

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw  
Institute of Philosophy  
Center for Ecology and Ecophilosophy

# STUDIA ECOLOGIAE ET BIOETHICAE



22/3 (2024)

## In Defence of Environmental Anthropocentrism

### W obronie antropocentryzmu środowiskowego

Zlatica Plašienková<sup>1</sup>, Eva Smolková<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Philosophy, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia

ORCID ZP <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3201-3722>; ES <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1450-8692> • [zlatica.plasienkova@uniba.sk](mailto:zlatica.plasienkova@uniba.sk);  
[filosmol@savba.sk](mailto:filosmol@savba.sk)

Received: 27 Mar, 2024; Revised: 15 May, 2024; Accepted: 16 May, 2024

**Abstract:** The critique of anthropocentrism has accompanied environmental thinking since its inception. However, we lack a deeper analysis of anthropocentrism and its forms. The authors of this study concentrate on analysing selected forms of anthropocentrism that were prominent in different periods of the history of European culture. They offer a basic typology of anthropocentrism and characterize *philosophical*, *religious*, *philosophical-theological* and *philosophical-scientific anthropocentrism*. They also include a fifth form of anthropocentrism, which they call *environmental anthropocentrism*. The authors consider changes that are important from a philosophical, ethical and axiological perspective and analyse the potential of anthropocentrism in comparison with some of *environmental anthropocentrism* its alternative forms, such as *biocentrism* and *cosmocentrism*. They also attempt to assess the significance of environmental anthropocentrism and the potential for its implementation in human-environmental relations. The environmental anthropocentrism proposed here is a potential solution with applicability to the search for a moderate, humble, non-arrogant, respectful and responsible human approach to relations with nature.

**Keywords:** anthropocentrism, biocentrism, cosmocentrism, theocentrism, typology of anthropocentrism

**Streszczenie:** Od samego początku swego rozwoju, myśl ekologiczna podważała założenia antropocentryzmu. Obecnie brakuje nam jednak pogłębionej analizy antropocentryzmu i jego poszczególnych przejawów. Autorzy niniejszego artykułu dokonują analizy wybranych form antropocentryzmu dominujących w różnych okresach historii kultury europejskiej. Artykuł przedstawia podstawową typologię antropocentryzmu, definiując antropocentryzm *filozoficzny*, *religijny*, *filozoficzno-teologiczny* i *filozoficzno-naukowy*. Autorzy proponują również piątą formę antropocentryzmu, którą nazywają *antropocentryzmem środowiskowym*. Rozważają oni zmiany istotne z punktu widzenia filozoficznego, etycznego i aksjologicznego, jak również analizują potencjał antropocentryzmu w porównaniu z antropocentryzmem środowiskowym i jego alternatywnymi formami, takimi jak *biocentryzm* i *kosmocentryzm*. Podejmują oni także próbę oceny znaczenia antropocentryzmu środowiskowego i możliwości jego realizacji w relacjach człowiek-środowisko. Zaproponowany tu antropocentryzm środowiskowy może potencjalnie stanowić odpowiedź na potrzebę wypracowania umiarkowanego, pozbawionego arogancji, pełnego pokory i szacunku, a także odpowiedzialnego podejścia człowieka do relacji z przyrodą.

**Słowa kluczowe:** antropocentryzm, biocentryzm, kosmocentryzm, teocentryzm, typologia antropocentryzmu

## Introduction

Until recently, research into environmental, or ecological issues was conducted within the science disciplines. Then, in the second half of the 20th century, with the need to tackle environmental devastation, such research increasingly fell into the realms of social science and the humanities. When we began investigating environmental issues in Slovakia in the 1990s<sup>1</sup>, the prevailing belief among the philosophical community was that environmental or ecological problems represented both a new challenge and, above all, an *opportunity* to change the relationship between humans and the environment, and nature more broadly. At the turn of the millennium, there was still optimism that this change would be driven by a growing awareness of the problem and an intensive search for solutions. Hence once could talk of seizing the opportunity to change and reorientate the relationship between civilisation and nature (or the planet)<sup>2</sup>. The opportunity lay in a new approach based on the assumption that the system of values would change, and the environment would be valued more. That has not happened, and nor has the proposed value reorientation been achieved, as can be seen in everyday reality and acceleration in the rate of climate change. In other words, if at the end of the 20th century there was still an opportunity to change humanity's relationship with nature, these days there is only the *necessity* of change.

In this paper, we will focus on the necessary changes that are of philosophical, ethical and axiological importance. These will be considered as part of a broader framework, which we have labelled an environmental framework.

The term “environmental” is used in several meanings, and there is no consensus on a single definition. Here it is understood as referring to the relationship between humanity and society on the one hand and the environment, i.e. the external environment, on the other. We start by defining environmental science as a complex academic discipline concerned with the formation and protection of the environment, that is, one that takes into account the needs of the environment. We will focus on the environment for life in general, but our primary concern will be the environment for human life.

As environmental science relies on knowledge from the area of ecology, which is concerned with the relationships among organisms and between organisms and the environment, our use of the term environmental partially overlaps with the term ecological. However, it is worth noting that neither environmental science nor ecology deal specifically with the required change in people's views on nature, its value status, or the moral norms relating to the environment. These issues are dealt with in the humanities. In recent decades the philosophical, ethical and axiological dimensions of environmental studies have become key to tackling the growing environmental problems. This creates the need to recognize the ontological and axiological status of nature as an existential condition of humanity and for ethical principles on the moral behaviour of humans vis-à-vis the environment. However, such a shift in opinion requires us to think about our understanding of contemporary anthropocentrism. And that cannot be done without also thinking about its forms: those that have existed in European thought and culture since antiquity. It is also necessary to note the basic features of the various forms of anthropocentrism, whilst drawing attention to the paradoxes of its application in historical contexts. In addition, it is methodologically useful to compare anthropocentrism with some of the alternative forms

---

<sup>1</sup> The first major ecophilosophical conferences in Slovakia were held at the Institute of Philosophy at the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. There were three international events, with published proceedings edited by Eva Smolková and Zuzana Palovičová (1992; 1993; 1994).

<sup>2</sup> In 2000, one of the first books on this issue was published in Slovakia (Smolková 2000).

(biocentrism and cosmocentrism) that have emerged within the environmental thought. From an ethical and axiological point of view, it is important to assess whether these alternative approaches are capable of initiating, and consequently enforcing, a change in humanity's relationship with nature.

The aim of the paper is to outline a basic typology of anthropocentrism – within its historical context and distinguishing the various forms of anthropocentrism and alternatives – and to indicate the potential for a new form of anthropocentrism in the context of environmental thinking. We call this type of anthropocentrism, *environmental anthropocentrism*. We also ask whether environmental anthropocentrism could offer an effective and efficient approach for solving environmental problems.

### **1. To Condemn or Defend Anthropocentrism?**

Over time, our understanding and experiences of the relationship between humans and nature, and the value of nature (or the environment), have changed and are still changing today. Most of them, however, can be described as some form of anthropocentrism. It should be noted that anthropocentrism is not a uniform view, nor does it have a clear definition. Etymologically speaking, the term is clear: human beings occupy a central position and everything else either relates “from” or “to” them. Note, however, that “being at the centre” does not necessarily mean occupying a hierarchically superior or exceptional position vis-à-vis the environment (the periphery), i.e. a position that would emphasize the uniqueness or superiority of humanity's “centripetal” position in nature (or on our planet or in the cosmos). And yet, the term anthropocentrism has come to be used precisely in the sense of humanity's dominance, privileging its place in nature and human reason, needs and desires as the overarching arbiters of human action towards the environment. This human exceptionalism or uniqueness stems from the notion that we are beings

created in the image of God or the high-point of evolution. Humanity's dominant position has also allowed conferring on humans the right to change, or more precisely, adapt the surrounding environment to their needs and desires. Hence the value status of nature ceased to reflect itself, independently of humans, and came to be seen only in terms of its utility.

However, this situation does not necessarily mean that anthropocentrism – methodologically speaking – is a view that presupposes human contempt or superiority over nature and other living creatures on Earth. It simply means that humans are creatures that ascribe value to entities and recognize and respect the value of entities (independently of human needs and desires) based on their expanding knowledge of the environment. Nonetheless, many scholars think that anthropocentrism is the main cause of the ecological crisis and indeed of all the environmental problems facing humanity today. Regardless of the accuracy of the above statement, it is certainly true that “The modern ecological crisis presents one of the biggest challenges ever faced by humanity. This crisis is currently more and more commonly referred to as global and total. Global – because its effects reach every corner of our planet”, and total because “its effects permeate deep into the very structure of nature” (Sadowski 2020, 7).

In this context, we may recall that in the second half of the 20th century environmental thinking emerged as part of the hunt for the causes of the growing environmental problems. Many authors agree that anthropocentrism has fundamentally influenced the way humans relate to the world. The anthropocentric approach to the world led to the thinking that humans are distinct from the world of nature, extraordinary, superior or even chosen beings. In European history, one can see how anthropocentric positions gradually strengthened, becoming especially marked in the industrial era. Methodologically, these anthropocentric positions relied on mechanistic concepts

and ideas, as can be seen in the language even today<sup>3</sup>.

Anthropocentric positions were also reinforced by utilitarianism, an ethical theory that considers usefulness<sup>4</sup> to be the criterion of the morality of an action, where usefulness is of course determined in relation to humanity. Everything on Earth and under the earth is judged according to its usefulness to humans, and this applies to both living and non-living nature. The right to exploit natural resources is based on the right of ownership, enshrined in the constitutions or state documents of most states on Earth. One could say that ownership applies to everything except humans. Animals, forests, fields, buildings, national parks, the airspace above our heads – virtually everything on Earth and under the earth<sup>5</sup> can be owned. Natural persons, legal persons, states, regions, municipalities and cities can all make territorial claims for a variety of reasons.

That makes it hard to say whether, as the question in the heading reads, one should condemn or defend anthropocentrism. Especially since anthropocentrism, the view that ascribes a central position

3 Turning to the linguistic side, manifest in linguistic structures and concepts, we can see that nature is described as a mechanical system, a thing, an entity. For example, the term 'planetary mechanisms' is found in many languages – Planetary Mechanisms, Planetenmechanismen – there is no linguistic alternative, despite the fact that scientists have long considered mechanistic ideas to be an inappropriate and misleading way of describing nature and natural processes. One cannot deny the existence of anthropocentric qualities in our descriptions of the world around us, to the extent that even when we are aware of the inappropriateness of such concepts and terms, we are unable to replace them with more apt ones.

4 These days utilitarianism draws on a wide range of ethical theories relating to environmental problems: e.g. additive utilitarianism assumes the achievement of good for the greatest number of people, for humanity as a whole, therefore the protection of nature is considered only in terms of the degree of utility for humanity.

5 Some clever developers have already divided up the Moon on the basis of property rights.

to humans in the world, or even the universe, and considers humans to be the supreme value and measure of all things, has taken different forms in different historical periods. The present form need not be identical in meaning to past versions and is unlikely to correspond entirely to future forms. Our study will first sketch a basic typology of anthropocentrism that draws on the ways in which anthropocentrism has been understood in different periods in the history of European culture.

## 2. A Basic Typology of Anthropocentrism in the History of European Thought

The first type of anthropocentrism is thought to be *philosophical anthropocentrism* (developed mainly in antiquity, and partly during the Enlightenment and was later made more explicit or was implicitly present during the rapid development of science and technology up to the present day). The second type is *religious* (mainly *Christian biblical* or *theological*) *anthropocentrism* (developed mainly in the medieval period). The third type of anthropocentrism combines philosophical and theological aspects and can be called *philosophical-theological anthropocentrism* (this version is characteristic of the Renaissance and early modern period but can still be found today). The fourth type of anthropocentrism is a combination of philosophical and scientific aspects and can be called *philosophical-scientific anthropocentrism* (it is mainly a phenomenon of the late modern period but exists today as well). These four basic types of anthropocentrism have positive and negative aspects identifiably related to humanity's approach to the environment (or animals, nature, the universe). There is also a new type of anthropocentrism that retains and expands on the positive features of the previous ones and is applicable to the current era. We call this new type of anthropocentrism, *environmental anthropocentrism*.

The origins of *philosophical anthropocentrism* in the European tradition can be traced back to the Sophists, especially

Protagoras (c. 480-410 BC), who was the most important philosopher among the Sophists. Protagoras is also associated with the anthropological turn in the history of ancient philosophy, whereby man became the centre of philosophical enquiry, “the measure of all things”; put simply, man was the measure of both being and non-being: of that which exists and that which does not. This anthropological turn is also linked to the emphasis on the subjective and relative nature of human cognition and the limitations of our cognitive faculties. It revealed the illusory nature of perception, and the fact that humans are individuals for whom there is no universal and valid truth.

We can therefore conclude that while Protagoras’s philosophy is undeniably the source of the anthropocentric character of philosophical investigation, i.e. thinking about man, his position in the world, and his values, it also points to the limits of human cognition. Moreover, it presents us with an opportunity to develop these basic ideas and propose new forms of anthropocentrism.

In the medieval period, *religious anthropocentrism* was prominent. It is primarily a Christian biblical (or theological) interpretation of humanity, both in relation to the non-human world and to God. Religious anthropocentrism is therefore linked to *theocentrism*. On the one hand, it seems to contain features of a Protagorean approach in which humanity occupies a central and hierarchically superior position in the world, and yet is subordinated to God (possessing free will, humans can go against God, disregarding his commands). Hence humans are beings created in the image of God, the pinnacle of creation and superior to all other living things on earth, but humans are also sinful creatures who break the moral principles handed down by God. Sins are of course social in nature. Ethics is therefore the ethics of the relationships between people and God. Little attention was paid to the human relationship with nature (or animals) in the medieval period. It

was only in the 20th century that this important dimension of biblical legacy came to be systematically explored.<sup>6</sup>

Several contemporary writers have pointed out that the gradual creation of the world as described in the Bible indicates a link between humanity and nature. As R. Sadowski states: “The Bible leaves no doubt that man is not God’s sole concern. The Creator cares for the whole of creation, including non-human nature” (Sadowski 2020, 11). And since man was the very last to be created, he did not come into existence until the natural world had been created in its entirety. Consequently, in biblical anthropocentrism, human beings are tied to the natural environment, which has to be looked after. As the creator and owner of the world is God, the world is entrusted to humanity to care for, but it is not unconditionally available. Man, human civilisation, bears responsibility for the world and this has to be recognized and respected. We therefore agree with R. Sadowski that humanity’s exceptional right to make use of nature, which stems from biblical anthropocentrism, is also inextricably bound up with the exceptional capacity of humanity, endowed with freedom and reason, to fulfil God’s purpose. In other words, “in God’s intention, the right to use nature is given only to man who is characterized by specific moral predispositions, namely, holiness, justice and righteousness of the heart. Man shaped in these ways will not abuse his power over other beings and will fulfil his obligation to care for creation” (Sadowski 2020, 13). These biblical messages have also been explored in the Christian theological tradition, in particular the understanding that humans are not only rational beings but also believers. Human existence is not therefore simply reduced to the material dimension and the satisfaction of material needs; there is recognition of the need

<sup>6</sup> The impetus for the new investigations came primarily from a provocative study by Lynn White, Jr. (White 1967).

for a spiritual dimension and for spiritual growth. That is not of course possible without humility and reverence for something that transcends man (and, given our interest in the environment, that can be nature as well as God)<sup>7</sup>.

The link between Christian biblical anthropocentrism and theocentrism therefore plays an important role in understanding humanity's relationship to nature, which is supposedly its home, as Pope Francis pointed out in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* (Francis 2015). Unfortunately, in the Middle Ages, the prevailing emphasis in the theological interpretation was on the superiority of humanity in the hierarchy of creation. This approach gradually gained strength and marked the beginning of the subsequent devaluation of the environment in which people lived. Axiologically, the idea of attributing value to animals or even nature was inconceivable. Values were associated with human existence. Other creatures had no role to play; although we should note that humans themselves did not necessarily consider themselves to be superior. There is a gap of sorts between the theoretical interpretation of anthropocentrism and practical life. Human beings may well have recognized the determining role played by the natural environment, especially in farming, their most common source of livelihood. Farmers (but also pastoralists) lived in partnership with nature (Kohák 2000, 63), taking, but also giving back by taking care of nature.

Another form of anthropocentrism is *philosophical-theological anthropocentrism*, which emerged during the Renaissance and drew on antiquity and, in a modified form on the medieval period, and, later on, early modernity. During the Renaissance, the emphasis was on the idea of humanism

and the associated understanding of humanity's role as the main creator of human history and the world. Man occupies a special God-given central position in the world, but also has the privilege of being able to self-constitute, form and make decisions based on reason and autonomy. However, that also means that humans often act unwisely and erroneously. In relation to nature, such behaviour is a manifestation of humanity's superior and arrogant relationship to the non-human world, which has gradually, with the ascendance of science (especially in the later modern period), fed into humanity's domination and power over the natural world. It should be noted that while the Renaissance understanding of anthropocentrism is a sort of attempt to link the philosophical with religious and theological aspects of the conception of human beings and their position in the world, in the later modern period, anthropocentrism connected the philosophical with the scientific aspects, and so can be referred to as *philosophical-scientific anthropocentrism*.

Another important point worth remembering is that the Renaissance version's reliance on ancient ideas paved the way for the later embracement of modern and Enlightenment ideas: that humans coexist alongside other humans in equality and freedom (Rousseau 2010), and the social order is the basic prerequisite for a dignified life (Kant 1999). Although it may not be immediately obvious, without human rights, living and non-living nature could not have acquired rights under moral and legal systems. At the same time, it should be added that it was modern and Enlightenment thought and notions of human exceptionalism and uniqueness that gave rise to such an understanding *philosophical-scientific anthropocentrism* that has been characterized as arrogant anthropocentrism by contemporary environmental thinkers.

Therefore, we must ask whether it is possible for a non-arrogant type of anthropocentrism to exist today? We would argue "yes";

<sup>7</sup> We have already drawn attention elsewhere to the highly inspiring approach found in the work of P. Teilhard de Chardin, a thinker who highlights the interconnections between the anthropocentric, theocentric and cosmocentric in explaining humanity's place in nature (the cosmos) (Plašienková 1993).

it is called *environmental anthropocentrism*. It could incorporate all the positive features of the previous types of anthropocentrism. However, we have to recognize that in general, without an anthropocentric approach to the world, human beings would not be rooted in the natural and cultural environment. Paradoxical as it may sound, without anthropocentrism, natural thinking would be impossible because it is humans who assign value to entities and to nature as a whole, be that intrinsic or instrumental value. Consequently, *environmental anthropocentrism* could well have the potential to change existing human approaches to the environment. To reveal its potential and validity, we need to point out some of the alternatives.

### 3. Selected Alternatives to Anthropocentrism

As noted above, environmental philosophy and ethics has, almost from the outset, been dominated by the critique of anthropocentrism. Most thinkers in the second half of the 20th century considered anthropocentrism to be the cause of the gradual process of environmental devastation, which led to it being rejected and alternatives being explored. It is not our aim to present these in detail, but rather to assess whether they have a future and under what conditions. We will focus on *biocentrism* (radical version and moderate versions – *zoocentrism*) and *cosmocentrism* (or the reduced version, which we call *planetocentrism*).

Proponents of radical *biocentrism* (especially A. Naess, M. Bookchin) declare that all living creatures are morally equal. That means that all living entities are considered to be equally valued as human beings. Thus, the proponents of biocentrism sought to achieve equal respect for all living beings, i.e. not just humans but also fauna and flora, on the basis of their intrinsic value. However, this raises a number of important questions about the nature of biocentrism: *Could all living beings actually be respected in the same way without distinction? How could*

*this respect be embedded in moral systems? Who will enforce and show such respect?* It is very difficult to ascertain what “increase respect for all living beings” actually means (Naess 1990; 2005), because on the moral plane respect is not always the same. To start with, it is determined by social hierarchy and the type of moral subject. It is also hard to determine a uniform way of “transmitting” moral and axiological principles in relation to all living beings. In the absence of a “selection” key, it is clear that it is impossible to draw a hierarchy of living organisms or of human beings. Even leaving aside the social side, we face the problem of determining which living beings are affected by moral and axiological considerations and which are not. If selection is not possible or permissible, moral and axiological principles would have to be “transferred” to all living entities. However, radical biocentrism cannot and does not have the capacity to distinguish between a mosquito and a tiger, a tree and a weed in the garden, a dog and a tick, and so in terms of ethics, “transferring” moral criteria to all living creatures in the world is impossible, when humans are the subject. Implementing biocentric moral criteria is so problematic that it has not been attempted by even the creators of radical biocentrism themselves. Radical biocentrism has thus remained more of a philosophical-theoretical concept than a generally applicable one.

Given the difficulties of pursuing radical biocentrism, representatives of moderate biocentrism attempted another solution, proposing a kind of moderate “equality” for all living creatures on the planet (Sessions 1995). G. Sessions sought a less radical vocabulary and began using the term coexistence of all living creatures. Although he retained the well-established term “respect” for living entities and nature, he did so in relation to the “purpose” of each species. The trap he fell into was trying to distinguish the “purpose” of each species, which has to be defined by humans. Consequently, this moderate form of biocentrism ended



up having to rely on anthropocentric and utilitarian principles. These weaken some of the principles of deep ecology, especially those that call on others to accept that relationships in nature are complex and made vulnerable by human activity (Naess and Sessions 1986). There is a simple answer to the question of who could implement all the ideas proposed by biocentrism: humans – because it is they who assign values to entities. Consequently, biocentrism has not managed to escape the charge of anthropocentrism. Nonetheless, it has been rendered less radical and, to some extent, modified bringing it closer to what we call environmental anthropocentrism.

*Zoocentrism* is another attempt to modify radical biocentrism and to propose moral criteria. It holds that moral criteria must apply to creatures that can feel, i.e. animals (Singer 1975; Regan 1983 etc.). Zoocentrism can be considered part of biocentrism, or more precisely as an attempt to conceive of an ethics of relations with animals<sup>8</sup> and the part of biocentric ideas that can be implemented. However, zoocentrism can also be seen as the partial abandonment of the principles of biocentrism.

Another alternative to anthropocentrism is *cosmocentrism*, along with the reduced version that we call *planetocentrism*. It stems from the need for a holistic and systemic understanding of the relationship between humans and nature, be that our planet or the entire cosmos. Cosmocentrism proposes that the cosmos, and the humans within it, should be seen as a single holistic universe. Its proponents suggest that a system of moral norms should be created that would act as an ethical barrier

against the disruption of the whole universe. The aim is to adopt the idea that humans are subject to the laws of nature and cannot escape them, which means that the greatest value of all is the existence of this holistic universe. In a more specific, reduced form, Earth is the planetary whole. This concept enables us to see planetary mechanisms as “moral entities.” Here we are thinking in particular of Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis, where the planet is a living organism (Lovelock; 2005, 23-24), which was popular in the 1980s and 1990s.

Although it was hoped that this admiration for such a “marvellous functioning whole” would lead to the creation of normative criteria for assessing disruption to the holistic structure and damage to the planet, it has proved difficult to implement. Nonetheless, it is important to note that cosmocentrism and the reduced version, planetocentrism, make reference to scientific knowledge. Currently, in light of major climate change – the consequence of interfering with holistic structures and planetary mechanisms – there is a good chance that some form of anthropocentrism with environmental aspects will be accepted. This comprehensive view of environmental goals, where cosmocentrism and planetocentrism are concerned, is based on the understanding that terrestrial nature and civilisation are part of the same whole and that the planetary structures are all interconnected. Methodologically, this approach can be described as an extension of anthropocentrism, one that is based on our scientific knowledge of the universe, nature and the laws by which they function.

If we have shown that the aforementioned alternative conceptions of anthropocentrism cannot be implemented without humans thinking about and valuing natural entities, we have also shown that anthropocentrism cannot be rejected. However, we recognize that the alternative approaches have provided a different perspective on the significance of the planet and planetary mechanisms, and all living creatures

---

<sup>8</sup> It is only in the last 20 years that animal rights (Singer 1975) have come to be discussed, and most publications refer to domesticated species. We talk about animals and plants having social value, but only when a value has been defined as such and can be legally enforced. We talk about the desire to save threatened and endangered species in the context of needing to preserve biodiversity, but it is discussed in terms of the potential loss to human civilisation.

on Earth. They have played an indispensable role in relation to the environment and can be used to show the importance and the meaning of the environmental aspects of anthropocentrism.

#### 4. Conclusion or the Need for Environmental Anthropocentrism

It is clear from the argument set out above that criticizing different types of anthropocentrism and their alternatives is not always productive nor rational. Rejecting different forms of anthropocentrism within their historical context, without taking into account the changes that have taken place over time can be counterproductive and, in principle, can hinder deeper understanding of the relationship between humans and nature and detract from its existential significance in different cultures. We therefore consider an anthropocentric relationship with the world to be natural, since there is no other applicable approach and because humans assign values to natural entities and implement them through moral, axiological and legal systems. It is now clear that the rate of implementation is slow, and we need to recognize that over the centuries change took place within the field of ethics before subsequently being enforced by law. Nevertheless, one can argue that the pace at which value is being attributed to nature in moral systems is much faster than at any time in the past, even if most scientists believe it is not fast enough to prevent a catastrophic scenario. It is evident that incorporating environmental values into moral and axiological systems is a long-term process, dependent on the culture and often the political orientation of the given country. Moreover, adopting a holistic approach with complex natural laws presents both moral and legal problems, as environmental laws and principles are the responsibility of individual states. Legally then, in the absence of a global state, it is probably illusory to assume that it is in fact possible to value and protect the environment. In conclusion, we wish to emphasize that

anthropocentrism should not, and indeed cannot, be condemned or dismissed. However, we also need to think about all the existing theoretical approaches and try to incorporate any ideas that could have a positive influence on these approaches, whilst recognizing that they inevitably change and evolve. We are now at the point where we should be incorporating the positive aspects.

In the ancient period the emphasis on humans was a positive aspect of *philosophical anthropocentrism*. However, if we humans are to evaluate things and be the measure of all things, we need to know what the right measure is, in other words, what contemporary civilisation urgently needs in relation to the environment. The inspiration for *religious (Christian biblical or theological) anthropocentrism* in the medieval sense was the emphasis on humility and reverence for something that transcends man (which need not be God alone; it could also be nature as a home for all living creatures), along with love and responsibility, and adoration as sources of moral principles.

The Renaissance, modern and Enlightenment interpretations of the *philosophical-theological* and *philosophical-scientific anthropocentrism* underpin the concept of human rights and freedoms. These days, the right to a healthy environment is another addition, and it is especially relevant when conceptualizing third generation human rights<sup>9</sup>. Environmental responsibility is also becoming increasingly prominent.

As we have tried to show, in attempting to produce an adequate understanding of *anthropocentrism*, we can draw on all historical periods, including types

<sup>9</sup> These are known as collective human rights. The third generation of rights includes: the right to peace, the right to a favourable environment, the right to economic and social development, the rights of national and ethnic minorities, the right of access to cultural heritage, the right to natural resources, the right to communication, and the right to intergenerational respect (Euroiuris.sk 2024; COE.int 2024).

of anthropocentrism that were dismissed just a few years previously on the grounds of recklessness and hostility to nature. The *environmental anthropocentrism* proposed here is a potential solution with applicability to the search for a moderate, humble, non-arrogant, respectful and responsible approach to relations with nature, where the home (*oikos*) is the sacred place of human habitation on Earth. We consider it a viable alternative in creating and enforcing ethical, axiological and legal norms that would apply to interpersonal action as well as human activities vis-à-vis nature or the planet.

The answer to the question of whether environmental anthropocentrism is possible is therefore unequivocally *yes!* But certain basic assumptions have to be met. We have to reject the view that human beings are the only thing of value and accept that nature or the planet has value in itself. Humans are still attributing values to individual entities. Natural values must be included amongst these, and they must be reflected in normative ethical criteria. In other words, humans should consider nature as part of culture, or even civilisation. Axiologically, one can conclude that we are prepared for change at the individual level. However, when it comes to morals, nature can only become accepted across cultures on the basis of individual responsibility for the natural environment as an environment that is shared with other people on the planet.

We have tried to show that *environmental anthropocentrism* is both possible and necessary. However, it requires both a significant shift away from the negative aspects of the various forms of anthropocentrism and the subsequent incorporation of the positive aspects as the basis of *environmental anthropocentrism*.

**Author contributions:** Conceptualization, Z.P. and E.S.; Methodology, Z.P. and E.S.; Validation, Z.P. and E.S.; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Z.P. and E.S.; Writing – Review & Editing, Z.P. and E.S. All authors have read and

agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research was funded by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under contract no. APVV-22-0397: *Naturalism and constructivism as competing or complementary programs* and by VEGA contract no. 2/0118/24 *The Social Nature of Normativity as a Starting Point for Explaining the Relationship between Individual and Collective Autonomy*

**Institutional review board statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this research. The founding sponsors had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, and in the decision to publish the results.

## References

- COE.int. 2024. *The evolution of human rights*. Accessed April 27, 2024. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/the-evolution-of-human-rights>.
- Euroiuris.sk. 2024. *Generácie ľudských práv [Generations of human rights]*. Accessed April 27, 2024. [http://ludskeprava.euroiuris.sk/index.php?link=gen\\_lud\\_prav#tretia\\_generacia](http://ludskeprava.euroiuris.sk/index.php?link=gen_lud_prav#tretia_generacia).
- Francis (pope). 2015. *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'. On Care for our Common Home*. Accessed April 27, 2024. [https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si\\_en.pdf](https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf).
- Kohák, Erazim. 2000. *Zelená svatozář [Green Halo]*. Praha: SLON.
- Lovelock, James. 2005. *Gaia and the Theory of the Living Planet*. London: Gaia Books.
- Naess, Arne, and George Sessions. 1986. "The Basic Principles of Deep ecology." *The Trumpeter. Journal of Ecosophy* 3(4): 14. Accessed April 27, 2024. <https://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/579/1241>.
- Naess, Arne. 1990. *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Naess, Arne. 2005. "The Deep Ecology Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects." In *The Selected Works of Arne Naess*, by Arn A. Drengson (eds), 33-55. Dordrecht: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-4519-6\\_88](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-4519-6_88).
- Plašienková, Zlatica. 1993. "Inšpiratívnošť Teilhardovej koncepcie planetárnej koreflexie pre formovanie ekologickej paradigmy [The inspiration

- of Teilhard's concept of planetary co-reflection for the formation of an ecological paradigm]." In *Spory o charakter ekologickej paradigmy: Diskusie o ekofilozofii II.*, edited by Eva Smolková and Zuzana Palovičová, 168-173. Bratislava: FÚ SAV.
- Regan, Tom. 1983. *The Case for Animal Rights*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 2010. *O spoločenskej zmluve [On the Social Contract]*. Translated by Miroslav Marcelli. Bratislava: Kalligram.
- Sadowski, Ryszard F. 2020. "The Role of Religious Argumentation in Shaping Pro-ecological Attitudes of Christians in Poland." *Studia Ecologiae et Bioethicae* 18 (1): 7-22. <https://doi.org/10.21697/seb.2020.1.02>.
- Sessions, George. 1995. *Deep Ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the new Environmentalism*. Boston & London: Shambhala Publications.
- Singer, Peter. 1975. *Animal Liberation*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Smolková, Eva. 2000. *Ekologický problém ako šanca [Ecological problem as a chance]*. Bratislava: Iris.
- Smolková, Eva, and Zuzana Palovičová eds. 1993. *Spory o charakter ekologickej paradigmy: Diskusie o ekofilozofii II [Disputes about the Nature of the Ecological Paradigm: Discussions on Ecophilosophy II]*. Bratislava: FÚ SAV.
- Smolková, Eva, and Zuzana Palovičová eds. 1992. *Diskusie o ekofilozofii I [Discussions on Ecophilosophy I]*. Bratislava: FÚ SAV.
- Smolková, Eva, and Zuzana Palovičová eds. 1994. *Ekofilozofické koncepcie [Ecophilosophical Concepts]*. Bratislava: FÚ SAV.
- White, Lynn T. Jr. 1967. "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis." *Science* 155: 1203-1207.