p. 28).

The origins of this phenomenon are manifold. On the one hand, they lie in the evolutionary mechanisms of rivalry, which in natural conditions served the purposes of selection and species survival. Under the conditions of industrial and post-industrial civilization, however, this mechanism has been intensified by economic and social systems founded upon competition. On the other hand, the neurotic pursuit of success is the outcome of cultural acceleration, as well as technological and economic progress, which have created an environment that continually demands greater efficiency, mobility, and adaptability to ever-changing circumstances (Lorenz, 1973, pp. 24–30).

According to Lorenz, constant competition and pressure to achieve success may lead to severe psychological and spiritual disturbances. The individual participating in the so-called “rat race” lives in a state of permanent tension and stress. The human organism, shaped in conditions of small-community life and a moderate rhythm of activity, is biologically incapable of enduring such strain (Lorenz, 1989).

The consequence of such a state of affairs may be fatigue and psychological exhaustion, leading to reduced resilience, professional burnout, and emotional disturbances. At the same time, a fear of falling behind the pace set by competitors emerges, further reinforcing the compulsive drive toward additional achievements, in a vicious circle of dependence on success and social recognition. As Lorenz observes, under such conditions, human beings lose the capacity for self-reflection, since they avoid moments of inner stillness. On the one hand, modern individuals fear silence, for it allows thoughts to surface that may provoke anxieties related to failure in competition; on the other hand, moments of silence would enable an examination of the meaning of one’s life and the purpose of one’s activity (Lorenz, 1973, pp. 28–29).

Psychological research confirms Lorenz’s diagnosis, pointing to the phenomenon of the so-called high-pressure culture, which can lead to chronic stress, depression, and anxiety disorders among adolescents and adults (Chen, 2018). The spiritual

consequences may be equally serious. The pursuit of success can replace the search for self-realisation in a deeper sense, linked to ethical and spiritual development. As a result, modern individuals are increasingly exposed to existential meaninglessness, despite achieving success in professional, economic, and social spheres.

The problem of the neurotic pursuit of success also permeates the realms of education and upbringing of the younger generation. Contemporary educational systems often replicate mechanisms of competition, meaning that students are subjected to pressure to achieve high results, participate in numerous extracurricular activities, and their value is assessed based on academic and non-academic achievements as well as peer-group popularity.

This phenomenon leads to a range of negative outcomes:

- Stress and burnout among children and adolescents – excessive educational demands and achievement pressure undermine the mental and physical health of young people (Łepko, 2017, p. 63).
- Loss of intrinsic motivation – students learn not out of curiosity or passion, but to meet the expectations of adults and society, which inhibits creativity and independent thinking.
- Lack of space for reflection – insufficient time for reflection, contemplation, deep dialogue, spiritual development, and building interpersonal relationships results in the flattening of the educational and formative experience.

Lorenz emphasises that biological and psychological equilibrium requires periods of rest and quiet, which are essential for regeneration and maintenance of mental health. Contemporary education, exposed to the logic of success, often ignores this fundamental need, leading to the formation of generations incapable of self-reflection and inner balance (Lorenz, 1973, pp. 28–29).

It seems that one possible means of countering the neurotic pursuit of success is to value the spiritual and religious perspective. Traditional religions offer a long-term perspective, allowing individuals to distance themselves from short-term goals and worldly ambitions. Education that incorporates a religious perspective emphasises that a person's value is not solely a function of material achievements or popularity, but is also related to moral development, relationships with others, and the discovery of life's meaning (Sadowski, 2023, pp. 7–8).

It appears that counteracting this “sin” requires restoring space in education for silence, rest, and reflection, as well as enabling and stimulating spiritual development. Only in this way is it possible to maintain a balance between the demands of civilization and the biological, psychological, and spiritual needs of human beings, thereby protecting humanity in its deepest sense.

5. Challenges Related to the Sin of *the Entropy of Feelings*

Another civilizational phenomenon that Konrad Lorenz identified as a mortal threat to humanity is the entropy of human feelings. This *deadly sin* refers to the gradual

loss of the capacity to experience deep emotions, empathy, and the joy derived from effort and overcoming difficulties (Lorenz, 1973, pp. 31–42). In the context of education, this phenomenon is particularly alarming. The younger generation, growing up in conditions of comfort and abundance, becomes less psychologically resilient, avoids challenges and exertion, which may lead to personality deformation and a fear of undertaking significant life challenges.

In describing this “sin,” Lorenz employs the metaphor of *thermal death*, referring to the concept of entropy in physics, that is, a state in which a system’s energy dissipates, leading to chaos (Lorenz, 1973). In psychological terms, this signifies a situation in which a person’s emotions are so suppressed or numbed that the capacity to experience intense feelings—both negative (suffering, grief) and positive (joy, love)—is lost. This state is not the result of natural calmness or emotional composure, but arises from excessive comfort, avoidance of challenges, and the pharmacological or technological “facilitation” of life.

Lorenz criticises modern societies for their pursuit of the elimination of all effort and suffering. He questions the resolution of problems with a painkiller, the management of stress through pharmacological means, and the replacement of physical exertion with technology. Such a way of life turns the individual into what Lorenz described as a *spoiled and softened man*, deprived of the capacity for character building and the ability to learn perseverance and self-discipline (Lorenz, 1973, p. 41; Lorenz, 1989, pp. 197–203; Piątek, 1998, p. 158; Łepko, 2001, pp. 159–160).

The *thermal death* of feelings may lead to serious psychological consequences. A person who does not experience pain or the necessity of overcoming difficulties does not develop the capacity for psychological resilience or the effort required to search for life’s meaning. Existential psychology emphasises that the sense of fulfilment and happiness is closely linked to effort and the confrontation with life’s challenges (Frankl, 2006). Without this process, life becomes emotionally flat, lacking depth and authentic meaning.

The social consequences of this phenomenon are equally serious. Societies deprived of the capacity for exertion become susceptible to the phenomenon of a “fragile psyche”. Young people avoid confronting problems, give up quickly in the face of obstacles, and are unable to build lasting interpersonal relationships, which require persistent effort, sacrifice, and compromise (Lorenz, 1989, pp. 197–203). The inability to experience intense emotions also weakens social bonds, diminishing solidarity and the capacity for empathy towards the suffering of others. Moreover, individuals oriented towards avoiding effort and pain become passive and disengaged from reality, failing to participate in life, which “slips through their fingers” (Lorenz, 1973, p. 39).

In the context of education, the *deadly sin* referred to as the entropy of feelings represents one of the most serious challenges facing contemporary educators. This “sin” manifests across several dimensions of young people’s lives:

- Low psychological resilience among youth – young people, shielded from difficulties by adults, pharmaceuticals, or technology, do not develop the capacity to cope with failure, frustration, or suffering. As a result, they enter adulthood without the tools necessary to overcome life's crises.
- Lack of persistence in pursuing goals – young people attempt to achieve success primarily when it is immediately rewarding, which hinders the development of long-term strategies and the exertion required to realise ambitious, far-reaching plans (Lorenz, 1973, p. 37).
- Loss of joy and satisfaction from undertaken challenges and effort – paradoxically, avoiding ambitious challenges and their associated difficulties deprives individuals of the opportunity to experience profound satisfaction derived from overcoming obstacles, potentially leading to a sense of emptiness, meaninglessness, and experiencing life not as an active participant and co-creator, but as a distant, passive observer (Lorenz, 1973, pp. 38–39; Sadowski, 2015, pp. 208–209).

It appears that the antidote to the entropy of feelings lies in the reintroduction of effort and character building in education. Education should not aim to remove all difficulties from a young person's life, but rather to teach gradually how to overcome them. Psychological and physical hardening, through sporting effort, the pursuit of ambitious goals, and participation in activities requiring serious and long-term sacrifices, is essential for the development of resilience and the capacity to experience emotions fully and maturely (Lorenz, 1973).

Numerous studies in developmental psychology indicate that experiencing controlled stress in youth strengthens the ability to cope with future challenges (Seery, 2011). Conversely, the lack of such experiences leads to excessive sensitivity and psychological fragility, which in adulthood results in heightened anxiety and withdrawal when confronted with difficult situations.

Traditional models of upbringing, both in families and schools, incorporated elements that counteracted the consequences of the entropy of feelings. Demands placed on children, physical work, school assignments, responsibility for household duties, and participation in school and peer-group life cultivated the capacity for perseverance and patience. Contemporary consumer culture, seeking maximum comfort, has abandoned these practices, making modern children and adolescents more susceptible to the negative consequences of emotional desensitisation (Lorenz, 1973).

Education devoid of effort and emotional challenges results in the formation of a fragile generation, incapable of coping with adversity and fully experiencing life. To counteract this process, education must emphasise the value of exertion, sacrifice, and difficult experiences as essential components of human development. In this way, it is possible to preserve the capacity to set and achieve ambitious goals, experience deep emotions, and cultivate empathy and joy, which constitute the foundation of humanity.

6. Challenges Related to the Sin of *Breaking with Tradition*

One of the most disturbing phenomena of modern civilization identified by Lorenz is the break with tradition. This process consists of the radical questioning of the legacy of previous generations, the rejection of the cultural foundations upon which the identities of particular social or national groups has been built, and the attempt to construct the world anew, as if history and tradition had no meaning whatsoever. In the context of education, this phenomenon has particularly far-reaching consequences. By severing cultural continuity, younger generations weaken their capacity to understand their own place in the world, to participate maturely in culture, and to construct their identities on the basis of the experience of preceding generations (Lorenz, 1973, pp. 61–76; Sadowski, 2015, p. 211).

Lorenz points out that in modern and postmodern societies we are witnessing a decline in respect for the past. In contrast to earlier cultures, in which older generations acted as custodians of wisdom and experience, contemporary societies tend towards the idea of radical autonomy of the young. They operate under the conviction that every generation can — and indeed should — create its own world, independent of the legacy of its predecessors (Lorenz, 1970; 1973).

The roots of this phenomenon lie in cultural and technological acceleration. Civilizational changes occur at such a rapid pace that the experience of older generations often appears to the young as obsolete or irrelevant. Furthermore, contemporary culture—shaped by individualism and emancipation—emphasises the value of a “new beginning,” while devaluing attachment to traditional norms, authorities, and social institutions (Lorenz, 1973, pp. 70–72).

The devaluation of tradition leads to a crisis of cultural continuity. Culture, as Lorenz emphasises, is an accumulative process; the accumulated wisdom of successive generations constitutes the foundation upon which human social and moral life is founded. Rupture of this continuity entails not only the loss of valuable experience but also the necessity of re-solving problems that humanity has already solved in the past. Lorenz warns that *building entirely anew* is a symptom of civilizational immaturity and results in the squandering of cultural heritage (Lorenz, 1973, p. 76; 1989, pp. 194–195; Sadowski, 2015, pp. 210–212).

The consequences of this phenomenon also affect the identity of the individual. A person deprived of rootedness in the tradition and culture of their community becomes susceptible to what Zygmunt Bauman (2000) described as liquid identity—a state marked by the absence of stable reference points in the sphere of values and behavioural patterns. Such a person also loses the sense of belonging to a historical community, which weakens social bonds and intergenerational solidarity. As a result, the individuals ceases to perceive themselves as part of the long continuum of human history and culture.

From the perspective of education, the devaluation of tradition constitutes one of the greatest challenges for contemporary pedagogy. The process of education

and upbringing has traditionally been based on the transmission of cultural heritage—that is, the passing on of knowledge, cultural models, symbols, moral norms, religious practices, art, and customs which form the foundation of personal development and active participation in social life. Under conditions of cultural devaluation, this transmission is undermined, giving rise to serious educational challenges:

- Relativisation of values – young people perceive traditional norms as arbitrary and outdated, which makes it difficult to form stable ethical attitudes.
- Fragmentation of historical knowledge – the accelerated pace of life and mass culture lead to a superficial understanding of history and cultural heritage, which weakens young people's cultural competence and blurs their sense of belonging.
- Rejection of authority – in environments where the experience of older generations is devalued, established educational models that once transmitted traditional values and life wisdom become difficult to sustain.

The result of such challenges is a disruption of the educational process, which in turn leads to difficulties in developing mature identity and in cultivating social and moral competences.

Tradition plays a crucial role in human development. It is a form of collective memory through which knowledge can be transmitted and moral as well as spiritual attitudes can be shaped. The continuity of tradition is essential for the preservation of humanity's heritage, for only through it can man build his future upon the solid foundation of the past.

Research in pedagogy and the philosophy of education emphasises that individual development requires a dialogue with the past; in other words, young people need contact with culture, art, religion, and history in order to make conscious life choices. By breaking with tradition, individuals lose the opportunity for full cultural, spiritual, and ethical development.

One of the key means of preventing the destructive consequences of the devaluation of tradition appears to be intergenerational education, which restores young people's contact with the achievements of previous generations. This may take various forms, ranging from the teaching of history, through cultural and religious practices, to active participation in the life of local communities, where young and old learn from each other through shared action and dialogue.

The aim of such education, however, is not the conservative preservation of tradition in an unaltered form, but its creative development – adding one's own contribution to the heritage of previous generations rather than rejecting it. Reconciling the challenges of the present with respect for the past ensures cultural continuity and protects humanity from the loss of its historical roots (Lorenz, 1973, pp. 61–76). This approach also allows for a more effective response to the challenges of contemporary life, as it draws upon the experience and wisdom of earlier generations.

The devaluation of tradition constitutes one of the most serious threats to contemporary education. A rupture with the past may lead to a crisis of identity, the fragmentation of culture, and the weakening of intergenerational bonds. Lorenz's framework highlights the need for an educational model that integrates the past and present. Furthermore, an educational philosophy that reaffirms the role of tradition can serve as an effective countermeasure to this *deadly sin*, restoring cultural rootedness in the young generation and enabling conscious, responsible participation in the building of humanity's future.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to identify the most significant contemporary educational challenges from the perspective of Konrad Lorenz's layered conception of the human being. An analysis based on this framework demonstrates that the dynamic development of civilization, which directly impacts the cultural component of humans (spirit/mind), proceeds at a pace that significantly exceeds the adaptive capacities of the biological components of humans (body and soul). As a result, a stratification occurs, threatening the integrity of the human person and their ability to live a "human life," that is, in accordance with their biological, psychological, and cultural nature (Lorenz, 1989; Łepko, 2018, pp. 76–78).

The article has discussed four of the eight *deadly sins of civilized humanity* that have the greatest impact on the education of the younger generation: 1. the devastation of nature, 2. the neurotic pursuit of success, 3. the entropy of feelings, and 4) the devaluation of tradition. Each of these "sins" reveals a distinct yet interconnected aspect of the crisis of contemporary humanity, and their analysis in the context of education leads to several key conclusions.

The remaining four deadly sins identified by Lorenz—overpopulation, genetic decay, susceptibility to ideological indoctrination, and nuclear weapons—are by no means less important. However, they operate predominantly at macro-structural, political, and techno-scientific levels, and their adequate treatment would require separate analyses drawing on demography, genetics, political science, and security studies. In the present article, the focus is restricted to those "sins" whose effects are most immediately visible in the everyday educational environment, and which can be directly addressed within pedagogical practice.

7.1. Valuing the Bond with Nature

The devastation of nature constitutes a fundamental threat to the growth of young people. Lorenz emphasises that the bond with nature shapes imagination and creativity and supports the development of aesthetic and ethical sensitivity, which are essential for human formation. Contemporary processes of urbanisation and industrialisation hinder or even deprive children and adolescents of this contact,

leading to various deficits (Lorenz, 1973). It is therefore crucial to place greater value on ecological education as a central component of contemporary pedagogy. By incorporating contact with nature, it becomes possible to use the natural environment as a source of the learner's inner harmony, creativity, aesthetic and ethical sensitivity, and a sense of responsibility for the well-being of the planet and present and future generations (Lorenz, 1973; Łepko, 2017, p. 57).

7.2. Equilibrium of Action and Reflection

The neurotic pursuit of success is a phenomenon that distorts not only adult life but also the processes of education and upbringing. Contemporary school systems often replicate mechanisms of achievement pressure, depriving young people of the space necessary for reflection and spiritual development. Lorenz warns that an individual who loses the capacity for self-reflection becomes a prisoner of the accelerated civilizational system (Lorenz, 1973). Education should therefore cultivate the ability to pause, critically evaluate one's own actions, and discover a sense of life purpose that extends beyond immediate "here and now" achievements. Otherwise, the individual risks being consumed by the pursuit of economic success (Lorenz, 1989, p. 185; Sadowski, 2015, pp. 206-207).

7.3. Character Building

The entropy of human feelings, stemming from excessive comfort and the avoidance of effort and discomfort at all costs, fosters the emergence of a fragile generation unable to pursue ambitious, long-term goals that demand sustained and diligent engagement. This condition also diminishes the capacity to experience profound and meaningful emotions. Lorenz notes that a person who avoids effort and suffering loses the capacity to fully experience their humanity (Lorenz, 1989, pp. 197-203). Education should therefore include elements of character building through controlled challenges, physical and mental discipline, and the teaching of obstacle-overcoming (Sadowski, 2015, pp. 208-209).

7.4. Preservation and Creative Development of Tradition

The devaluation of tradition leads to an identity crisis and the rupture of cultural continuity. A person severed from their connection to the past becomes rootless and susceptible to moral and spiritual destabilisation (Lorenz, 1973, pp. 61-76; Lorenz, 1989, pp. 193-195). Intergenerational education, which combines the experience of older generations with the creativity of the young, is crucial for restoring balance between the present and the past. Education should therefore not only safeguard tradition but also teach its creative development, highlighting the responsibility to cultivate and contribute to humanity's heritage.

7.5. An Interdisciplinary Approach

An analysis of Lorenz's *deadly sins* demonstrates that contemporary educational challenges are systemic and interdisciplinary—they cannot be resolved solely within the framework of pedagogy. Addressing them requires the dialogue of philosophy, psychology, ecology, sociology, and theology. Only such a comprehensive approach allows for the creation of an educational model that responds to dynamic civilizational changes while safeguarding the integrity of the human being and their physical, psychological, social, intellectual, and spiritual growth.

The principal aim of this article was to identify the greatest obstacles to safeguarding humanity in the educational process. An examination of Lorenz's conception indicates that preserving human integrity requires, above all, the restoration of balance across all layers/components of the human being: body, psyche, and spirit/mind.

Education that reconnects young generations with nature, teaches balance between action and reflection, and strengthens character constitutes a fundamental condition for the cultivation of humanity in contemporary civilization. It also fosters a bond with tradition, which is essential for grounding individuals in cultural and historical continuity. Only in this way can the civilizational pathologies described by Lorenz be avoided, preserving the human being as an entity capable of creative, ethical, and spiritual life in harmony with nature and culture.

Statements

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

AI Tools Declaration: During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT4 for literature search, bibliography compilation, translation from foreign languages, and language editing. The author independently developed the study design, structure, and original draft of the manuscript and assumes full responsibility for its content.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Polity Press.
- Chen, B.-B. (2018). High-pressure culture and its effects on mental health of adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 33(3), 275–295.
- Frankl, V.E. (2006). *Man's search for meaning*. Beacon Press.
- Liu, J., & Green, R.J. (2023). The effect of exposure to nature on children's psychological well-being: A systematic review of the literature. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 81, 127846. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2023.127846>.
- Lorenz, K. (1970). The enmity between generations and its probable ethological causes. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 57(3), 333.
- Lorenz, K. (1973). *Civilized man's eight deadly sins*. Methuen.

- Lorenz, K. (1977). *Behind the mirror: A search for a natural history of human knowledge*. Methuen Books.
- Lorenz, K. (1981). *The foundations of ethology*. Springer.
- Lorenz, K. (1989). *The waning of humaneness*. Unwin Hyman.
- Lorenz, K., & Kreuzer, F. (1983). *Leben ist Lernen. Von Immanuel Kant zu Konrad Lorenz: Ein Gespräch über das Lebenswerk des Nobelpreisträgers*. R. Piper & Co. Verlag.
- Łepko, Z. (1999). W sprawie antropologicznych aspektów ekofilozofii [On the anthropological aspects of ecophilosophy]. In J.M. Dołęga & J.W. Czartoszewski (Eds.), *Ochrona środowiska w filozofii i teologii* (pp. 265–280). Wydawnictwo Akademii Teologii Katolickiej.
- Łepko, Z. (2001). Etologiczne inspiracje ekofilozofii [Ethological inspirations of ecophilosophy]. In J.M. Dołęga, J.W. Czartoszewski, & A. Skowroński (Eds.), *Ochrona środowiska społeczno-przyrodniczego w filozofii i teologii* (pp. 135–164). Wydawnictwo UKSW.
- Łepko, Z. (2017). Ekopedagogiczna relewancja etologii [Eco-educational relevance of ethology]. *Seminare*, 38(1), 53–73. <https://doi.org/10.21852/sem.2017.1.04>.
- Łepko, Z. (2018). W sprawie środowiskowej ochrony człowieczeństwa człowieka [On environmental protection of man's humanity]. *Seminare*, 39(1), 69–80. <https://doi.org/10.21852/sem.2018.1.06>.
- Piątek, Z. (1998). Osiem grzechów głównych naszej cywilizacji w ujęciu Konrada Lorenza a kryzys środowiskowy [The eight deadly sins of our civilization according to Konrad Lorenz and the environmental crisis]. In J. Dębski (Ed.), *Humanistyka, przyrodoznawstwo, technika w obliczu kryzysu biosfery [Humanities, natural sciences, technology in the face of the biosphere crisis]* (pp. 153–163). Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna w Olsztynie.
- Sadowski, R.F. (2015). *Filozoficzny spór o rolę chrześcijaństwa w kwestii ekologicznej [A philosophical dispute over the role of Christianity in ecological issues]*. Towarzystwo Naukowe Franciszka Salezego. <https://doi.org/10.21852/tnfs.2015.1>.
- Sadowski, R.F. (2023). Remarks on the concept of a sustainable city in light of Konrad Lorenz's concept of man. *Sustainability*, 15(3), 2443. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15032443>.
- Seery, M.D. (2011). Resilience: A silver lining to experiencing adverse life events? *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(6), 390–394. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721411424740>.
- Vella-Brodrick, D.A., & Gilowska, K. (2022). Effects of nature (greenspace) on cognitive functioning in school children and adolescents: A systematic review. *Educational Psychology Review*, 34(3), 1217–1254. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-022-09658-5>.
- Wuketits, F.M. (2012). *Zivilisation in der Sackgasse: Plädoyer für eine artgerechte Menschenhaltung*. Mankau Verlag.

