

Environmental culture as a system of values: essence and main properties.

Lilya Andreevna Sabirova¹.
Egor Valerievich Gromov².

Address:Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University 89, Kazanskaya Str., Elabuga, the
Tatarstan Republic 423600.

Abstract

During last several decades in the world philosophy the problem of ecologization of universal culture has been developed. At the same time the issue of essence and essential properties of environmental culture remains insufficiently elaborated in modern philosophical thought. This article attempts to answer the questions: what is environmental culture? What system of values prevails in it? What are its essential properties? To solve the objective the following methods have been applied such as analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, unity of the historical and logical. The study has brought out the essential properties of ecological culture, considered the main approaches to the problem of ecologization of culture, suggested new definition of ecological culture, found out some problems that can be solved during further investigations. The analysis of the approaches existing in the world culture draws up a conclusion that characteristic for ecological culture are the main properties such as prevalence of ecology-oriented values; presence of ecological imperative defining the main features of behavior and activities of man, influence of the sphere of moral norms on the relations between man and nature; socio-historical character, complex structural complexes; active participation in creation of main processes of the world dynamics. The article reviews the definitions of environmental culture suggested by leading Russian philosophers, reveals its value content, offers the definition of ecological culture as totality of world view and moral values determining the character of relations between man and natural environment and setting conditions for mutual optimal character of these relations.

Keywords: culture, ecology, environment, sustainable development.

¹Sabirova Lilya Andreevna, Proletarskaya st. 8, kv. 69, Elabuga, Tatarstan Republic 423603.E-mail: LiASabirova@kpfu.ru

²Gromov Egor Valerievich, Molodiojnaya st., 12, kv.47, Elabuga, Tatarstan Republic 423603. E-mail: gromove@mail.ru

Introduction

The article attempts to answer the question about the essence and properties of such multi-value phenomenon as environmental culture. Despite the past history of the problem, any certain approach to definition of environmental culture and its essential properties have not been elaborated in the world philosophy so far. The purpose of our study was to reveal the essence of ecological culture, characterize its properties and value content.

In the course of our investigation the tendencies of exposure of the main aspects of the problem of environmental culture existing in the world philosophy have been analyzed. The problem of ecological culture has been actively elaborated in Russian and world philosophy for the last decades. The need for serious cultural changes to optimize relations between man and environment has been noted for a long time. But at the end of the twentieth century this problem gained real actuality. In Russia activation of its elaboration is determined by the whole range of sociocultural and political factors, among which a particular place is taken by the influence of the Ecological Doctrine of the Russian Federation and a number of legislative acts adopted in 2001, in which the notion of “ecological culture” acquired a legal status. The issue about essential properties of environmental culture was solved by V.N. Mangasaryan [1], V. Plumwood [2] and many other authors. At the same time much attention was devoted to the place and role of environmental culture in man’s background knowledge, the place of environmental culture in strategies of sustainable development and solution of ecological global problems in general (V. Plumwood [2]), etc. Some aspects of essential properties of ecological culture were elaborated in the processes of formation of international and national strategies of development.

The result of investigation was its definition suggested as the system of world view and moral values determining the character of man-environment relations. Special attention was paid to essential properties of ecological culture.

Methods

The following methods were applied in the course of investigation: analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, unity of the historical and logical. Analysis and synthesis were used to expose essential properties of ecological culture, its specific character and place in universal culture. Deduction and induction were used to determine the essence of ecological culture. The method of unity of the historical and logical was used to characterize the role of ecological culture in solving ecological global problems.

Results and Discussion

The problem of ecologization of universal culture has been elaborated by the world philosophy since 1960s. Consciousness of ecological threat, caused, besides other factors, by rapid deterioration of environment in many industrially developed countries of the world, has been resulted in abrupt activation of research in this field. The global strategies adopted at the turn of 20 – 21 centuries have stopped to be a matter of only state structures; this question involves the whole humanity [3]. It is this background against which the problem of ecological culture arises. In western philosophy the problem of ecologization of culture is solved within the framework of the areas such as ecological anthropology that studies the problems of interaction between man and environment, ecofeminism and many others. So, in 1993 the work by V. Plumwood «Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason» [2] came out, in which the author associates hopes for a better future with ecologization of culture implemented on a global scale via democratic transformations. She suggests assuming as a basis of this process overcoming cultural rationalism and dualism of man and nature. Thus, ecological culture proves to be a new cultural paradigm in the main. The relations of partnership and dialogue are ready to replace the former urge towards the total control over nature.

The works of many other modern philosophers interpret the ecological culture somewhat differently. For example, L. Head, D. Trigger and J. Mulcock [4] understand it as the totality of components of everyday culture determining interaction between man and environment. Based on the analysis of the tendencies of development of socio-natural relations in Australia of the turn of the twentieth-twenty first centuries, the plurality of ecological cultures within one social system is not admitted. Similar attitude to environmental culture is observed in ecological anthropology. M. Mooney, in particular, [5] regards environmental culture as the aggregate of forms of behavior aimed at protecting and maintaining an optimal environmental quality.

The Russian philosophical tradition is characterized by the diversity of approaches to the problem of ecological culture, most of which involve its existence at all stages of social development. Thus, among the definitions referred to by V. V. Misenzhnikov, most of them characterize ecological culture as an integral part of human culture. He highlighted four approaches to the essence of ecological culture prevailing in the domestic philosophy: environmental culture as an interpretation of the experience of socio-natural interactions, ensuring the formation of environmental awareness; as an integral part of culture – the result of environmental education and awareness; as “... a set of norms, opinions and sets that characterize the attitude of society, social groups and personalities to nature”; as a body of environmental knowledge, skills and standards [6].

Understanding the ecological culture as an integral part of the culture in general, irrespective of the stage of its development, not only has an impact on the theoretical development of the problem in recent years, but also manifests itself in the legal sphere. So, in the explanatory note to the draft law “On Ecological Culture” of 2004, the subject of the future law is defined as “... an integral part of universal human and national culture, including the system of social relations, material values, norms and ways of interaction between society and environment, successively formulated in the public consciousness and behavior of people for life and work of generations by continuous environmental education and enlightenment, promoting healthy lifestyle, spiritual development of society, sustainable economic and social development, environmental safety of society and humanity” [7] Similarly, the essence of ecological culture is understood by N. Mangasaryan. According to him, environmental culture covers the regulatives of socio-natural interactions that are characteristic for social culture; it is formed purposefully, however, he also admits natural calamity and the development of its individual elements [1, p. 45].

Widespread are the definitions of ecological culture as a special form of environmentally oriented human activity. This does not exclude the understanding of environmental culture as a part of the culture of society. For example, according to S. V. Alekseyev, “environmental culture is an ability to conduct an ecologically reasonable activity, responsible towards the environment, education of a conscious attitude to nature; reflection of the holistic perception of the world, synthesis of the diverse human activities, based on the unique properties of the biosphere, a dominant position of man in it; organic, integral part of the culture, which encompasses those aspects of human thought and activity that correspond with the natural environment; the stage of development of human culture which is characterized by general awareness of the importance of the ecological problems in human life“ [8, p. 15].

Understanding the environmental culture as a special condition of human culture is determined, above all, by the idea of culture as a set of results of human creative activity and the system of values that define the form of this activity. In light of the above expounded it is quite logical to understand ecological culture as a special state of culture in which the optimum relations between man and environment occupy a leading position in the value system. At the same time environmental culture is considered as belonging to a certain stage of development of society and its culture. The presence of environmental culture implies a certain level of knowledge about the society-nature relationship, a relatively wide spread of ecological literacy, a certain state of environmental consciousness.

Such understanding of ecological culture is in line with the objectives of the modern world community, as understood in the strategies of global development, in particular, in the principles of the Rio de Janeiro Declaration of 1992 [9] and the document "Future We Want" 2013 [10].

In modern philosophy there are different approaches to the problem of the value content of environmental culture. Some authors believe that environmental culture includes, above all, the values associated with the interaction of society and nature per se, such as the aesthetic perception of nature, considerate attitude to it, understanding the need for conservation and restoration of natural resources, etc. Others consider ecological culture as a fully reformed system of values, all of the components which are subject to environmental imperatives. Also the value of ecological culture as the world view and system of ethics is assessed in the works of different authors in different ways. For example, in the works by V. V. Misenzhnikov and O. G. Tavstuha, ecological culture appears primarily as a special form of ideology. As such, it is a system of values that define the attitude of man and society to nature. Other researchers, such as V. N. Mangasaryan and T. Ye. Abramova considering ecological culture first and foremost as a system of norms of environmentally correct and safe behavior.

The circumstances studied enable to consider environmental culture to be a particular state of human culture. Accordingly, it can be characterized by the following properties:

1) Ideological values. Environmental culture is characterized by a qualitative change of treatment of the environment, compared with previous eras of cultural development. At early stages of culture development the interaction of society and nature was determined, above all, by the perception of nature as a special spiritual force. This state of culture corresponds to natural spiritual environmental awareness. Later, with the development of technosphere and assimilating by humanity of a growing number of natural processes and phenomena, in the world view of Western civilization, and then the whole world, there began to dominate the consumer attitude towards nature. The value of the latter began to be defined by its value as a source of resources for human activities. The formation of utilitarian consumer environmental awareness together with the development of industrial society has led humanity to the danger of global ecological crisis. Utilitarian consumer attitude towards nature still continues to have a significant impact on the global dynamics. At the same time, awareness of environmental threat has led to the emergence of a fundamentally new form of philosophy, focused on the harmonization of human-environment relations, an integral part of which is the system of environmentally oriented cultural values. They are based on the understanding of special spiritual significance of nature, its role and place in a person's life, including the idea of man as a single living being, actively creating his environment, and the need for harmonization of nature forming activity with the possibilities of biosphere.

2) Environmentally oriented norms of behavior. Respect for nature, love for it has long been among the cultural values of the majority of the peoples of the world. However, the development of ecological culture imposes new requirements for their content. Accordingly, morality and ethics in the ecological culture get a special significance not previously existed or existed only in a latent form. The moral norms as basic regulatives of human activities include the criteria of environmentally correct behavior. Extending the scope of action of morals in relations between man and environment requires a number of principles to be adopted, including the principle of ecological imperative, the principle of reverence for life, etc.

3) Specifics of development. The development of ecological culture cannot be separated, on the one hand, from the development of material and spiritual culture of the society, on the other hand - from the development of environmental consciousness. It is carried out through the growing importance of environmental values, their actualization in the system of culture. The prerequisites for the development of ecological culture are the traditions of nature management, historical forms of economic activity, aesthetic values, etc. The factors of development of ecological culture are the

achievements of the environmental studies, in the first place, such as ecology and sciences adjacent to it; the development of legal norms regulating social relations in the sphere of nature management and environmental protection, etc. The appearance of ecological culture is associated with awareness of the dangers arising out of the main tendencies of development of the consumer society.

4) The main functions and roles. Ecological culture is the main regulator of human activity in its relationship with the natural environment. The values of environmental culture determine mutually optimal character of socio-natural interactions, by which the vital human needs are taken into account, the Earth's biosphere is preserved, and its degradation is prevented.

Thus, environmental culture is characterized by such basic properties as the predominance of values corresponding to the noosphere ecological consciousness; presence of ecological imperative that determines the main features of the human behavior and activities, dissemination of the moral standards of the relationship between man and nature; socio-historical character, complex structural properties; active participation in forming basic processes of the world dynamics.

On this basis, we can define environmental culture as a system of ideological and moral values that determine the nature of relations between human being and environment and cause mutually optimal character of these relations.

Conclusion

The study has revealed the essential properties of ecological culture, considered the diversity of approaches to the problem of reorientation of culture towards environmental values, formulated the definition of ecological culture as a kind of system of ideological and moral values. At the same time, it has revealed a number of problems that can be solved in the course of further research:

- the problem of the place of ecological culture in the system of universal cultural values is required to be clarified;
- in order to control the development of ecological culture, it is essential to investigate the major features of this process, to find out their specificity for different sociocultural conditions.

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