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Towards the Conflict and Compatibility of the Contemporary Economy with Nature

W stronę konfliktu i zgodności współczesnej gospodarki z naturą

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Abstract: The subject of interest is the constant deepening of the old conflict between culture and nature, and thus also the conflict with nature and the economy, which J. Šmajš considers to be a subsystem of culture. The conflict between nature and culture is considered to be the main cause of the global ecological crisis, which is a crisis of coexistence between humans and nature. Attention is drawn to the predatory economy, which Šmajš considers to be one of the causes of this conflict and which greatly influences the shape of contemporary culture. The main aim of the paper is to find ways in which this conflict, which has acquired a global dimension, can be mitigated and to advocate for the synergy or compatibility of the economy as well as the whole culture with nature. The solution is to move away from anthropocentrism, to reorient values in society based on a proper understanding of the phenomena of nature, culture and economy. Along with this, it is important to raise environmental awareness among economic actors, but practically among all people. We consider that to be an important step towards mitigating the above-mentioned conflict and towards the development of a sustainable economy and society.

Keywords: nature, culture, economy, conflict, mitigation

Streszczenie: Przedmiotem powszechnego zainteresowania jest problem stałego pogłębiania się odwiecznego konfliktu między kulturą a naturą, a tym samym konfliktu między naturą i ekonomią, którą J. Šmajš uważa za podsystem kultury. Konflikt między naturą a kulturą uważany jest za główną przyczynę światowego kryzysu ekologicznego, który jest kryzysem współistnienia człowieka z przyrodą. Szczególną uwagę zwraca się tu na drapieżną gospodarkę, na którą Šmajš wskazuje jako jedną z przyczyn tego konfliktu i która ma ogromny wpływ na kształt współczesnej kultury. Głównym celem artykułu jest znalezienie sposobów na złagodzenie tego konfliktu, który obecnie nabral wymiaru globalnego, oraz opowiedzenie się za szukaniem sposobów na osiągnięcie efektu synergii lub zgodności gospodarki i całości kultury z naturą. Jednym z możliwych rozwiązań byłoby odejście od antropocentryzmu, reorientacja podstawowych wartości w społeczeństwie w oparciu o właściwe rozumienie zjawisk przyrodniczych, kulturowych i ekonomicznych. Równocześnie ważne jest podnoszenie świadomości ekologicznej podmiotów gospodarczych, a w praktyce wszystkich ludzi. Uważamy to za ważny krok w kierunku złagodzenia omawianego konfliktu oraz rozwoju zrównoważonej gospodarki i społeczeństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: przyroda, kultura, gospodarka, konflikt, łagodzenie

Introduction

The economy is a subsystem of culture, which at the end of the 20th century has a significant impact on changing both culture and nature and threatens sustainable development. The process of globalisation is a significant contributor here.

One of the conditions for changes in culture, the economy and nature to take place without endangering the quality of life on Earth is to mitigate the age-old conflict between culture and nature, and thus also the conflict between the economy and nature, and to work for their synergy or compatibility.

The conflict between the economy and nature is undoubtedly a serious type of conflict that threatens sustainable development. The economy, but ultimately the whole of culture, cannot develop in ways that have a negative impact on the environment and nature. Particularly worrying are the negative impacts of the current economy on ecosystems, the environment and the whole of nature, the state of which is already incompatible with a sustainable way of life. In order to be sustainable and to ensure a good quality of life for people, the economy must not damage or threaten nature, but, on the contrary, must develop in synergy with nature. It is therefore necessary to seriously address the age-old conflict between nature and culture and, in particular, to pay attention to the conflict between the economy, as an important subsystem of culture, and nature, which has been persistent for a long time, and which is constantly intensifying. Consequently, it is necessary to find ways to mitigate it and to ensure compatibility between the two systems – nature and culture as a whole.

The present paper is based on theoretical research, on qualitative analysis of theoretical sources, which are information sources mainly from the field of social sciences and humanities. More specifically, we relied on a qualitative analysis of texts of authors dealing with philosophy (especially axiology, evolutionary ontology and ecophilosophy),

but also sociology, cultural studies. With the aim of elucidating the real state of society, which is developing mainly thanks to the economy at the expense of nature as well as culture, which are already threatened today. This has been pointed out by several authors and especially by J. Šmajš, who calls for a correct understanding of the relationship of culture to the Earth and, consequently, for its reconstruction. We have subjected his work and that of other authors to a systematic analysis, which has become the starting point for clarifying the conflict between culture and nature and for finding solutions to strengthen the compatibility of the contemporary economy with nature.

The paper is based on a critical view of the contemporary cultural economy, which, as a subsystem of culture, has a significant share in making the functioning of contemporary society unsustainable in the long-term perspective. One of the main reasons for this is the conflict between nature and culture, which is intensifying as a result of the development of an economy that is mainly focused on achieving economic growth and thus promoting consumption and consumerism, which in the long term threatens life on Earth.

We assume that the complete elimination of the conflict between the economy and nature, which is already global in scope, is hardly to be expected, but given that the shape of present and future culture and nature depends on human beings, it is they who must have an interest in mitigating the growing socio-cultural burden and other threats to nature and thus to culture. It is also necessary to strive for the compatibility (mutual compatibility, permissibility) of the economy and, ultimately, of the whole culture with nature. Our aim is to argue that an important task for the development of society and life on Earth in general is to develop the economy in a sustainable way, which requires a reorientation of values of economic actors, increasing their environmental consciousness, which is an important prerequisite for mitigating

the conflict between the economy and nature.

The conflict between nature and culture is considered to be the main cause of the global ecological crisis, which is a crisis of coexistence between humans and nature. In the context of the need of this crisis to mitigate and resolve the conflict between the economy and nature, but also between culture and nature as a whole, in the interests of sustainable development, and also in the context of resolving this crisis, we draw attention to the need to raise environmental awareness among economic operators, but also practically among all people. This, however, presupposes first of all a reorientation of society and civilisation in terms of values, based on a correct understanding of the phenomena of nature, culture, the economy and the environment. In this context, we draw attention to the philosophical reflection on the relationship between nature and economy, which Šmajš considers to be the dominant subsystem of culture.

1. Contemporary culture, predatory economy, and endangered nature and culture

Humans, by virtue of their biological nature, have been “forced” in the past to create culture as a systemic means of the will to survive. Culture gradually became a force capable of intervening in nature and creating structures in it that would not otherwise exist.

Contemporary culture has been referred to as – consumer or mass culture, consumer culture, world culture, planetary culture, borderless culture, etc., and several thinkers have been critical of contemporary culture (see for example, Arendt 2004; Juvin and Lipovetsky 2012; Lipovetsky 2008; Lipovetsky 2013; Kolářský and Suša 2008). One of the reasons is that culture has merged with economic sectors to such an extent that it has turned into a sector that generates economic benefits. As some have pointed out (see for example, Bauman 2008; Petrussek 2010),

contemporary culture is tied to the market society, or more generally, to the consumer society. In the process of globalization, it “has been transformed into a sector whose key function is to generate economic benefits” (Slušná 2015, 6).

The economy is considered not only as a subsystem of culture¹, but also as a significant determinant of it (for more details see, Šmajš 2006; Juvin and Lipovetsky 2012 and others), as evidenced by the fact that both the cultural and creative industries have become some of the most dynamically developing sectors in the world. As a result of industrialization and urbanization of modern society, and also democratization of culture, mass culture is developing, even at the cost of damaging human and natural resources. Economic actors have a significant part to play in this. It is the global economy in particular that has played a significant role in its spread, by encouraging consumption in the pursuit of profit. Expansion of economic activities is creating uncontrolled socio-cultural burdens that are already threatening the quality of life on Earth.

One of the consequences of mass culture is consumerism, which not only does not automatically lead to a better quality of life but is also problematic because it is associated with an increase in the use of natural resources, regardless of the ecological costs, and with many other problems that complicate sustainable development. As J. Šmajš (2010), for example, notes, business and, in general, the various activities in the economy are currently carried out not only with the help of nature but also at its expense. Economy is a part of culture, (civilization) and the main instrument of saturation of human needs and reconstruction of the Earth’s natural environment into artificial cultural environments. However, Šmajš adds that as economy, along with

¹ The economy is one of the subsystems of culture, the dominant subsystem of culture and an equally artificial subsystem of nature (for more details see Šmajš 2010; 2011).

the satisfaction of needs, creates an expanding and increasing artificial earthly order, the aggregate of the older natural order decreases.

The need for change of human action and the fatal vulnerability of nature is pointed out, among others, by H. Jonas who claims that the nature of human agency has changed and so "... 'we' on a global average can no longer afford an escalation of well-being" (Jonas 1997, 235). According to Jonas, the humanization of nature is at such a stage that it threatens culture, and thus human beings and society. He describes it as a hypocritical verbal turn for embellishing its total subordination to man in order to satisfy his needs (Jonas 1997).

The problem lies in the fact that the shape of contemporary culture is influenced by the development of an economy that Šmajš refers to as predatory. It favours those needs that are not urgent for man but are urgent for the economy. These needs have to grow in the predatory paradigm², which he refers to as "the hidden trick of today's predatory economy" (for more details see, Šmajš 2010; 2014a). The predatory economy relies on the "contagious" idea of economic growth and is thus incompatible with nature, which is the superior host system of culture. Moreover, it satisfies people's actual cultural needs while failing to satisfy what only nature can reproduce. The various activities in this economy are not carried out in synergy with nature but at its expense (reduction of the natural order of the Earth, reduction of the size of natural ecosystems, but also damage to man and nature by artificial technical metabolism), which does not promote sustainable development.

Threats to nature and threats to people are similarly linked, for example, by K. Lorenz. He points to the endangered nature but also to the endangered "civilized humanity", which, by destroying the living nature that

surrounds and feeds humans, endangers itself by ecological ruin. He suggests that, "It will probably only begin to realise its mistakes when it feels them economically" (Lorenz 2014, 31). At the same time, he adds that it may already be too late.

In a similar way to Lorenz, F. Capra acknowledged that by the turn of the century it was becoming clear that "our economic activities are damaging the biosphere and human life in ways that may soon be impossible to reverse" (Capra 2009, 144). They are unsustainable, and so is the economic theory and practice that currently promotes the pursuit of continued, undifferentiated economic growth. According to the scientists, unlimited expansion on a planet with limited resources can only lead to disaster.

The problem is that many economic actors attribute primarily utilitarian value to nature, which ultimately deepens, endangers not only the economy but the whole society. However, some economists are aware of the threat to nature. For example, M. Šikula has identified one of the serious contradictions in the contemporary world – the contradiction between the economy and nature, or the environment, which is related to the increase in the use of natural resources, without taking into account the real needs of people, ecological costs and consequences. In his view, this contradiction threatens to lead to an apocalyptic outcome, because the multiple increase in the intensity of the predatory extraction of natural resources, which ignores the ecological costs, is deeply at odds with rational management. At the same time, both overt and covert conflicts are increasing, as is the struggle for control of energy and water resources, habitable territory, etc. (Šikula 2009). Šikula seeks remedy in combining the rational thinking of actors in the economy with environmental thinking. However, he sees a problem in the time lag in the formation of environmental consciousness and conscience of humanity. The shift in the environmental thinking and action of generations is, in his view,

² In addition to the predatory economy, Šmajš points to the predatory spiritual basis of culture (for more details see Šmajš 2013; 2011 and others).

much slower compared to the deterioration of global conditions on Earth (Šikula 2003). This can be considered as one of the main reasons for the present state of nature and culture.

The threat to nature and thus the threat to culture is very openly pointed out by Šmajš, who explicitly referred to contemporary culture as “endangered”. He considers the destruction of the original natural assumptions of culture to be a serious threat to human perspective, while at the same time stating openly that culture is threatened by the very humans who have occupied and conquered the planet (Šmajš 2006; 2008).

Thus, it is time to acknowledge the state in which nature and the environment are today and to think seriously about how, on the one hand, production and consumption of raw materials and energy is increasing, and, on the other hand, what is the rate of acquiring new natural resources or finding alternative resources. Lastly, this is also highlighted by Earth Overshoot Day³, which occurs every year when all the resources that the Earth can renew in a year have been exhausted. For the rest of the year, humanity lives in “ecological debt”, with the date being pushed back each year, indicating humanity’s ever-increasing demands on the Earth’s finite resources. In this context, we consider it an asset that in recent years the world has seen an increased interest in environmental issues. For example, the European Parliament has also emphasised the principle of “doing more with less” as an important challenge for producers and consumers in the light of the global scarcity of natural resources (for more details, Amanatidis 2022).

The demand for humanity to be coherent with the natural being is found in H. Jonas (Jonas 1997), who rejected anthropocentrism as dehumanizing man himself and called

for the protection of life, both present and future. Jonas emphasized that we have not only a duty to humanity, but a duty to human beings to lead a good life. Man, according to Jonas should assume the role of a kind of steward who will take care of nature. Unfortunately, the contemporary man is more concerned with the stewardship of his property than of nature. Profit, material values and well-being are for him superior to the value of nature, but also to other values. Increasingly he is becoming alienated from his natural environment, and we are in a state of global civilizational crisis, which is considered to be a previously unknown type of conflict between culture and nature. According to Šmajš (2013) the whole modern history is also a severe battle between culture and nature, which paradoxically arises from the prosperity, strength and success of the offensive adaptive strategy of culture, not from its weakness. The reason for the emergence is the scale of the counter-natural abiotic culture, which reaches maximums and encounters not only the physical limits of the globe, but also the limit of drawing on both the main sources of material cultural wealth: natural forces within humans and external natural forces. In this context, S. Komárek (2008) does not consider a conflict but a dichotomy – nature versus culture, which arose as a result of a gross misunderstanding of the unity of the world and the place of man in it. Given that the economy is a subsystem of culture we can similarly consider a dichotomy – nature versus economy. It is this subsystem that pits culture against nature.

While the above and some other thinkers point to a dichotomy or conflict between culture and nature, according to E. Višňovský (2003), the antagonism of culture to nature is only relative, not absolute. It consists in the artificial combination of natural elements (in the conventional character of the norms prevailing in it). However, according to him, this artificiality of culture towards nature should

3 The date when the world and individual countries start living on ecological debt is published annually by the Global Footprint Network (2022).

not be demonized but neither should it be downplayed or ignored. Perhaps the greatest threat lies in man himself. In the fact that he would rather like to live in the artificial world of civilization than in a living, albeit cultivated, nature. We are inclined to this view, adding that the problem of contemporary man is the state of his environmental awareness⁴, his understanding of nature and other values.

Environmental awareness encompasses knowledge of the current state of the environment, environmental problems, ecological and environmental trends, and also of traditions that relate to environmental issues. In our view, at present, people are not sufficiently motivated to protect nature and the environment. In particular, economic actors, in an effort to continuously increase profits, unwisely seriously interfere with nature and manage its resources, as a result of which “wounded nature” threatens both culture and human beings (Šmajš 2008). However, this does not only concern producers of goods and services, who are characterised by over-exploitation of resources, including natural resources, and even with their waste and over-exploitation, but also consumers and customers who, in the struggle for well-being, escalate their consumption. In this context, U. Beck noted: “Dependence on consumerism and on the market more or less means once again a new form of dependence on ‘nature’, and this immanent dependence on ‘nature’ then becomes, precisely in it and also because of it, a law of life in industrial civilization” (Beck 2011, 11).

Ultimately, the global ecological crisis is a crisis of human coexistence with nature.

4 The concept of environmental awareness first appeared at the United Nations Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment (United Nations 1972). The primary means of raising environmental awareness is education. It concerns the state of the environment, the causes and consequences of this state, but also environmental care as a conscious human activity (see: Bechtel and Churchman 2002; Schmuck and Schultz 2002).

R. Kolářský and O. Suša (2008) describe it as a social problem, the essence of which is a critical situation in the relationship of society to nature as an environment, to the physical-biological prerequisites of social life, i.e., a situation of increasing and cumulative effects disrupting these natural-ontological prerequisites. Its roots are to be found in modern industrial society and we agree with S. Kumar (1992) that they lie in our way of thinking, in our values and in the fact that people consider themselves superior to nature. At its core is the conflict of culture with the Earth. As expressed by Lorenz, “Humans have fallen prey to the widespread but mistaken notion that nature is inexhaustible” (Lorenz 2014, 25). Similarly, Šmajš believes that the escalation of the global ecological crisis could be a reason for the relations of all cultural activities (both individual and collective) to the living and non-living environment of the Earth to be properly understood, subjected and organizationally reconstructed, and eventually newly regulated. In doing so, it would not be a rebuilding and regulation in terms of economic expediency, but in terms of broader and more distant human, cultural and biospheric expediency.⁵

The above-mentioned opinions also confirm that the problem is the state of environmental awareness and thinking of contemporary man, which we consider to be the essential cause of the ecological crisis (see also for example, Mravcová 2020). Development of environmental awareness would make it possible to strengthen people’s responsibility for their actions, to understand the relationship between man and nature, the seriousness of environmental problems, risks and threats, which are important steps for their elimination. And equally, it is important to gain legal awareness of the environment, attitudes towards the environment, and the fact that

5 J. Šmajš even formulated – Eleven conditions of biophilic turnover of culture (see Šmajš 2014b).

it is largely devastated by humans (Mravcová 2019, 33-35).

Environmental awareness must be based on a clear explication of nature and culture, but also the value of the environment, which should provide motivation for people to engage with environmental issues and approach them as existential problems. In order to resolve the conflict between nature and culture and to develop culture in synergy with nature, it is first of all necessary to have a correct understanding of the minimum phenomena – nature, culture and environment and to be aware of their importance for the sustainable development of human society.

Together with Kumar, Šmajš and some others, we believe that an important step towards mitigating the conflict between nature and culture, or nature and economy, and their synergy, is the need to raise people's environmental awareness, which should be based on the value reorientation of society and civilization. This is an important prerequisite for mitigating the conflict between the economy and nature and strengthening their coexistence for sustainable development.

2. Value reorientation of contemporary man in order to mitigate the conflict between economy and nature and to promote sustainability

By value orientation we mean a relatively stable, socially conditioned set of attitudes of subjects towards persons, situations or other material or immaterial objects of human thinking, feeling and behaviour, while these attitudes are based on a certain recognised value hierarchy (Encyklopaedia Beliana 2010). This set of attitudes is contained in people's consciousness.

The value reorientation in each period should be based on the perception of the changed social reality and also on the change in the perception of values and the change in their understanding. It is socially conditioned and requires a reassessment of accepted values and,

at the same time, an understanding and acceptance of new values (see for example; Miller, 2000; Lawrence, 1993 etc.). In this context, also H. Skolimowski, for example, calls for a rethinking of the values that link sensual action to awareness, in the context of a "misreading" of nature that has become the cause of many of the world's problems. In this context, he calls for "recycling our minds" (Skolimowski 1999, 180).

We are inclined to the view that: "It is above all our value consciousness that deserves attention, critique and renewal. At a time of unprecedented prosperity – though not to the same extent for all – and unexpected technological possibilities, it is as if we have run out of ideas and ideals. To live for material gain or for technological 'miracles' is to confuse ends with means, values with pleasures" (Višňovský 2020, 9). Finally, as mentioned above, the value awareness as a problem has been recognized long ago by the economist Šikula, who would likewise welcome a more significant shift in environmental thinking and action across generations. He was critical of the fact that "While our ancestors understood the Earth as their mother provider, today, under the influence of a short-sighted predatory economy elevating profit to the status of supreme divine, man treats it as a dead object of his selfish interests, which can be plundered at will" (Šikula 2003, 258). We can agree that human and cultural behaviour towards nature is becoming increasingly insensitive and irresponsible. It treats it as a means, an instrument to serve man. In this regard, Šmajš states, "Terrestrial nature as a global production enterprise, which in a desolate and cold universe creates the conditions and all the semi-products for human business, has so far been given neither the proper economic value nor the analogous moral and legal subjectivity that every enterprise has in a counter-natural culture" (Šmajš 2014a).

In terms of economic utilitarian criteria, nature is considered as a means or a commodity that can be expressed in terms

of price. According to Šmajš, nature does not yet have a value per se in economic theory, and in the labour theory of value only human labour, i.e., purposeful natural forces within man, adds value to natural structures. He disagrees that contemporary people view nature “as the property of man, only as a backdrop to socio-political events, a domain of power interests of big and small politics, a storage of food and resources...” (Šmajš 2006, 67). Similarly, Komárek (2008) has described as barbaric that people view non-human nature as a “substrate without a price”, as modern economic theories do (a flower has no value in a meadow, only in a flower shop, and that is equal to the cost of picking and bringing it by a human).

We agree with these thinkers, and likewise consider that neither nature nor natural resources can be regarded as commodities. However, the problem is that nature conservation is approached with reference to the needs and interests of man, which is a manifestation of anthropocentrism. As some contemporary philosophers (Stáhel 2021; Višňovský 2020) state, we are living in a new geological and climatic epoch, which is defined as the Anthropocene⁶ from the point of view of natural sciences. We have entered it as a result of human activities, but above all because of the massive exploitation of fossil fuels in the last two centuries. Man has placed himself at the centre of culture and proclaimed his life to be of supreme value, with the result that the culture of modern man is described as anthropocentric and humanistic. Humans have succeeded in building a planetary civilization that geologists have named the “age of man – the Anthropocene” (Višňovský 2020, 8).

In this regard, Lorenz critically observes that, “I regard the idea that man is from the beginning the set goal of all development as a paradigm of that blinding pride which

precedes the fall” (Lorenz 1997, 186). Similarly critical of contemporary man, for example, was Y.N. Harari, who referred to humanism as a world religion, while at the same time warning that attempts to fulfil the humanist dream may cause its disintegration (For more details: Harari 2019).

The problem appears to be, for example, that the development of culture relies on technology, by means of which man is able to “manipulate the natural world so as to transform it into a source of his own well-being, wealth and prosperity” (Višňovský 2020, 77). In fact, contemporary man does not understand scarce natural resources as values in themselves. They represent for him the so-called instrumental values, derived values by means of which the target values are fulfilled. Although instrumental values make it possible to achieve desired goals and satisfy human needs, the problem is that both nature and man are now subordinated to the production of goods and services for profit. Reducing the value of nature to financial gain results in irresponsible waste of natural resources and environmental damage. Such an approach to nature and, in general, to values that are essential to human life and difficult to renew, is not sustainable. As E. Smolková (2004) points out, nature and natural resources must be a primary value for people even when they have to choose between economic and other human interests.

Nature is considered as a necessary condition of human existence (see for example, Šmajš 2006), as an existential value, and thus a change of vision from humility before nature to humility before nature is necessary, which will enable the existence and development of culture, including the economy. Nature is a value as a whole and also natural entities and objects, but also processes (e.g., biodiversity, stability, etc.). They are values in themselves, independent of human consciousness, and also of the economic evaluation of natural

⁶ The term Anthropocene is composed of the Greek words *anthropos* (man) and *kainos* (new). Thus, in simple terms, it is the “age of man”, or more precisely, the “man-made age”.

entities. Man should have a moral interest in their preservation.

Together with nature, it is necessary to re-specify the phenomenon of culture, the economy as its subsystem and the environment. Culture is considered as “what man, by his planned and creative intervention, develops out of himself; it is the thing in which man realizes himself as a historical being in the struggle for ever higher self-development” (Brugger 1994, 351). However, the improvement of human beings, which is supposed to be the goal of culture, is associated with a lack of appreciation of nature, ecosystems and the whole environment, and thus with the emergence of environmental problems, risks and threats. This calls for a rethinking of human attitudes towards these values.

On the one hand, culture expresses the specificity of the human species, what distinguishes us from other biological species, but on the other hand, it expresses the diverse forms of social existence, the different forms of being human (Sedová 2017). It is a kind of natural-adaptive mechanism that humans have created in order to survive. Man was in fact considered as an “unwilling” or “deficient being” who adapted to his environment by means of culture and became a cultural being.⁷ It enabled him to transcend a purely natural existence. Nature is considered not only as the highest value and but also as the natural mother of all people and cultures. After all, man is also a part of it, and as Višňovský (2020) stated, man can never get rid of his naturalness; he can never escape it as he can never escape from nature. All attempts to escape from nature, to overcome it or to master it, are ultimately harmful to him.

The aim of culture is supposed to be the improvement of man, but we have

⁷ For example, J.G. Herder in his work *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Humanity) developed the hypothesis that the physical inadequacy of man is supplemented in the struggle for existence by a specific adaptive tool – culture (Herder 2020).

doubts whether contemporary culture is really moving towards that goal. Šmajš, like M. Timko (2006) for example, has described culture as a counter-natural human adaptive strategy that defines itself in every age in a hostile way towards nature. And similarly, the contemporary economy⁸, which constitutes the dominant subsystem of culture, has been labelled by Šmajš as incompatible with the environment, since although it is considered as “a mean of cultural valorisation of nature” (Šmajš 2010, 134), it develops at the expense of the nature on which humans depend, at the cost of limiting the natural order and damaging ecosystems. One of the hopes for meeting the needs of current and future populations, while responsibly managing natural resources and maintaining a healthy environment, is the sustainable economy model. Based on the concept of sustainable development or sustainable living, it is an emerging new global development paradigm⁹.

However, Višňovský (2003) points out that if culture was incompatible with nature, if it was completely alien to it, or if it was by its very nature absolutely antinatural, it could hardly have been created and could hardly have been successfully used by man as a systemic mean of its adaptation and survival.

⁸ Here, Šmajš was referring to the traditional model of economics – the linear model, or linear economy, which relies on a one-way linear process: ‘resources – products – waste’, aimed at maximising social wealth and profit, while over-consuming natural resources, producing uncontrollable amounts of waste with a negative impact on natural resources and the environment.

⁹ Sustainable development is considered to be a global development paradigm, the basic development paradigm of the 21st century, as well as a project for reconciling economic and social development with the requirement to protect the environment, while the economic system must be based on alternative value orientations that support the move towards sustainable development (for more details see e.g. Blažej 2005; Klinec 2005).

Contemporary man should reflect on the fact that extinction of culture does not mean extinction of nature, while extinction of nature means extinction of culture (Leakey 1996). Nature is an important value for the sustenance and development of culture, and thus of the economy as a subsystem of it. Similarly, Šmajš (2014a) stresses that culture must reflect its ontological link to nature, because it cannot be developed in the long term without considering this link. Nature “created” culture, not the other way around; culture cannot create nature, it can only modify it. Like Šmajš, H. Rolston (1988) pointed out that the values inherent in nature are existential, and the existence of nature as a whole makes possible the existence of a “human” layer, which at the same time places on man the responsibility not only for himself, but for the system. Thus, despite the fact that nature has been largely transformed by human activity with respect to human needs, it remains an irreplaceable system, or biotic existential habitat.

Along with nature and culture, there is a need to be aware of the value of the environment. It encompasses everything that creates the natural conditions for the existence of organisms, including humans, and is a prerequisite for their further development. In any age, it is important for human and cultural development to ensure a healthy environment, which relies on the interaction of 3 factors or components – abiotic, biotic and social, which is not an easy task in today’s world. Finally, the environmental crisis can be seen as a crisis of humanity. Such environmental challenges as environmental degradation, pollution and climate change, depletion of finite resources, etc. can be seen as manifestations of a moral crisis or a crisis of values in contemporary society.

Thus, all those involved in the economy are expected to compare all cultural and especially economic values with the unconditional values of nature, and, relying on this basis, to treat them with dignity and respect (Rolston 1988). Based on

this, they will be aware that, just as nature is of value to them, it is also of value to future generations, enabling their development and thus the development of the whole culture.

We consider respect for life to be the foundation on which the relationship between nature and culture, and therefore the economy, should be based. A. Schweitzer (1993) stressed the need to inspire in contemporary man a respect for life, which he described as the cornerstone for all morality. He considered life to be of supreme value, noting that the respect for life which man shows for his own existence is one aspect of his relationship with nature.¹⁰ This theorist proceeds from a reflection on the will to life, not only his own will, but also that of all other wills. For at every moment, it is possible to be aware of an elementary fact, namely that “I am life that wants to live in the middle of life that wants to live” (Schweitzer 1993, 26). Thanks to the will to live, we come to be concerned with the destiny of human beings, but also with all creatures in our environment, and to be interested in their welfare.

Like Schweitzer (1986), along with respect for life, we consider respect for nature to be a universal moment in every culture. Everyone should show it to all creatures on the planet. We regard it as an essential

¹⁰ Respect for life is also emphasised by other representatives. For example, Skolimowski sees it as the starting point for responsibility for life and for the Earth, and at the same time as a primary value for sustainable development. Respect for all people and for all creation is the foundation of our actions in relation to the natural world and in relation to our human “contemporaries” (Skolimowski 1996) or A. Leopold, who openly and vehemently stresses the need for respect for the whole community of life and for the conditions of its sustainability. In his “Earth Ethics” he openly states that responsibility towards the Earth is the most important duty of humans in the new millennium (Leopold 1999). J. Kaliský and L. Kaliská require respect for the lives of others. It begins with wonder at life because it is a source of meaning and value (for more details see Kaliský and Kaliská 2020). The problem of naturalness, in relation to respect for life, is addressed by B. Baďurová (for more details see, e.g., Baďurová 2022).

prerequisite for mitigating the conflict between culture and nature, and thus between the economy and nature. Schweitzer recognizes egalitarianism in relation to nature and considers nature to be a moral value that humans equally “own” and unites them. And so, in economics they should also treat nature as a shared value to be mutually cared for. In order to protect this value, they should, for example, use new technologies, be economical with material resources, recycle, reduce energy or strive to extend the life of products.

It is encouraging that some entities in today’s economy are already familiar with such approaches. This is evidenced by new alternative economic models and initiatives¹¹ that are able to ensure economic and social well-being on the basis of efficient use of resources and minimal environmental impact. They are emerging in the background of growing environmental problems, as some economic actors have come to realise the true value of nature and to see the economy as an open subsystem that is part of higher systems (society, nature, the universe). And also, that its functioning should be based on the respect to other components of higher systems. Nevertheless, most actors continue to focus on the rational pursuit of economic goals and the greatest possible profit, so today we still cannot describe the current economy as sustainable.¹²

11 For example, the circular economy model (also called circular or green economy), which relies on the use of available resources in environmentally and economically sustainable ways, as well as the green economy, the sharing economy, etc. (for more details see for example, Klinec 2010).

12 A sustainable economy does not have a precise definition yet, but is usually defined in terms of the resources it uses. It is based on the sustainable use of natural resources and takes into account the principle that the degree of use of renewable components should be in balance with their production. It aims to meet needs and well-being, but with the least possible use of resources and minimal harmful impacts on the environment (see for example, Huba 2004; Priatelja Zeme CEPA n.d.).

We assume that if not only the subjects in the economy but eventually all of us realise that culture is dependent on nature, we will be interested in developing not only sustainable economy but the whole culture without seriously endangering nature. As Višňovský says: “The purpose of civilization was supposed to be the development of human potential. Why, then, do we not seek harmony between nature and culture? Why don’t we create our world as a garden?” (Višňovský 2003, 239).¹³

Seeking harmony between nature and culture, that Višňovský calls for, we consider to be rather difficult a goal to achieve. A more realistic goal seems to be striving to achieve compatibility between the economy and nature by raising environmental awareness among people, which will be based on a correct understanding of such values as nature, culture, environment and respect for nature by as many people as possible. We see this as an important prerequisite for reducing the conflict between the economy and nature and for strengthening their coexistence for sustainable development. And at the same time as a prerequisite for sustainable economic and social development.

Conclusions

The conflict between the current economy and nature undoubtedly requires a great deal of attention today and, in particular, it compels us to search for effective solutions. Mitigating the conflict between the economy and nature, or between all culture and nature, and seeking to make them compatible is a task practically for all people, including those in the economy and those who have not yet been born.

13 Višňovský considers the garden to be a “cultural landscape” that has an essential and holistic human dimension. It is a living space or environment where – as though in a Hegelian way – the distinction between the natural and the cultural is both maintained and abolished (Višňovský 2003).

Although we have not discussed in detail specific proposals for resolving or mitigating this conflict, we have highlighted the reasons for its emergence and, in particular, its intensification, and we have pointed to the need to rethink the methods, practices and goals that underpin the development of the contemporary economy. At the same time, we have pointed out that this depends to a large extent on the environmental awareness of those involved in an economy that can now be described as “predatory”. It is based on the idea of economic growth that is not achieved in harmony with nature.

Many actors in the economy, and ultimately in contemporary culture, which describes itself as anthropocentric and humanistic, are approaching nature mainly with reference to the needs and interests of humans, which continually deepens the conflict between the economy and nature. However, economic development should rely on values that promote the sustainability of the economy and society as a whole. We therefore consider that an important prerequisite for mitigating this conflict and for sustainable development is the reorientation of society and civilisation in terms of values and the strengthening of environmental consciousness among people and, in particular, among those involved in the economy.

At the same time, however, we have recognised that, given the shape of the contemporary culture and the state of society, in which the current economy is also trying to meet some of the needs of people that it often itself generates, it is not easy to carry out a reorientation of values. In particular, the problem is that people approach nature as a means, an instrument to serve man, without regard to the ecological costs and consequences.

However, we consider value reorientation to be an important basis for the formation of environmental consciousness and consequently for changing the behaviour of entities operating in the economic sphere towards nature. The basis of environmental

consciousness should be a correct understanding of the phenomena – nature, culture and economy, environment. On this basis, people will be able to understand the ontological link between culture and nature, and thus also that human and environmental values are not in principle in conflict, which at the same time means that it is realistic to ensure the synergy and compatibility of culture and economy as a subsystem of culture with nature. Strengthening environmental awareness can be seen as an important step not only towards resolving this conflict but also towards developing a sustainable economy and society.

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