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**CONCEPTS OF HUMAN NATURE IN SELECTED
WORLD RELIGIONS AS INSTITUTIONAL
DETERMINANTS OF THE SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT POLICY***

Summary: The sustainable policy is more and more getting a central political concern and the politicians and economists look for the ways of introducing it in an effective way. Religions could provide institutional support, as soon as neoclassical economics doesn't deliver such one. The neoclassical economics by treating expenditures on environment protection only as an additional cost, diminishing the efficiency can't ensure the necessary motivation to realize such a policy. Religions could provide lacking institutional support to the neoclassical framework, which by treating the expenditures on environment protection only as an additional cost, diminishing the efficiency can't ensure the necessary motivation to realize such a policy. Religions due to their particular concepts of human nature, may fill this gap by impacting on people's attitude towards various aspects of human life, including problems, which are the concern of sustainable development policy. The goal of the paper is to discuss the influence of the concepts of human nature in selected world religions on the sustainable policy. This task is realized by showing how concept of human nature, perceived in their three dimensions – worldview, social world, individual world (body, soul, and mind) affects the way of thinking about sustainable policy issues. Furthermore the question is raised, of how the voice of the world's religions could be better used in the conduct of this policy. It may be used by working together on the meta-religious level looking for the common features and building common statements to sustainable policy matters.

Keywords: sustainable policy, concept of human nature, world religions.

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Introduction

The sustainable policy is more and more getting a central political concern (EU 2020 Strategy as example) and the politicians and economists look for the ways of introducing it in an effective way. Religions could provide lacking institutional support¹ to the neoclassical framework. As long as the mainstream economics treats the expenditures on environment protection only as an additional cost, which diminishes the efficiency of the economy, it can't ensure the necessary motivation to realize such a policy. Such an attitude to the sustainable policy is an effect of the model of man, which neoclassical economics and economic policy adapts. In fact the homo economicus has no other motivation for handling as own utility maximization.

Religions can fill this motivational gap², because of their specific role in the society. According to the theory of social systems by Parsons, or by Luhmann, the religious system being a part of the cultural system have a latent character. Due to the fact that they change very slowly, and due to their norm and value providing function they play a unifying role in the society, enabling the better functioning of other systems). This character is even more visible, if the religion is manifesting itself in other systems like in economics for instance affecting the way of perceiving economic actions and giving the frames a deep sense for it (for instance the deep sense of work as participation in the creation in Christianity)³. Moreover the motivational input on the economics comes from their view on human nature, which affects ways of thinking about economy and economic policy⁴. They may impact on the sustainable policy⁵ at many levels as soon as

¹ The role of institutions in the realization of the economic policy was discussed in: A. Horodecka: *Instytucjonalizm i podejście instytucjonalne do polityki gospodarczej*. „Polityka Gospodarcza” 2001, nr 5/6, p. 115-143.

² Heterodox economics is as well an option, because of their focus on sustainability. A. Horodecka: *Przemiany obrazu człowieka we współczesnej ekonomii*. In: *Polityka gospodarcza jako gra w wyzwania i odpowiedzi rozwojowe*. Ed. J. Stacewicz. Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH, Warszawa 2014.

³ J. Wach: *Sociology of religion*. Kegan Paul, London 1947, p. 393: „(...) perfect integration of a society never has been nor can be achieved with a religious basis”; A. Segal, *Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*. Blackwell Publishing, Malden 2006, p. xviii.

⁴ Although the debate about the intersection of religion and thinking about development or sustainable development started some years ago (C. Rakodi: *A framework for analysis the links between religion and development*. ”Development in Practice” 2012, Vol. 22, No. 5/6, p. 634-650), was preceded by some pioneer – works in this field like that from M. Weber: M. Weber, P.R. Baehr, G.C. Wells: *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism: and other writings*. Penguin, London 2002.

⁵ Religious organization very early since 1988 were using the language of sustainability based on Brudtland definition (World Commission on Environment and Development).

they don't limit it only to the issue of utility or even health, but consider as well moral and spiritual order and so provide values, reasons and ways for solving ecological problems, which have been missed in the sustainable policy (International Environment Forum 2001).

The **goal** of the paper is to discuss the influence of the concept of human nature on the sustainable policy. **The main thesis of the paper** is that the **concept of human nature of particular religion affects the way of thinking about ecological issues and sustainable policy**.

As example the biggest world religions are considered: Christianity and Islam with their spiritual source – Judaism, believed by almost 53% of all world inhabitants. They developed a particular attitude to economic affairs and sustainability taking form of catholic social teaching, protestant economic ethics, or Islam economics.

This paper **starts** with the definition of the concept of human nature and discusses its dimensions and impact on human actions. In the **second** part the selected world religions and their concept of human nature are introduced. In the **third** step the different approaches to ecological issues which are fundamental for sustainability thought are presented as a consequence of particular concepts of human nature and worldview. In the **conclusion** the possibilities of using the voice of the world's religions in conducting sustainable policy are discussed.

1. Concept of human nature in selected world religions

The concept of human nature, which can be defined as a way of perceiving the world, people among us and self, bases on the assumption that there are some basic dimensions in human being which have to be addressed in order to get the complete concept of human nature. The philosophical anthropology can be a scientific authority in this attempt, but lacks empirical foundations, therefore it could gain according to Fahrenberg⁶ by working together with psychology⁷ and other empirical disciplines, which alone can't embrace the complexity of human being.

In **first** place the human being can be perceived by his/her relation to the physical world (Nature) and the metaphysical (God). The **second** dimension is the social world – which addresses relations between people and the **third** fo-

⁶ J. Fahrenberg: *Menschenbilder*. In: *Dorsch – Lexikon der Psychologie*. Ed. M.A. Wirtz. Verlag Hans Huber, Bern 2014.

⁷ This problem – of lacking of theory of man was mentioned by: M. Scheler: *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*. Bouvier, Bonn 1991, p. 9.

cuses on relation of human to him/herself to his/her basic dimensions: body – referring to his behaviour, soul – to his motivation and mind – to the sense of living, spirituality, reasoning⁸.

The **definition of world religions** depends on the discipline, which define them, most scientist agree to define it as ‘system of common beliefs and practices which refer to supernatural beings and focuses on the religion as community system’⁹. The most publications refer to five biggest world religions¹⁰: Christianity 33%, Islam 19.6% (and Judaism as source of two former 0.2%); Hindu 13.4%, Buddhism 6%.

When it comes to the **worldview** all selected religions believe that human being is created by God and has to obey his commands. Human being is put in the centre of the world but with this role is connected a great responsibility towards the world. The mankind (represented by Adam) by the act of naming the animals takes over the responsibility for them before God. Islam refers here to the human’s custody over the God’s property, which means to not only to harm it but to give it back even better (similarly to the evangel about talents). Although God has created the world good, the lack of obedience of human has made it sinful (Christianity and Judaism) or disharmonious (Islam). The human being has a task by his/her deeds to restore it to the by good deeds and faith.

The **social world** bases on the solidarity thought with other human beings, which has their sources in Judaism already (Sabath year, the duty to give back a coat for a night given as a security by a debtor). The commandments for caring for the poor, widows, children can be traced back in all religions. Judaism develops the idea of loving your neighbour as yourself (adapted by Christianity and Islam), and provides many direct laws concerning the way of caring for other people (see: Torah). In Islam zakat obliges people to help others, but starting with a family which plays central place in all 3 religions.

The **individual world** is shaped by the belief that human being can and have to get perfection because he was created on the resemblance of God. At the level of **mind** human being shall acknowledge that there is a higher moral order, grounding in God and His Word – commandments (Tora, Bible & Quran). The love to God takes real shape in love for human beings and the nature. All referred religions encourage reading holy texts and participating in the cult, to ac-

⁸ A. Horodecka: *Komponenty obrazu człowieka w ekonomii*. ”Kwartalnik Historii Myśli Ekonomicznej” 2014, nr 1(5).

⁹ *Britannica encyclopedia of world religions*. Ed. W. Doniger. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2006, p. 915.

¹⁰ *Pięć wielkich religii świata: hinduizm, buddyzm, islam, judaizm, chrześcijaństwo*. Ed. E. Brunner-Traut. Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, Warszawa 2002.

quire the right **motivation**, to make the heart alive for something more than own interests, which affects the behaviour¹¹. Some specific rules especially in holy books with Law-Character (Torah, Quran) shall help people to revive this eternal law by everyday practice. In Christianity this role is fulfilled by religious communities and their teaching (in Catholicism – for instance by pop encyclical) or by deeper engagement in daily concerns of members (as in free churches or Judaist diasporas, mostly in US) or more institutionalized help (Catholic Church) the social and ecological engagement is more institutionalized.

2. The impact of concept of human nature in selected world religions on the issues of sustainable policy

Each of religion develops **particular attitude to the environment responding to the current changes**, by basing on their traditions and interpreting them it in the light of actual problems! Religions due to their complex view on human nature are well equipped to look on social problems from a deeper and more holistic perspective than neoclassic economics. The globalization, information revolution and the development of media opened additional ways of delivering the statements beyond a particular community enabling meta-religious meetings and agreements (for example World Parliament of Religions).

The impact of **Judaism** on sustainable policy can't be reduced to the 0.2% believers, but includes its founder role to Christianity and Islam. Its view on human subordinates animals and nature¹² to the human, and is visualized in the creation story in Torah, where God creates Adam on his image, equal and nominates him to the ruler over the world (symbolically pictured by the scene of giving names to animals by Adam). This doesn't necessarily mean dictatorial rule, but much more the responsibility for the world¹³ before God, who **owns** the world and only appoints human being to govern the world¹⁴. Another sustainable

¹¹ This method of self-commitment to some core values and a behaviour resulting from them in the institutionalized environment is applied in management for instance in value-management or in governance ethics as suggested by Wieland.

¹² The nature in Torah is deprived of Holiness mainly due to the Priest Tradition (P-Tradition).

¹³ 'Taking the hereditary possession', 'image and likeness', in a divine way, like his Creator (see: Ps 24,1; 89,12). This meaning changed due to changing perspective on looking at man and the role of ruler. R.S. Gottlieb: *The Oxford handbook of religion and ecology*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006; H. Trosh-Samuelson: *Judaism*. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*. Ed. R.S. Gottlieb. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006, p. 25-64.

¹⁴ Z. Kijas: *Biblijne i teologiczne motywy ochrony przyrody*. In: *Mówić o ochronie przyrody. Zintegrowana wizja ochrony przyrody*. Ed. M. Gregorczyk. Instytut Ochrony Przyrody PAN, Kraków 2002; B. Irrgang: *Christliche Umweltethik*. Reinhardt, Muenchen/Basel 1992, p. 120f.

commandment is the one about resting of the earth each seventh year, what should serve the animals, the nature and poor (Ex 23, 10). Sustainability has as well moral aspects, as the flood-story shows, where God devastates the nature, because of the wrong moral conduct of people. Due to the moral rightness of Noah, the world is restored and protected by the rainbow – covenant between humanity and God, who gives back to humans the power over the world (Gen 9, 2-7). The goal of the relation between human and nature is described in **eschatological** perspective by prophets and is characterized by a perfect harmony (Isa 11, 6-8). The sensibility to the Nature was maintained by many typical agrarian feasts practised before Babylon exile (Sukkot, Pessach, Shavuot), which were re-interpreted historically during Exile¹⁵, but nowadays their primary meaning is restored, as the source for the ecological motivation. The nature-sensibility has as well its sources in mystical and philosophical traditions like the one of M. Buber and his concept of I-Thou¹⁶, which indicated treating the nature as ‘you’ – equal to human being. By entering into a contact with nature, human can experience God, and by treating nature as object (‘it’) – moves away from God. Making sensible to the nature can be found in prayers (for instance: community prayer for the country¹⁷) and in the good example of Rabbi and other members of the community¹⁸.

Summarizing, Judaism stresses the necessity of sustainable policy and provides motivation for conducting such a policy, basing on idea of responsibility, respect for the nature (mystical tradition) and moral behaviour. Developing of such consciousness by believers depends on the way of interpretation of the scriptures and way of every-day practice within communities.

Christianity inherited much of the concept of human nature and worldview from Judaism. Human is perceived here as a complex being, body-soul unity. Therefore his behaviour can’t be analysed in separation of his motives and without the deeper meaning attached to it, like for instance some major sources of deeper meaning which is according to many empirical researches and not only in Christianity justice and love. The ecological problems are perceived according to understanding of some Biblical texts as being a result of human’s moral decay

¹⁵ Tora started to take a direct place of the pre-Babilonic adoration of God in creation. H. Trosh-Samuelson: Op.cit., p. 25-64.

¹⁶ M. Buber: *Ich und Du*. Philipp Reclam Jun, Stuttgart 1995.

¹⁷ „(...) our eyes open to the beauty of creation, make us sensible to care for the earth”: E.D. Frishman, D.E.S. Stein, J. Keren-Black: *Mishkan T'filah. World Union Edition – A Progressive Siddur (Mishkan T'filah, Luxury – World Union Edition)*. CCAR, 2010, p. 376.

¹⁸ For instance by buying ecological products, avoiding using one-way plates by common feasts and eating, encouragement of pro-ecological activities of other members.

and focus on tangible benefits (for instance: the passage about Noah and flood and dryness as penalty for bad behaviour, this all is explained in the frame of so called *Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang* (so called: “act-consequence relation”), and the idea, that God is the ruler over the nature, similar to other deities in antique world)¹⁹. The care for environment has to result as well from a moral obligation to do the good, and avoid bad, what is written in in a human heart in the act of creation²⁰. When human being takes moral choices, he/she saves the good in the world, and makes his care for this good visible. The text about creation (Gen 1-2) is interpreted in many facets in similar vein as in Judaism²¹. In Catholic Church in addition to the scriptures, the example of Saints – way-pointers and personification of the ideal concept of man is important. For instance Franc from Assisi in his love to the Nature is a vivid sign of mystical treatment of Nature – as an equivalent partner, as brother and sister²². The richness, healing power of the nature and its harmony was stressed as well by Hildegard von Bingen²³, whose portrait can be seen on many healing herbs sold in pharmacies nowadays. Today's monasteries sustain this close-to nature tradition by keeping to the natural light day-rhythms and enable people to experience this closeness to the Nature and care during retreats, seminars or conferences. Statements in ecological questions base often on the neo-Thomist ethics²⁴ and Medieval philosophy²⁵, which can be characterized by a particular concept of world in which human is a centre in the ladder of beings, above having the spiritual realm beyond the natural. Although the nature is subordinated to human being, this relation shall assemble

¹⁹ A. Szafranski: *Chrześcijańskie podstawy ekologii*. Zakład Ekologii Człowieka KUL, Lublin 1993, p. 9.

²⁰ A. Oworuszko: *Biblijne podstawy ekologii*. ”Drohiczyński Przegląd Naukowy” 2010, nr 2, p. 135-152.

²¹ Some researcher maintain that due to this Genesis-text referred before people didn't paid enough attention to the nature: L. White: *The historic roots of our ecological crisis*. ”Science” 1967, Vol. 55, No. 3767, p. 1203-1207. Other researches don't see such a correlation between ecological attitude and religion: H.H. Boyd: *Christianity and the environment in the American public*. ”Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion” 1999, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 36-44. Another research proves a negative impact for reasons mentioned before (concentration on the end of times), but its important to mention that these researches were conducted almost 20 years ago, when ecological movement was often associated with some movements characterized by the relativism of values and therefore were suspicious for the Church.

²² Compare a book ascribed to him ‘Flowers of Saint Franc of Assisi’: K. Kabatc, E. Kabatc: *Kwiatki świętego Franciszka*. Siedmioróg, Wrocław 1997.

²³ H.V. Bingen, B.W. Hozeski: *Hildegard's healing plants: from her medieval classic physica*. Beacon Press, Boston 2002.

²⁴ A. Dura: *Ekologia głęboka-chrześcijaństwo-etyka*. ”Problemy Ekologii” 1999, vol. 3, nr 1, p. 30-33.

²⁵ K. Bochenek: *Niektóre aspekty zrównoważonego rozwoju w świetle chrześcijańskiej filozofii średniowiecznej*. ”Problemy ekorozowju” 2010, vol. 5, nr 1, p. 71-79.

that between human and God taking form of caring for the nature, as God cares for him – with love and responsibility²⁶. In protestant and free churches, the activity depends often on the possibilities of local churches and engagement of their members.

Summarizing Christian churches find more and more their own voice and explanation of ecological consciousness basing on their religious sources. Different denominations in Christianity sustain in diverse ways many initiatives for sake of the environment, which depends on degree of centralization, the conditions in which a community lives, and on members. Therefore the meaning of common action grows as a measure of taking stronger impact on the policy.

Islam as having foundations in Judaism and Christianity bases on texts, which resembles in many places the scriptures of Tenecha and Bible. Allah appears here as the Lord over the world and its Creator (Q 25:2; 10:5). Heaven and earth reveal the signs for human (Q 51:20-21; 22:18), who has the role of custody (Q 35:39 and Sunnah Hadis²⁷) being obliged to maintain the unity of creation, the integrity of the land, flora, fauna and wildlife. This unity can't be achieved to the benefit of someone, but has to aim balance and harmony²⁸. The strongest reference to the nature is derived from the idea of Unity of God (Tawhid)²⁹, which means that all creatures are equal in giving prize to God (Q 54:49; 55:5-9)³⁰ and in the Islamic principle of gentleness (Ihsan) denoting respect for others. Some legislative laws originate in the idea³¹ of Allah as the only ruler of the earth and who therefore has an exclusive right to use the land. Moreover there are regulations on profits derived from the use of natural resources, the use of scarce resources and the common welfare is concerning the protection of and the charitable gifts ("awqaf") may be made with the specific conservation objectives³². The reason for ecological and social problems is seen here as well in moral decay, which is understood as the destroying of good creation. The con-

²⁶ A. Domańska: *Antropologia filozoficzna Bonawentury*. "Studia Mediewistyczne" 1986, vol. 24, nr 2, p. 3-45.

²⁷ L. Hobson: *Guiding principles for a solution to environmental problems*. In: *Islam and the Environment*. Ed. H. Abdel Haleem. Ta-Ha, London 1998, p. 34.

²⁸ A. Omar Naseef: *The Muslim declaration on nature*. In: *Islam and the environment*. Ed. H. Abdel Haleem. Ta-Ha, London 1998, p. 18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁰ L. Hobson: *Op.cit.*, p. 41.

³¹ They have a long tradition, for instance prohibition of the destruction of grain, harming animals and women and children of conquered peoples is to find it the address of Caliph Abu Bakr to his army. F.M. Khalid: *Islam and the environment*. In: *Social and economic dimensions of global environmental change*. Ed. P. Timmerman. John Wiley&Sons, Chichester 2002, p. 3.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

sumerism, the obsession with profit and utility without considering morality is blamed for destruction of other is sign of lacking gratitude toward the gift of harmony coming from God³³.

Islam as compared to former religions focuses more on institutional responsibility of some cultures and systems. Especially western civilisation is blamed³⁴ and its cultural imperialism³⁵. Islam is getting more aware of its own values and focuses on setting a strong link between the Qur'an and their legal institutions governing its exercise and looking for practical solutions³⁶. Symbolically, green attitude of Islam can be seen as well in the green colour of flags of Islamic countries³⁷.

Conclusions

The discussed religions due to their worldview and concept of human nature have many in common when it comes to the foundations for the sustainable policy. All the religions use common channels, which affect the sustainable policy: influence on agents, impact on an economic orientation; institutional influence.

Basic ideas and motives for environmental care are very congruent, although Islam authors tend to make their values and ideas exclusive, which can be explained in different ways³⁸. The attempt to speak about religious treasures of own tradition and the interreligious dialog can be very helpful and motivating. The idea that in religions³⁹ (especially in those discussed above) there is more common beliefs than separating ones, opens a possibility to discuss more creative solutions to solve problems on the way to greater sustainability. A very valuable attitude is the one of using the specific forms of wisdom, which are held by each of religion to express common ideas of the unity between human

³³ R. Kamla, S. Gallhofer, J. Haslam: *Islam, nature and accounting: Islamic principles and the notion of accounting for the environment*. "Accounting Forum" 2006, Vol. 30, No. 3, p. 250.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ A. Omar Naseef: *Op. cit.* p. 12-15; R. Kamla, S. Gallhofer, J. Haslam: *Op. cit.*, p. 245-265.

³⁷ It's also highlighted that it was the favourite colour of Muhammad.

³⁸ One possible explanation is lacking contact with other religions and motivation to understand them deeply. Islam as other religions discussed perceives itself as 'the right' religion. Moreover for Christianity a whole Tora is accepted as a source of its religion, and therefore Christians have motivation to understand it and study it within theologian studies. A different situation is when it comes to Islam which deals within Islam religious studies only with Qur'an accepting only Qur'an as a source of the faith. Therefore deals only with those Tora originated, but modified stories when they found their way in Qur'an.

³⁹ See: World Parliament of Religions.

and the nature. This attitude combined with the understanding of the necessity to work together for common wealth⁴⁰ on individual and institutional level can lead to better outcomes.

The religion influences different levels of conducting sustainability: international platforms (the world ethos, Burkhardt protocol), state (advisory role), third-sector, and especially faith-based-organizations, small communities and individuals as by supporting diverse activities on different levels: like encouraging engagement for common goals, advisory role, putting example, organizing pilgrimages, or retrieval to natural places, enabling direct contact to the nature, last but not least by entering into dialogue with scientists to understand better the problems and to had more profound knowledge about possible solutions.

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⁴⁰ Which are for instance included in the world-ethos using a meta-language in the inter-religious dialog.

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**KONCEPCJE NATURY LUDZKIEJ W WYBRANYCH RELIGIACH ŚWIATA
JAKO INSTYTUCJONALNE DETERMINANTY POLITYKI
ZRÓWNOWAŻONEGO ROZWOJU**

Streszczenie: Zrównoważona polityka znajduje się coraz bardziej w centrum zainteresowania politycznego i zarówno politycy, jak i ekonomiści szukają sposobów wprowadzenia jej w sposób efektywny. Religie mogą zapewnić wsparcie instytucjonalne dla ekonomii neoklasycznej, jako że ta nie dostarcza jej. W ekonomii neoklasycznej przez traktowanie wydatków na ochronę środowiska tylko jako dodatkowego kosztu, zmniejsza jej efektywność i nie może zapewnić niezbędnej motywacji do realizacji takiej polityki. Religie z powodu ich szczególnych koncepcji natury ludzkiej mogą wypełnić tę lukę poprzez wpływ na postawy ludzi wobec różnych aspektów życia ludzkiego, w tym problemów, które są przedmiotem zainteresowania polityki zrównoważonego rozwoju. Celem artykułu jest omówienie wpływu koncepcji natury ludzkiej w wybranych religiach świata na politykę zrównoważonego rozwoju. Zadanie to jest realizowane poprzez ukazanie koncepcji natury ludzkiej. Jest ona postrzegana tu w jej trzech wymiarach – wizji świata, wizji społeczeństwa oraz wizji jednostki (na poziomie ciała, duszy i umysłu) – i w zależności od nich wpływa na sposób myślenia o kwestiach polityki zrównoważonego rozwoju. Ponadto powstaje pytanie, w jaki sposób głos religii świata mógłby być lepiej wykorzystany w prowadzeniu tej polityki. Może być stosowany przez współpracę na poziomie metareligijnym – szukając wspólnych cech tychże religii i budując wspólne poglądy w sprawach polityki zrównoważonego rozwoju.

Słowa kluczowe: polityka zrównoważonego rozwoju, koncepcja natury ludzkiej, religie świata.