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## The environmental aspects of Tadeusz Czeżowski's concept of the sense of life: 'I' in the world as a part of it<sup>1</sup>

“The man who regards his own life and  
that of his fellow creatures as meaningless  
is not merely unhappy but hardly fit for life.”

(Albert Einstein)<sup>2</sup>

This article presents the figure of Tadeusz Czeżowski, the creator of the concept of the meaning of human life, formed in the manner of thinking proper to holism and environmental philosophy, called philosophical environmentalism. He considers the meaning of human life in connection with the meaning of other components of nature and society. An individual's life is fully meaningful when, in pursuing their own purpose, they contribute to the purposes inherent in ever-widening environments up to the infinitely great environment of the universe. This is possible when an individual is treated as an integral component of the universe, inseparable from it.

**Keywords:** meaning of life, ecophilosophy, environment, criterion of meaningfulness, ecological style of thinking

### 1. The introductory remark

Professor Tadeusz Czeżowski was born in 1889 in Vienna, where his father, who came from Galician Podolia, stayed for a short internship at the Ministry of the Interior. Then he returned to Galicia as the district head in Gorlice

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<sup>1</sup> I wrote this article on the 40th anniversary of the death of professor Tadeusz Czeżowski (2021, March 28).

<sup>2</sup> A. Einstein, *The World As I See It*, General Press, Natrona Heights, Pa, 2018.

and Żółkiew, and finally settled in Lviv, where he graduated from a four-year folk school, secondary school and the University in mathematics (with Waclaw Sierpiński), physics (with Ignacy Zakrzewski and Marian Smoluchowski) and philosophy (with Kazimierz Twardowski, Władysław Witwicki and Jan Łukasiewicz). During his studies, he met Tadeusz Kotarbiński. It was only in 1918 that he left Galicia, going to Warsaw, and then to Vilnius, where he took up the position of professor at the Stefan Batory University in Vilnius. From 1945, he was a professor at the Nicolas Copernicus University in Toruń. In 1948, he became editor of the quarterly journal "Ruch Filozoficzny" [Philosophical Movement] published in Lviv before the Second World War. Already in the secondary school, he began to be bothered by the ethical question: How should one act to act well? Later, he was more interested in the logic and methodology of science than in ethics. These facts fully justify treating Tadeusz Czeżowski as a Galician who spent a quarter of his life in Galicia.<sup>3</sup>

I met Professor Czeżowski at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s. At that time, he was the head of the Department of Logic at the Nicolas Copernicus University in Toruń. I was a theoretical physicist who was interested in philosophy and, on the basis of his textbook on logic, I prepared for the exam with Prof. Tadeusz Kotarbiński. As two physicists we made contact easily. He invited me to his seminar where I gave a lecture on causality in quantum mechanics. After that, he sent me many books in English, French and German on the philosophy of natural sciences and methodology, which he had received from the Kościuszko Foundation in New York, asking for a review for the "Ruch Filozoficzny". At that time, these books were unavailable in Poland; most of them were subject to political censorship. They were an invaluable source of the latest knowledge for me. Then, Czeżowski agreed to become a reviewer of my doctoral dissertation "The dependence of cause and effect on time" (written under the supervision of Prof. Władysław Krajewski at the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Warsaw) together with Prof. Roman S. Ingarden (junior) – theoretical physicist at the Nicolas Copernicus University and Prof. Maria Kempisty – cybernetician at the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Warsaw. I contacted him often almost until the end of his life in 1981.

After many years, when I became an eco-philosopher, I read his article about the meaning of life (1949) and I found that his concept of the meaning of

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<sup>3</sup> T. Czeżowski received the Cross of Valour for his participation in the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1920. During World War II, risking his life, along with his wife and daughter, he hid several Jewish friends from Vilnius, including the mathematician Abraham Fessel. For this deed, in April 1963, the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem decorated him with the highest Israeli civilian decoration "Medal of the Righteous Among the Nations". On August 22, 2012, Tadeusz and Antonina Czeżowski with their daughter Teresa were posthumously awarded the Honorary Citizenship of Israel for saving Jews during World War II.

life is based on the way of thinking, which is characteristic for environmentalists and eco-philosophers. Czeżowski's scientific achievements are enormous and well known. However, I would like to pay attention to something that not everyone knows about, and what in our time is important for the development of the new philosophy and a new way of thinking. It is about the innovative idea of the meaning of life, presented by Czeżowski at one of his philosophical lectures in 1950s. It is interesting due to the extremely clear and logically precise explanation of the concept of the meaning of life – like many other of his concepts – especially for people accustomed to strict thinking, mainly for graduates of natural sciences. I learnt about it during my didactic work with students of technical, mathematical and natural sciences faculties. He presented the essence of the meaning of life in the language of logic, but not in words and symbols understandable only to specialists, but in a language understandable to the average person with secondary education. His idea of the meaning of life is also attractive because it contains some elements of praxeology and the general theory of systems, which at that time was not well known to him. This shows his intuition about the tendency to further evolution of science and his courage to formulate an innovative concept, which only the future development of philosophy could confirm. The most important, however, is that in his own way he explained the essence of the meaning of life, anticipating the attitude of people to life and the world, presented later by ecologists and eco-philosophers. In further considerations, I will try to show the ecological aspect of the meaning of life contained in Czeżowski's concept. The presentation of this aspect is important because people who make their life meaningful in accordance with Czeżowski's postulates create the necessary conditions to overcome the growing ecological crisis on a global scale and – thanks to this – a chance to extend the life of our species.

## 2. The concept of the meaning of life

One should begin from Czeżowski' trivial ascertainment that generally "life in itself" does not have any meaning. The meaning of life is the work of each person individually. It is the result of how they behave and act. In addition, no one more than themselves can be responsible for the fact that their life has a meaning. Only they are able to give sense to their own life, transforming it from "life in itself" into "life for themselves". Only they can evaluate their own life or someone else's as meaningful or as meaningless. There are many criteria of meaningfulness, and yet their number can be growing. Nevertheless, none of them is sufficiently objective to be acceptable to all. They are usually subjective or, at best, intersubjective, and are valid only in certain communities. The meaningfulness criterion depends on how one understands

the word 'meaning'. One must agree with Czeżowski that 'meaning' is a category of logic and, therefore, one should define it in the language of logic and, consequently, understand it within logic, where something has meaning only if it constitutes some logical whole with its surroundings. In other words, an element of a set has meaning if it is logically connected with other elements of this set by inference relationship. One can also apply it to the human life. Czeżowski wrote: "We say that a combination of words makes sense when it creates a coherent – rational whole, (...) we say: 'someone's life is meaningful', that is, 'this man's life creates a coherent, rational whole'."<sup>4</sup> Human life creates such a whole, when it consists of actions, which have different goals. These goals are arranged in such a way that closer goals are means to achieve further goals. "It may be that all goals are subordinated to one final and supreme goal, which governs a human life completely. About such a harmonized life we will say that it is meaningful, but it is meaningless when it consists of actions guided by occasional impulses, not connected with any unifying thought, sometimes incompatible with each other – a life from day to day under the influence of immediate reactions to external circumstances. A meaningless is also that of a freak who directs all their efforts towards satisfying the mania for collecting worthless things, or a life filled with acting towards unworthy goals. It is meaningful if it has been arranged in such a way that it forms a whole that rationally aims to achieve the best goals of those that we are able to achieve under given conditions. In order to make life meaningful in the above sense, one must first be able to distinguish between what is really good and what is only apparently good, and what is better and worse, and secondly, it is necessary to make efforts to persistently pursue the chosen goals".<sup>5</sup>

When one can say that someone's life is meaningful? Only then when each stage of his life is a conclusion of an earlier stage and a premise for the subsequent one. The principle of consistency ('the conclusion cannot contradict its premise' applies here also. In other words, activities in one phase of life cannot be directed against activities in the next one. The continuity of human activities is characteristic of a meaningful life. Thus, the stages of life and the events that take place in them should be treated as phases of a 'simple' (uncomplicated) process, according to Roman Ingarden's terminology.<sup>6</sup> The meaning of life, understood as a simple process i.e. without moments of discontinuity and bifurcations, is, of course, an extreme idealization, which is, however, permissible on grounds of abstract considerations, within formal logic. The reasonable life

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<sup>4</sup> T. Czeżowski, *Odczyty filozoficzne* [Philosophical lectures], TNT Toruń 1958, s. 146–158.

<sup>5</sup> Tamże.

<sup>6</sup> R. Ingarden (Snr.), *Spór o istnienie świata* [The dispute on the existence of the world], vol. 1, Cracow 1949.

has to form a coherent whole. The transformation of a set in a whole requires a special organization of its structure (elements and interactions between them) so that they could realize a given function of a goal attributed to this set. Therefore, a life is meaningful when it is focused on a task (goal) and when its phases are subordinate to the fulfillment of that task and are organized in such a way that they realize it step by step. Organized life is therefore a necessary condition for a meaningful life, but not a sufficient one. From the point of view of formal logic, it does not matter which goal in life one is heading towards, because any goal can organize human life. However, in practice one looks at the meaning of life in general at the axiological level and identifies a meaningful life with a valuable one. Then, an accepted system of values (ethical values hierarchy) decides about the meaning of life. Therefore, in the common consciousness, one evaluates a meaningful life usually as better than a meaningless one. If so, then the goal, which should organize life to become it reasonable in ethical sense, must be positive from viewpoint of a system of values accepted by community, of which element is an individual person. Thus, this goal ought to be good, valuable, suitable, reasonable or worthy. This requirement applies not only to the so-called ultimate (final) goals, but to intermediate and partial goals, which end the following stages of life of a person and by means of them one achieves the final goals. Only morally correct people can set such goals. As a consequence, a meaningful life is merely an attribute of moral humans. However, not every moral person makes his life meaningful for many reasons. A person who has set a total and final goal also determines partial and intermediate goals either in advance or after closing of subsequent stages of their life. Thus, they plan 'a road map' for the realization of their life goal. It is important that partial goals and intermediate goals should be subordinated to the ultimate life goal, because life is meaningful, if all partial and intermediate goals result from the end goal. It is an example, where future events or states determine the past ones. It is theoretically possible in case if 'final' goals for some community, if individuals are involved in it. However, practice proves otherwise. In statistical distribution, the individuals have convergent or similar goals, as a given community has fixed conditions of collective life, socialization and enculturation. However, one individual person wants to have a meaningful life, while another does not. That depends on their 'free will'. The adaptation to social life, which consists in the respect for common norms, ethical values, beliefs etc., requires resignation from individualistic attitudes as well as adaptation to the conditions of common life and the internalization of common goals. Therefore, all people, aiming to attain their goals, those treated as individual ones, often unintentionally contribute to reaching collective goals formulated by the particular community, where they belong. Therefore, one can say that life of an

individual has a meaning when it facilitates the implementation of collective goals. Shifting from individuals and small communities to greater ones: to the whole population understood as ‘a world society’, one can say that the lives of each individual or community are meaningful, if they contribute to reach mankind’s goals, and, inversely: life of mankind is meaningful, if it contributes to attain the goals of communities or individuals. Hence, one has to deal with a feedback between the individual meaning of life and the meaning of life of a community and the world’s population. As a result of globalization processes, the meaningful life of each individual depends on their partial realization of the goals of the entire population of the Earth. If it is relatively easy to define the goal of each individual and of a small community, it is very difficult to say what goal is or should be set for humankind, the reason being that it does not have any universal system of value, which could be acknowledged as obligatory by all people. The final goal of humankind is determined by two opposed positions – the naturalistic and the religious one. In the first case, this goal is implied by evolution of the universe – of nature and society. In the second case, it is defined by God. These goals can be divergent (even contradictory), if God is opposed to the nature, or convergent, if God and nature are in relation of subordination: either human beings create God, or God creates nature together with humans. In both cases, one assumes implicitly that teleological determinism is most important, and other categories of determinism are subordinated to it. In fact, teleological determinism is a symmetrical representation of causal determinism with respect to the direction of time.<sup>7</sup> If in teleological determinism what has to occur in the future determines what is at present, then in causal determinism, what is at present is conditioned by what was in the past. The schema shown here, connecting the meaningful life of an individual with the meaningful life of humanity, is built on the relatively primitive concept of determinism reduced to causation (typical of the eighteenth-century mechanistic worldview, anachronistic today). Now we know that there are other categories of determinism (including even chaos), which, consequently, gives rise to doubts, which one can formulate in the form of the following questions:

- In what relation is the teleological structure to the chaotic one?
- Does a stochastic system realize the function of an aim?
- Do, in principle, uncoordinated (accidental) activities during the life of individuals or communities contribute to attaining a final goal?
- Is it possible to define what should the final goal be without referring to an ideology or a religion?

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<sup>7</sup> W. Sztumski, *O przyczynowości i celowości* [About causality and teleology], *Z zagadnień filozofii nauk przyrodniczych* [On issues of the philosophy of natural sciences] (ed. Stanisław Butryn), IFiS PAN Warsaw 1991.

- Does an extremely meaningful life, especially a collective one, understood as subordinated to a common final goal, not demand the institution of totalitarian authority as a necessary condition?
- Is it possible to have a meaningful life with full freedom of choice of decision with regard to the final goal in face of divergence of goals and of dispersion of human activities?

I am unable to answer or analyze all of these questions, as it would require extensive research and, in addition, it is not necessary to continue my considerations. If one treats society as an additive set, and not as a mereological one, then individual goals not at all have to be convergent with the goal of the society. Instead, if society is an organized and integrated set, that is a system, and it is so, in fact, then the divergence of individual goals, resulting from free will of individuals, is only seemingly chaotic. Anyway, chaos – contrary to current opinion – is not a disorder; a chaotic set can be and normally is a system, determined not only by a causal relationship. The qualification of a goal as ‘suitable’ depends on cultural and historic conditioning, in which a community functions. Therefore, in a multicultural world there are many criteria, by means of which one can qualify the ‘suitability’ of goals because of the notion of suitability itself is relative. As a result of limiting freedom of an individual by a community under the influence of processes of socialization, enculturation, indoctrination, education etc., goals of individuals, in statistical distribution, are convergent or similar, and at least they overlap partly with goals of the community, because individuals co-create and co-realize the collective function of the goal of their community. The absolute notion of ‘a suitable goal’ is independent of paradigms of culture, ideology, politics etc., which makes it possible in a monocultural society. However, firstly, such a society appears to be not quite realistic, and, secondly, such a society would require a totalitarian political system, which is not exactly desirable. Nevertheless, to a certain extent, it seems possible to define a common suitable end goal, which could be independent of social, cultural and historical conditions. I believe one can find such a goal by referring to what is the main concern of all people in the world and which results from the instinct for self-preservation. It is not a concern dictated by culture (by worldview, ideology, politics, confession, profit, etc.), but only by the biological nature of human beings. The ‘absolute’ end goal is the life and survival of an individual and of humanity as long as possible. Such a final goal is universally accepted by people without regard to any cultural and natural differentiations, except some deviants, who intentionally strive to self-extermination by suicide. Their behavior can result not only from their innate pathological inclinations, but also from transformation of their consciousness under influence of the ‘civilization of death’ at present in the world as well as ideologies of nihilism and religious fundamentalism, propagated by various sects.



### 3. The ecological aspects of Czeżowski's idea of the meaning of life

The natural, biological goal of human beings to survive must be supported through culture. This requires a harmony between the biological and cultural nature of human beings and between their socio-cultural and natural living environment. Therefore, the challenge to survive has to become the goal of cultural activity. Culture ought to synergically interact with nature, and not to stand in opposition as until now. Therefore, one must put in the 'dumpster of history' the civilization of death together with all its negative consequences for man. Instead, to develop it, one should implement the idea of civilization of life, propagated by philosophical environmentalism and other variants of eco-philosophy. Basic category of these philosophies is in general sense the relation 'human-environment', and specifically human behavior (attitudes, activities) towards the environment in which human beings live; the environment broadly understood as the natural habitation (abiotic and biotic), socio-cultural, spiritual or mental one. This relation is the research subject of study of 'environmentology' (a science, which consists of all sub-domains focused on environment) and philosophy. Here, I am interested only in axiological aspect of this relation. On its basis, one can evaluate attitudes, behaviors, activities and ways of thinking, related to environment. According to this ecological criterion, good is all what does not contribute to the excessive degradation of environment or, what prevents degradation, and thereby what contributes to protection of life not only of people on the Earth.

Universal and supra-historical meaning of life can be pursued by individuals or communities, if their goals are subordinated to a fundamental interest of humankind – to ensure the possibility of maximal extension of existence of the human species on the Earth. That requires propagating the ecological consciousness, ecological sensibility, and taking actions to protect the environment. The idea is that thanks to propagating of pro-ecological attitudes it will be possible to reorientate consciousness based on the paradigm of ecologism. It is the principal task for all people responsible for the education of future generations – parents, teachers, priests, journalists, politicians, culture animators etc. In their hands lies the fate of humanity. Life is the more meaningful the more optimally it is organized to achieve the ultimate goal. One should not waste it to achieve goals that are not related to the final goal, and, let alone, to realize wicked ones. The energy of life should not be wasted on something unnecessary, which does not serve public interest, which is useless. Therefore, life, if it is to be meaningful, requires minimal dissipation of human energy. A person's whole life must be subordinated to the basic goal and concentrated on it. As



we know already, it has to form and to perpetuate conditions, which facilitate the maximum extension our life's time on the Earth. Minimization of wasting energy and resources goes hand in hand with the optimization of functioning of social system and, consequently, with the optimization of its structure that is to say of internal organization, in such a manner and to such organizational extent, which would guarantee in given conditions the optimal cooperation between individuals and communities. However, Czeżowski goes yet farther in his idea of the meaning of life. He considers it on three levels successively: individual, social and worldwide. He connected the meaning of an individual's life with the meaning of the world yet at a time when attention was not paid to the already developing globalization processes. He connected the measure of the meaning of life with the ever-larger social environments, starting from the narrowest environment of only one person, gradually to the wider environments of groups, communities, societies, up to the widest one – of the world society. Thus, the meaning of life is all the deeper the more it relates to an ever-greater social and natural environment, in a borderline case, to the universe. It would be best if a person coordinated their life goals gradually with the goals of ever-larger social groups and with ever-wider areas of nature, if their main goal were successively included in the main goals of an increasing number of societies, and, if their final goal resulted deductively from the final goals of the world society and of the universe. As a consequence, an individual would be strongly determined in the social aspect by the global society and in the natural aspect by the universe. This limits severely their free will and even makes it illusory. From the point of view of ecophilosophy, it is important that an individual should be integrated into their environment, with which they co-create an organic whole and unity. Therefore, their relation to the natural and social environment cannot be built on the principle of 'I-and-world' (of independence from the environment), but on the principle 'I-with-world' (together with the environment). Human beings cannot treat the environment as something strange and unfriendly, as something that they are allowed to destroy, but as something of which they are an inseparable part and of which they should take care like of themselves. Czeżowski imagined that the world (and the universe) has a predetermined final goal imposed by the laws of nature or by a god ('Omega' in Teilhard's concept of evolution), towards which man is heading and to which man is subordinated, to make human life meaningful. "The philosophical meaning of the phrase "meaning of life" bases on looking at the world as a whole, of which the life of every human being is a part. If the world is meaningful, then so are its components. As a result, we state that the meaning of the world is its logical and thus harmonious structure. The world undoubtedly has such a structure: we start from this assumption in any scientific research aimed at

discovering the details of this structure. In a harmoniously constructed whole of the world, each part fulfills its specific role – this specificity of each, even the most modest element, can be called its sense within the world”.<sup>8</sup> However, the problem is that no one knows the ultimate goal of the world, all the more of the universe, except for religious people for whom that goal is a god or eternal salvation, which in fact is only enigmatic and illusory knowledge. So, how to reconcile a concrete and imaginable goal with the abstract and unimaginable one? He argues that individual life, if it should be meaningful, must contribute to the realization of the goal functions of communities, societies, nature and the universe. That claim is based on the presumption that the universe is a closed and organized system that realizes a function of a goal and implements it during the natural and social evolution. As a consequence, the world is teleologically determined. A meaningful life also requires the coordination of a person's own interests with the interests of groups, society, the world and the universe. Unfortunately, in the article *Three attitudes towards the world*, Czeżowski stated, “Man and the world are in an opposition that imposes itself in various forms when reflecting on oneself”.<sup>9</sup> In other words, a person can make their life meaningful if they subject themselves to the order of the world, and even of the universe, and if they find a compromise between their own free will and the objective necessity immanent in sensual reality. The formulation of these two necessary conditions for a meaningful life: coordinating the goals of individuals with the ultimate goal of the universe and human beings consciously submitting themselves to the world order as a result of tolerance and compromise, proves that Czeżowski built his concept of the meaning of life on the “ecological style of thinking” yet unknown to him. Moreover, this proves that the sources of pro-ecological attitudes are not only on the utilitarian level – if one wants to survive, one has to take care not only of oneself, but also for other people, not only for the local environment, but also for the global one. Sources of pro-ecological attitudes can also be found on theoretical and logical levels. One has to care for other people's environment and interests to make one's own life meaningful, even if one is not sure if one survives as a consequence. Environmental ethics does not have to result from the awareness of threats to existence caused by environmental crises or catastrophes. It may also result from considerations about the harmony in the world, its sustainable development and the meaning of life and of the world. One can arrive at ecological philosophy as a consequence of considerations regarding the environment as well as of consideration of the meaning of human life.

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<sup>8</sup> T. Czeżowski, *Odczyty filozoficzne* [Philosophical lectures], dz. cyt.

<sup>9</sup> T. Czeżowski, *Trzy postawy wobec świata* [w:] tegoż, *Pisma z etyki i teorii wartości*, ed. P. Smoczyński, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1989.

The idea of the meaning of life presented here may have various restrictions and may be criticized for many reasons: that it is based on an exaggerated idealization of the world, that one unjustifiably transfers the properties of society and human to nature, that one assumes that the principles of logic apply also in nature (even in the universe), that one makes conclusions from countable sets with regard to uncountable ones, etc. However, this does not diminish its significance, because it shows how to make one's own life meaningful because of shaping pro-ecological attitudes.

### Conclusive remarks

Czeżowski's concept of the meaning of human life was innovative at his time, because he built it on ecological thinking that appeared only in the late 1990s. He connected the meaning of life directly with the care for natural and social environment. The life of an individual is meaningful, if they can define their final goals in such a way that it is subordinate to the main goal of their social environment. The life of an individual becomes meaningful the more, the more the realization of their final goal contributes to the achievement the main goals of society and nature, in the extreme case, to the achievement of the ultimate goal of the world's society and of the universe. In this way, Czeżowski situated individuals in the universe and in the global society, about which little was known at that time. He regarded the individual as an integral and inseparable part of the universe in the natural and social as well as in the local and the global dimension. This is how the relations between an individual and their environment are understood now in ecophilosophy.

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### **Środowiskowe aspekty koncepcji sensu życia Tadeusza Czeżowskiego: „Ja” w świecie jako jego część**

#### *Streszczenie*

W artykule przedstawiono postać Tadeusza Czeżowskiego, twórcy koncepcji sensu życia człowieka zbudowanej na gruncie stylu myślenia właściwego holizmowi oraz filozofii środowiska zwanej environmentalizmem filozoficznym. Rozpatruje on sens życia człowieka w powiązaniu z sensem innych elementów przyrody i społeczeństwa. Życie jednostki jest w pełni sensowne, gdy realizując swój własny cel, przyczynia się do realizacji celów właściwych coraz szerszym środowiskom aż do nieskończenie wielkiego, jakim jest wszechświat. Jest to możliwe wtedy, gdy jednostkę traktuje się jako integralny składnik uniwersum, nierozzerwalnie z nim związany.

**Słowa kluczowe:** sens życia, ekofilozofia, środowisko, kryterium sensowności, ekologiczny styl myślenia