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# Provisional (Substitute-Dispersive) Status of Ethics in the Polish Educational System

## ABSTRACT

The subject of this article is the actual—not only formal, but also factual—location of ethics as a school subject in the supervisory, managerial and organizational structure of the Polish education system. The research aim of the text is to argue—based on the domestic and foreign scientific literature, opinion-forming publications, and the author's own work—that ethics is for some reason the only subject in the Polish education system whose rachitic and nebulous status can be described as institutional dispersion, or in other words, as dispersive (in)presence. The methodological instrumentarium of my paper consists of complementary methods of analysis and synthesis of sources and data, the method of comparative analysis, the method of contextual interpretation, the constructivist method and the method of exemplification. The line of argumentation of the article leads from demonstrating and analyzing the location of ethics in the legal and education systems in force in Poland, with its consequences for the “ordopractic” functioning of ethics in the realities of Polish schools. In the next step, I discuss the issue of asynchronously differentiating the ethical domain in the education system, which causes it to be parceled out and disintegrated between three uncoordinated domains: the subject matter, occasional ethical content, moral education

## KEYWORDS

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dispersion, alienation  
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and ethics lessons proper. The main line of argumentation of the article is the pivotal nature of ethics in Polish education. Its most serious consequence is its merely *ersatz* status, involving not only law and school *usus*, but also public perception.

## Introduction: Implementation of ethics into the education system

At the very beginning I would like to emphasize that the analyses and reflections included in this text, which I wish to share with the readers (being open to reliable criticism and creative debate), are not just a product of purely academic considerations, but an outcome of my long professional experience that includes working as a teacher or ethics in a secondary school.

The subject of this article is the actual—not only formal, but also factual—location of ethics as a school subject in the supervisory, managerial and organisational structure of the Polish education system. The research aim of this text is to prove—based on the domestic and foreign scientific literature, opinion-forming publications, and the author's own work—that ethics is, for some reason, the only subject in the Polish education system whose weak and unclear status can be described as institutional dispersion, or in other words, as dispersive presence. The methods used to prepare this paper included the methods of analysis and synthesis of sources and data, the method of comparative analysis, the method of contextual interpretation, the constructivist method, and the method of exemplification. The methods used to prepare this paper included the method of analysis and synthesis of sources and data, the method of comparative analysis, the method of contextual interpretation, the constructivist method, and the method of exemplification (Judycki 1993; Szatur-Jaworska 2001: 85; Bronk 2006: 62; Besler 2007: 163–164).

In Polish schools, according to the law and reinforced common practices, ethics is treated in the way that raises numerous and justified objections. One may have the correct impression that ethical education in Poland is perceived as something redundant or even unwanted (Stolarski 2007: 415). It seems that ethics is to be present at school for only one reason: it is to legitimize the presence of religious education in formal public education, confirming its republican and

lay character. However, in my opinion, which is rooted in historical and legal aspects, it is exactly the opposite: introduction of religious education into the system of public education sanctioned the need to introduce ethics classes which were (in advance) planned as an alternative (Madalińska-Michalak, Jeżowski 2018: 221) for religious education. Such solution made it possible to: (1) satisfy the demands of the Church (the episcopate of Poland, to be precise) which, from the time of the political system change, i.e. from May 1990, demanded restoring religious education at schools. Such restoration took place on 1 September 1990 according to the Instruction of the Ministry of National Education of 3 August 1990 (Krzywkowska 2017: 355; Janczarek 2021). It is worth mentioning that religious education had been removed from schools on the basis of the Act of 15 July 1961 on the development of education (articles 1–2) (Pyter 2015: 113–114; Madalińska-Michalak, Jeżowski 2018: 220); (2) satisfy (at least to a certain degree), progressive aspirations of the emerging civil society (Wałdoch 2008: 5, 12–13; Tomczyk 2018: 11, 14, 17–18), gradually changing into the information society (Szewczyk 2007: 10; Goliński 2011: 28, 31, 118, 138; Rozkrut 2017).

### Conceptual distinctions: ethical content—moral education—lessons of ethics

To maintain order and precision, first we should make a distinction into the following concepts: ethical content, moral education and ethics as an independent didactic unit. Ethical content and moral education are permanent elements present at schools. The former, in a partial, occasional, but topical (i.e. problem-based) form, are transferred to students as inseparably connected with the curriculum. They are mainly taught during compulsory subjects such as: Polish (also, to a lesser degree, foreign languages), citizenship education, entrepreneurship, history, and education for safety. Also, they occur as an integral component of additional subjects, such as philosophy (if the subject is taught by a given school and is not replaced with music, art or Latin) or religious education.

Within the functional aspect, ethics is a component of moral education carried out by educational institutions according to the school

educational-preventive programme, through a series of actions. The most important of those actions are lessons with the class teacher. Also, moral education is fulfilled through the classes of education for living in a family, library lessons, classes conducted in the school common room, care and upbringing classes, individual paths of student support, pedagogic activities (Ziółkowski 2016: 17–18, 51, 73, 88, 91, 109 et al.), as well as ongoing cooperation between the school and parents in analysing and solving students' educational problems. Also, after-school classes are the space in which moral education may be carried out, especially classes in philosophy or ethics, social circles, psychology or Bible (religious) clubs, school voluntary work centres, as well as film discussion clubs.

Transmitters of moral education organised or coordinated by the school also include educational campaigns such as "School with Class," "School of Dialogue," International Tolerance Day, World Day of Kindness and Greetings, Earth Day, World Day of Animals, Week of Happiness at School, Day of Human Rights, International Day of People with Disabilities, World Health Day, Teddy Bear Day, Day of Safe Internet, International Day of Mother Tongue, Flag Day, and many others.

Also, schools offer moral education through celebrations of memoirs or important historical and national events within the all-Polish, regional or local scale. The most important of them are the Day of National Education, the National Independence Day, the anniversary of the Constitution of 3rd May, and the School's Patron Day.

Moral education at school also occurs through encouraging children and youth for voluntary work, e.g. for supporting the School Club of the "Caritas" charity organisation, working in local hospices, participating in "NEUCA for Health" marches, helping animal shelters, taking part in the all-Polish social project "Szlachetna paczka" ["Charitable Package"], volunteering in the annual final of the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity, participation in one-time and cyclical support actions that include collecting money, materials, products, plastic bottle caps or paper, which are to be used for charity, school or class purposes.

That impressive but, at the same time, incomplete and example list, can be complemented by such forms of the school's moral education as participation in the actions of honorary blood donation

(organised, e.g., by the European Foundation of a Honorary Blood Donor “Relatives”); participation in School Strike for Climate, which is getting more and more popular; involvement (often initiated by the youth themselves, which is praiseworthy) in charitable raffles, school and Christmas charity fairs, collections of food and other things, social-educational actions such as “Daffodils,” “Yellow Santas,” etc.; establishing and conducting or supporting places in which people may share food or clothes, or bookcrossing centres (free exchange of books, handbooks and magazines).

Also, moral education of students is carried out through the cooperation of schools with local environments. Students may also create and carry out social projects offered by the foundation “Zwolnieni z teorii” (“Exempt from Theory”) which helps young people develop skills needed to enter the job market.

According to §1, para. 1, of the Regulation of the Minister of Education of 14 April 1992 on the conditions and way of organising religious education in public schools (Journal of Laws 1992, issue 36, item 155), ethics is a school subject in public primary schools (upon the parents’ request) and in public secondary schools (upon the request of parents or students if they are adult). For unknown reasons (and not taking into account the obvious fact that classes in ethics include ethical and moral contents that are integrated and systematized, and not dispersed in various school subjects), the law-maker assigned such classes only to primary and secondary schools, forgetting about preschools. This is the first tangible example of dispersion perceived as curricular fragmentation leading to trivialization and marginalization of ethics in the Polish system of education.

The truth is that in Poland there is no legal act that would be directly dedicated to ethics. Regulations specifying the formal status and location of ethics in the organizational structure of education occur in the resolutions specifying the conditions and ways of organizing religious education at public preschools and schools. The word “ethics” is not mentioned in the titles of those resolutions, which seems absurd. As we can see in the above-mentioned regulation, which was based on art. 12, para. 1 and 2 of the Act of 7 September 1991 on the system of education (Journal of Laws 2019, item 1481, 1818 and 2197), the legislator focuses only on the organization of religious education in the public education system. For some reasons,

both the law-maker and the executive authority, represented by the Ministry of National Education, not only connects ethics with religion (with bonds that seem inseparable), but also subjects ethics to religion, with which the authority justifies the sense of introducing and maintaining it in the Polish school.

From 1990s, legal regulations concerning Polish education have been subject to constant changes. Since 2015 such changes have been introducing every year (sic!). The system of legal information “Legalis C.H. Beck” has recorded as many as nine changes (status on 06.08.2022) of the uniform text of the Act on the education system of 7 September 1991 (Journal of Laws 1991, No. 95, item 425). The changes occurred on:

- 16 May 1996 (Journal of Laws 1996, No. 67, item 329),
- 19 November 2004. (Journal of Laws 2004, No. 256, item 2572),
- 4 December 2015 (Journal of Laws 2015, item 2156),
- 31 October 2016 (Journal of Laws 2016, item 1943),
- 8 November 2017 (Journal of Laws 2017, item 2198),
- 5 July 2018 (Journal of Laws 2018, item 1457),
- 5 July 2019 (Journal of Laws 2019, item 1481),
- 18 June 2020 (Journal of Laws 2020, item 1327),
- 16 September 2021 (Journal of Laws 2021, item 1915).

This legal act is still valid in some aspects<sup>1</sup>, but irrespective of this, with regard to the education system reform introduced in 2017, the Polish parliament introduced new regulations. They include the Act of 14 December 2016—Education law (Journal of Laws 2017, item 59), with particular emphasis on the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 14 February 2017 on the preschool education curriculum and primary school curriculum, including the curriculum for students with moderate or significant mental disability, as well as the curriculum used in first-level vocational schools, in special schools preparing students for employment, and in postsecondary schools (Journal of Laws 2017, item 356 as amended), and especially the Regulation of the Minister of Education of 8 March

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1 General regulations; management of schools and public institutions; evaluation, classification and promotion of students in public schools; primary school final exam; secondary school final exam and professional exam; financial support for students; detailed regulations; penal regulations.

2022 changing the regulation on the preschool education curriculum and primary school curriculum, including the curriculum for students with moderate or significant mental disability, as well as the curriculum used in first-level vocational schools, in special schools preparing students for employment, and in postsecondary schools (Journal of Laws 2022, item 609). Although the above-mentioned act of 14 December 2016—Education law (Journal of Laws 2017, item 59), is quite new (it has been valid for six years), it has been amended four times (year after year):

- on 10 May 2018 (Journal of Laws 2018, item 996),
- on 21 May 2019 (Journal of Laws 2019, item 1148),
- on 7 May 2020 (Journal of Laws 2020, item 910),
- on 18 May 2021 (Journal of Laws 2021, item 1082).

It turns out, however, that this document in no way refers to the legal reinforcement of ethics lessons in the system of education. Such reinforcement is still subject to the earlier act on the system of education of 7 September 1991, in the version of 16 September 2021 (Journal of Laws 2021, item 1915). Article 12, para. 1 and 2 of the act, which is not as vague in terms of the legal status of ethics in the education system, as it is unclearly formulated, was not changed at all in further amendments to this act. Let us see that para. 1 of this article only generally refers to the organization of religious education in preschools, primary schools and secondary schools. There is not a single word about ethics in it. Paragraph 2, in turn, complements the previous one. It states that “the conditions and ways of carrying tasks mentioned in para. 1 by the school” are to be specified by “the Minister in charge of education in cooperation with the authorities of the Catholic Church and the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church, as well as other churches and religious associations,” through appropriate regulations. Thus, the approach to and the position of ethics in the organizational structure of the education system are determined by the normative act of a lower order.

Nothing was changed by the act of 14 December 2016—Education law (Journal of Laws 2017, item 59) in the version of 18 May 2021 (Journal of Laws 2021, item 1082). No attempt to reconstitute ethics was made. What is more, the term “ethics” appears in the document only once—in the preamble in which we can read that “respecting the Christian system of values, teaching and education

is based on the universal principles of ethics.” The sentence itself deserves a separate article. Here I will only interpret it in a general manner. Unfortunately, the sentence indicates a strongly internalized conceptual chaos (at the level of the law-maker), as well as competence gaps filled with ruthlessly copied, stereotypical convictions that belong to the social imaginarium.

If this is the case with the knowledge of ethics among decision-makers performing the function of the authorities, the position and description of ethics in the Polish law is understandable. Also, it is not a surprise that it functions in the system of education in the way it does, and that people (even teachers of ethics) perceive it this way (which seems shocking). In this context, alarming are the results of the research related to “the fulfilment of teaching ethics in Polish schools in 2006–2015” (Madalińska-Michalak, Jeżowski, Więśław 2017: 15), published in 2017 by Joanna Madalińska-Michalak, Antoni J. Jeżowski and Szymon Więśław in the monograph entitled *Etyka w systemie edukacji w Polsce* [*Ethics in the Polish System of Education*]. In the book we can read that “only one in two respondents [among all the ethics teachers who participated in the research—added by P.D.] to a higher or lesser degree believed that teachers of ethics are prepared for conducting the classes” (Madalińska-Michalak, Jeżowski, Więśław 2017: 139).

What is more, “almost one in three respondents have doubts concerning the quality of preparing teachers of ethics for conducting classes in this subject. They declared they have «no opinion» on this, and 18% of the research participants said that teachers of ethics are not prepared for conducting classes in this subject at school [...]” (Madalińska-Michalak, Jeżowski, Więśław 2017: 140). Also, according to the research authors, “teachers in towns and cities evaluate their own preparation for the job higher than teachers in villages,” and “private school teachers are more critical towards their preparation for the job” than teachers who work in public schools (Madalińska-Michalak, Jeżowski, Więśław 2017: 142).

Interestingly, teachers of ethics, who completed studies related to philosophy or ethics, i.e. those who are the most predestined to teaching the subject, evaluate their qualifications for teaching ethics “with much distance.” Only 47% of them believe they are well-prepared for teaching ethics, out of which only 11% evaluated their preparation



as very good, 15%—good, and 22%—quite good. In turn, teachers of languages, “who acquired qualifications to teach ethics through the participation in various courses,” evaluate their preparation for the job surprisingly high (67% positive assessments).<sup>2</sup> It is similar with religious education teachers (64% positive assessments) and teachers of other humanist and social subjects (60% positive assessments), with the exception of history teachers with qualifications for teaching ethics, who were the most critical of themselves, although they were still less critical than teachers who finished philosophical or ethical studies (49% positive assessments) (Madalińska-Michalak, Jeżowski, Więśław 2017: 144–145).

It is noteworthy that as many as 80% of the “teachers with the lowest level of education” (with the bachelor’s degree) believe that they are very well prepared for teaching ethics. In case of teachers with higher qualifications, especially those with the doctor’s degree, there is a stronger criticism on this issue, which is why only 47% positively evaluate their preparation for the job (Madalińska-Michalak, Jeżowski, Więśław 2017: 144, 151).

Except for the history teachers, the degree of other teachers’ being satisfied with the qualifications for teaching ethics at school turns out to be proportional to their approach to the need for introducing changes in the way of educating people who do such a job. Such changes are the most expected by the teachers of ethics who completed philosophical or ethical studies (40%), and the least expected by the teachers of ethics after philological studies (teachers of Polish—27%; teachers of foreign languages—19%), pedagogical studies (23%), and historical studies (22%). Among the teachers who do not really support the implementation of changes into the way of educating teachers of ethics, the largest group are theologians. In the group of teachers who completed theological studies, only 17% support the systemic reorganization of educating ethics teachers, 32% are against it, and 51% have no opinion on this (Madalińska-Michalak, Jeżowski, Więśław 2017: 151).

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2 Teachers of Polish who obtained the qualifications for teaching ethics are less optimistic; 52% of them say their preparation for the job is on a satisfactory level (Madalińska-Michalak, Jeżowski, Więśław 2017: 144).

In the Act of 14 December 2016—Education Law (Journal of Laws 2017, item 59), in the version of 18 May 2021 (Journal of Laws 2021, as amended 1082), there is a statement that “respecting the Christian system of values, teaching and education is based on the universal principles of ethics.” Unfortunately, the statement multiplies the common and symptomatic misunderstanding and tangles itself into logical contradictions.

First, no system of values can be *a priori* based on the principles expressing any obligations as, due to the classical statement of Henryk Elzenberg, obligations are implied not by the principles but by the values that justify the principles (Elzenberg 2002b: 81–85, 88, 90). In this sense, the principles are of secondary importance, as they are derived from the values upon which they are founded.

Second, from the context we can (implicitly) deduct that the author of the statement mistakes the system of values (axiology) for the system of moral values, norms and assessments, i.e. ethics. Moreover, the author narrows the concept of axiology (reduced to the notion of ethics) to confessional axiology, and, more precisely, to Christian axiology.

Third, there is nothing like the “universal principles of ethics.” Ethics, as a specific and coherent system of values, norms and moral evaluations, is of a particular nature. The term “universal ethics” is an ambition-related relic of the past; an objectless oxymoron, an academic abstraction (Grenz 1997: 21–22; Hołowska 2010: 50–51, 57–59). It is true that ethics may attempt to be universal, but only in the sense given to it by Immanuel Kant, i.e. as an *a priori* formal system (Finnis 1983: 74; MacIntyre 1996: 472). Only in this sense we can speak, for example, about the universal use of the ethical principle of justice. However, when we are to formulate detailed solutions, which include filling that general principle with specific, life-related content, the potential universal nature of ethics disappears, yielding to context-based specification. Ethical systems, which are particular in their nature, submit universal postulates and directives, imperceptibly acquiring or purposefully not mentioning their own impassable particularity (MacIntyre 1978: 107–108, 167; 1984: 498–500; 1996: 470; 2007: 247; 2010: 64–65; Zdrenka 2003: 12, 25, 44, 115, 129, 133, 159, 163–164, 168; Gałęcki 2020: 60, 112, 425–426, 470, 559, 561–562, 563, 564, 566–567, 570). In this context, we can quote the

words of one of the most outstanding contemporary ethicists, Alasdair MacIntyre who, in the dissertation: *Whose Justice? What Rationality?* unequivocally states that “there is no place for referring to practical-rationality-as-such, or to justice-as-such, for which all rational people, due to the rationality itself, would have to argue. There is only a practical-rationality-of-this-or-that-tradition, and justice-of-this-or-that-tradition” (MacIntyre 2007: 467; see also MacIntyre 1983: 454; 1987: 10–11).

Forth, equally problematic, as previously indicated, is the statement that teaching and upbringing in Poland is based on the “universal principles of ethics,” respecting, however, the “Christian system of values.” The problem is that, apart from what was proved above in the first and second points, the assumed universality of ethical principles cannot be limited to a particular—in this case Christian (Cackowski 1993; Woleński 1993)—axiology, regardless of its arbitrary claims to universality and absoluteness.

Regulation of the Minister of Education of 14 February 2017 on the preschool education curriculum and primary school curriculum, including the curriculum for students with moderate or significant mental disability, as well as the curriculum used in first-level vocational schools, in special schools preparing students for employment, and in postsecondary schools (Journal of Laws 2017, item 356 as amended) provides a few more details concerning the issue, although it does not specify the place of ethics in the education system. Instead, the regulation mentions ethics as one of the subjects of school education. We can say that this is an attempt, based on professional scientific knowledge, to formulate the educational objectives, teaching content and conditions and ways of implementing the curriculum for ethical education.

As we can see from the above, the location of ethics as a school subject in the Polish legal system is very weak, and it is such location that determines the institutional “ordopraxy”<sup>3</sup>, i.e. the order of

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3 I made this term by combining the Latin noun *ordo*—“established order,” and the old Greek *πράξις*—“action,” through the analogy to the term “orthopraxy” introduced into the post-conciliar Roman Catholic theology by Johann Baptist Metz as a diptych completion of the term “orthodoxy” (Haker 2001: 59–60; Klinger 2001; Czekalski 2013: 224–225, 227; Feliga 2014:

functioning and perception, and axiometry (hierarchical measure of values) in the social system.

## In defence of the dignity of ethics: Mackinder's parallel

This reminds me of *mutatis mutandis*, a case described in 1913 in the magazine *The Geographical Teacher* by a great British geographer and one of the creators of geopolitics, Halford John Mackinder. It does not refer to ethics, but to other school subjects (geography and history), and to the British system of education, but it is also related to the issue which seems to be very important in the context of the problem of a provisional status of ethics in the Polish education system.

Although geography and history differ from each other in terms of subject and methodology, Mackinder postulates—albeit only in primary school teaching—to merge them into a combined subject called “geography and history” (Mackinder 1913: 4, 5). In contrast, with regard to university teaching, in teachers’ colleges and in secondary schools, especially in the older grades, Mackinder supports the separateness of geography and history (Mackinder 1913: 5). However, in both teaching formulas, he demands that geography synthesised with history (Potocki 2009: 5) be taught by an educator “who has studied both geography and history, and has studied them separately” (Mackinder 1913: 5).

Mackinder further argues that the perceived privileging of history in the British education system, justified by its “greater and more established dignity” (Mackinder 1913: 4), fails to match its character as a “literary subject” as compared to geography as a “scientific subject” (Mackinder 1913: 5). However, this did not prevent the founders of the British educational order in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century from treating geography as a mere illustration and an auxiliary element for teaching history (Mackinder 1913: 4–5), which stripped geography of its due dignity and autonomy as a school subject that is equally important to history. As a geographer, therefore, Mackinder made it a point of honour to defend the dignity of geography, while

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174, 205, 207–213, 271; Królikowski 2018: 83; Pokrywiński 2022: 17, 145, 204–205, 207).

at the same time showing a willingness to recognise the dignity of history (Mackinder 1913: 5), thus putting an end to the systemic antagonising of the two subjects, which reduces the dignity of the former. In addition to giving geography autonomy and equal status with history, the dignity of geography is to be reinforced by the fact that it should only be taught by teachers with proper specialization (Mackinder 1913: 5).

My reference to Mackinder is merely illustrative and serves as a parallel to illustrate the positioning of religious education and ethics in the Polish education system and the position they actually occupy within it. Religious education can be compared to Mackinder's history, with its "greater and more established dignity," while ethics can be compared to educationally pauperized geography. After three decades from the return of religious education to schools, with the parallel introduction of ethics into them, and over a century after Mackinder's memorable and landmark text, the time has come to (apart from settlements and summaries appropriate to such circumstances) repeat his appeal. This time, however, such appeal should include the demand to restore the systemically, educationally and socially defiled dignity of ethics, but without attacking religious education or joining the critics who antagonise the two subjects and pit them one against the other.

### Pivotal nature of ethics

The intentions of my text are clear: while recognising the dignity and autonomy of religion, I would like to defend the dignity and autonomy of ethics. I am against categorising these subjects as symmetrical, antagonistic, equivalent or substitutive respectively, for they are—just like other school subjects—fully autonomous. This is evidenced by the history, nature, aims and functions assigned to ethics and religion separately. My research objective is not merely to rehabilitate ethics and convince others that it should be equal to religion, but to show—with reference to the theses of Mackinder outlined above and the conclusion drawn from them—that, as geography is for history, ethics is for religion a fundamental discipline and not just an illustration or an ancillary element. Just as Mackinder draws our attention to the "geographical axis of history," highlighting the

determining influence of the geographical factor on the course of the universal history (Mackinder 2009: 17), I, too—with all the obvious differences—submit for discussion the thesis of the essentially pivotal character of ethics both in relation to religion and to the whole corpus of school subjects raising or referring to moral issues, as I signalled earlier.

Geography and history should definitely be brought closer together in order to explicate the influences and dependencies of social moral systems and scientific ethical theories on the geographical factor and vice versa. The parallel of the statuses of geography and ethics is surprising in view of their apparent differences, and it finds interesting continuations in more recent works by domestic authors. In 2012, in the *Geographical Review*, Andrzej Lisowski published an important article: “The Place of Social and Economic Geography in Geography and Education System” (Lisowski 2012). Everything he wrote on the historical and current complications related to the location and importance of geography in the system of education can be referred to ethics (and he was not the only author who discussed this in various publications) (Lisowski 2004; Liszewski 2004; Maik 2004, 2016: 28–30; Wójcik, Suliborski 2021: 10).

I share Lisowski’s concerns, expressed on behalf of the environment of Polish geographers, about the major threats to which geography is exposed (Lisowski 2012: 172), readdressing them, of course, to ethics. They turn out to be surprisingly congruent, although it is possible that they involve a much wider range of disciplines.

One of the most serious concerns of ethics is taking over the issues traditionally belonging to it by other disciplines, collectively referred to by Józef Pieter as “the sciences of moral phenomena” (Pieter 1967: 141).

Such sciences include: (1) psychology (Rest 1982; Flanagan 1993; Banyard, Flanagan 2006; Bloom 2015, 2017; Neill 2016; Colacicchi 2021; Vargas, Doris 2022), which is transformed into the psychology of ethics, like in the ideas of Erich Fromm (Fromm 1999), as well as ethically-oriented humanistic/existential psychology (Szasz 1967, 2001; Rogers, Stevens 1971; Maslow 1986; May 1989; Żylicz 1995); (2) psychology of morality (Ossowska 2002), due to the characteristic of which, provided by Piotr Olaf Żylicz, we obtain a full view on self-identification and approach of this discipline to ethics: “Ethics,

for moral psychology, is [...] like an elder brother in the faith. It is indispensable because it provides key categories and many universally valid reflections and judgments, while, at the same time, it is either negated or ignored by it. Psychology of morality, in its search for identity, wants to be independent and, at the same time, it wants to be perceived as an empirical science, which ethics, by definition, is not” (Żylicz 2010: 26–27). This discipline that aspires for scientific independence as compared to ethics, is complemented by (3) so-called social psychology of morality, forced by scientists such as Philip Zimbardo (Zimbardo 2008), who uses it as the foundation for the development of the psychology of evil (Zimbardo 2004), as well as by Jonathan Haidt (Haidt 2007, 2014), Elliot Aronson and Carol Tavris (Aronson, Tavris 2008), Steven Pinker (Pinker 2005, 2015), Joseph P. Forgas, Lee Jussim, and Paul Alphonse Maria van Lange (Forgas, Jussim, van Lange 2016).

The range of ethical science appropriated by psychology also includes the “new ethics” created in 1949, inspired by the depth psychology by Carl Gustav Jung, and opposed to the “old” ethics. The author and promoter of the new ethics was Jung’s student, Erich Neumann (Neumann 1969).

The psychologization of ethics increasing at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Lubomirski 1989; Olech 2001; Rabinowski 2004: 26; Krajewski 2010: 428) was also expressed in the psychoanalytic trend which was developing fast at that time, and which finally took the form of the “ethics of psychoanalysis,” in accordance with the term given to it by Jacques Lacan (Lacan 1992). Important contribution to the ethics of psychoanalysis was made by Lawrence Friedman (Friedman 1956), Thomas Stephen Szasz (Szasz 1974), Ernest Wallwork (Wallwork 1991), Don S. Browning (Browning 1997), and the above-mentioned Jacques Lacan (Lacan 1992).

The conquest of ethics by psychology also took place in the section of so-called “positive psychology,” understood directly as the science of happiness, well-being and human virtues (Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi 2000; Seligman 2002; Carr 2004; Czapiński 2004; Martin 2007; Compton, Hoffman 2020), and the psychology of emotions in the trend of emotionalism (Prinz 2007: 13–49), functioning in Poland under the unfortunate (in my opinion, too narrow

and value-laden) name of “emocjonalizm” (“emotionalism”) (Krajewski 2010). Emotionalism distinguishes an independent class of emotions, classifying them as moral emotions (Weiner 2012; Klebaniuk 2018).

The tendencies in question were very aptly, vividly and insightfully described by the American ethicist Mike W. Martin in his book: *From Morality to Mental Health*, published in 2006. In the preface to this work, we can find an extremely important remark concerning the therapeutic trend in ethics as a tendency to “approach moral issues in the categories of mental health, e.g. through pathologization of vices (alcoholism as a disease), psychologization of virtues (self-respect as self-esteem), and liberalization of attitudes (sex as good, guilt as suspect) [emphasis—P.D.]. This tendency developed throughout the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century, although its roots go back to Plato and the Stoics. At worst, it is a confused and dangerous attempt to replace morality with therapy. At its best, this tendency integrates moral and therapeutic understandings, bringing creative solutions to problems that could not have been solved in a different way” (Martin 2006: VII; translated by P.D.).

Apart from psychology, Pieter’s sciences of moral phenomena, which are more and more efficiently depriving ethics of its scientific heritage, include:

- pedagogy: within its frame, the annexation of the ethical domain mainly occurs in the area of the so-called ethical pedagogy (Kansanen 2003; Gregory 2013: 73–94), which is interchangeably named moral pedagogy (Huff, Frey 2005; Nowicka 2010);
- political science making its own, much more modest claims on ethics than other sciences (Ossowski 2008; Bevir, Blakely 2017);
- cognitive science: it changes the name of ethics into neuroethics (Churchland 2013), positive neuroscience (Greene, Morrison, Seligman 2016), or the ethics of empathy (Baron-Cohen 2014; Keysers 2017: 285–325);
- sociology, with particular reference to sociological ethics, derived from the sociological school of Émile Durkheim and more commonly encountered under the name of ethical sociology (Mariński 2006a: 16), whereas Durkheim still used



the anachronistic term “physics of morality”—*physique des mœurs* (Durkheim 1950). This inspiration gave rise to a discipline separate from ethics, which has come to be known as the sociology of morality (Ossowska 1963, 1983: 539; Piwowarski 1966, 1970; Mariański 2006a, 2006b, 2020; Abend 2008; Hitlin, Vaisey 2010; Tarczynski 2015);

- theology, like psychology, has elaborate conceptual and research tools which are focused on ethical issues. The expansiveness and efficiency of theology in this area has contributed to the emergence of several of its sub-disciplines, resulting in terminological and methodological confusion. Such confusion mainly concerns the sensitive issue expressed in the question of the relationship between moral theology and ethics. Is (to use Helmut Juros’ old, but still attractive and adequate distinction) moral theology subject to the process of ethicizing, which ultimately reduces it to theological ethics (specifically Christian ethics or, more precisely, Roman Catholic ethics), which is closer to philosophy than to the theological matrix; or does moral theology in fact completely subordinate ethics to itself, subjecting it to the process of theologization? (Juros 1980: 160–164, 169, 177, 183, 204, 220, 230, 234, 237) It will not be surprising for anyone if I mention that, during the Second Vatican Council and afterwards, the second tendency officially won in the Catholic Church (Wojtyła 1967; Inlender 1968; Styczeń 1967, 1998; Dura 1998: 175–177; Giertych 2004; Ślipko 2009: 19–25).

The existence of moral theology alongside, or preferably instead of, ethics by no means—as in the other cases discussed here—consolidates the position of ethics or enriches it, but seeks to marginalise and weaken it, not even hiding its dislike of ethics or its Besserwissers’ sense of superiority over ethics. As I have already mentioned, this approach is especially visible in the works of psychologists of morality with whom only moral theologians may compete in this regard. Here are two illustrative examples. The first one comes from the scientific article entitled “Zur moraltheologischen Methodenlehre heute” [The Methodology of Moral Theology Today] by Gustav Peter Ermecke, a German moral theologian perceived as an important representative of late neo-scholasticism in the period after the Second Vatican

Council. In a very direct manner, Ermecke writes that moral theology cannot be understood as “a bastard of Stoic ethics and the Code of Canon Law code” (Ermecke 1966: 75). The use of the word “bastard” with reference to moral theology that is rooted in Stoic ethics reflects the nature of the discussed problem in a sufficiently clear manner.

In his *Introduction to Moral Theology*, another contemporary German moral theologian, Klaus Demmer, makes the following statement that is very popular among Christian theologians: “the best elements of pagan philosophy have been taken over by Christianity in which they have been critically and selectively purified, transformed and elevated” (Demmer 1996: 13). Since ethics is a science that is philosophical *par excellence*, both in terms of its origins (Dio- genes Laertios 2006: v. 18, 16–17) and in terms of its problems, argumentative techniques and methods of justifying its claims, the above-mentioned comment implies that ethics taken over by Christianity underwent “critical and selective purification, transformation and elevation,” ultimately taking the form of moral theology. It seems that this case, too, is sufficiently illustrative not to require any further explanations.

The *status quo* in question produced a reductionist combination of ethics with theology, and of morality with religion, which still persists today, not only in some scientific circles (especially among theologians), but more broadly in the entire social and state system. As a result, the stereotype of the Polish Catholic has become established in the Polish society. It is interpreted in various ways, especially in terms of its assessment in the context of the pursuit of a civil society and a republican state system with legally sanctioned separation of the Church and the state, freedom of belief, speech and religion, as well as in relation to the doctrine of ideological neutrality, political correctness, multiculturalism and tolerance standardised in the societies and countries belonging to the collective West. One often encounters the view that a religious person, only by virtue of his or her membership in a religious institution, is morally superior to people with other belief systems, in particular to non-believers.

## Ethical *ersatz*

I am sorry to admit that the above-mentioned legal decisions, regulating the presence of religious education and ethics in Polish schools, on the one hand, reinforce the hegemony, arbitrariness and monopolisation of ethics by religious associations and doctrines directly in the educational system and indirectly in the society, and, on the other hand, they make ethics an exotic appendix to religion, its equivalent, or—which is the most controversial and debatable of all—its weak surrogate, a defective substitute, a cheap imitation of religion, a second-class product, or a subject (for people) of an inferior quality.

I could give countless examples of the situation outlined. I will only mention a seemingly minor detail, but one that is nevertheless highly significant. School catechesis commonly, repeatedly and openly goes beyond the framework of knowledge transfer proper to school subjects. It is possible that the widespread nature of this practice entails common and sustained social acceptance that evokes no reflection. One may have the impression that the formative function (respective mentoring/moralistic function)—in the sense similar to that given to the term by Luigi Pareyson (Pareyson 2009: 25–31, 326)—generally dominates the educational (informational-cognitive) function in religious education, while religious education itself becomes, at best, an extended arm of the socialising and controlling influence of the religious institutions supervising the school catechesis. Institutional support, close symbiosis and mutual leveraging between educational and religious organisations contribute to the legitimisation and reinforcement of practices such as, for example, obliging primary school pupils to attend school catechesis within the preparation for the reception of their First Communion outside the school. The same is true of secondary school students preparing to receive the sacrament of Confirmation in their home parish churches. The students are often required to participate in religious education on a compulsory basis despite their formally optional nature. I know from my personal experience that, many times, such situation caused distress to students who attended or wished to attend ethics lessons, but, because of the necessity to attend religious education lessons, had to resign from or postpone their participation in ethics lessons.

Let me remind you that the removal of the research material that historically belonged to ethics, including the terminology developed by this science, took place gradually, starting from the first transfers of ethical aspects into Christian theology, which took place in the second century AD (Pietras 2007: 17–18; Myszor 2010: 145; McGrath 2013: 2), when such theology was being shaped. In this sense, the phenomenon I have described is neither new nor particularly surprising. It is, however, a poor consolation for ethics, taking into account the fact of the constantly increasing dispersion of its terminology and issues. In my text I have mainly focused on the theoretical side of this phenomenon. An invaluable collection of information that highlights its practical aspect can be found in the above-mentioned book by Joanna Madalińska-Michalak, Antoni J. Jeżowski and Szymon Więśław: *Etyka w systemie edukacji w Polsce* [*Ethics in the Polish System of Education*]. Unfortunately, it is not very optimistic. On the contrary, it seems to be a drop that overfills the bowl in the context of the legal location and practical organisation of teaching ethics in the Polish education system, which, in all other aspects, still leaves a lot to be desired.

The reform announced by the Ministry of Education and Science at the beginning of 2022 is to make ethics a compulsory subject to be taught during two lessons per week (with the exception of grades 1–3 of primary school and preschools), starting successively from 1 September 2023 and ending on 1 September 2027. The question as to whether the situation of ethics will be improved due to such a reform remains open. I am, however, already concerned about the fact that the announced legislative and organisational changes<sup>4</sup> want to continue what constitutes the original sin of educational legislation in Poland, i.e. the perception of ethics and religious education

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4 The announced changes are to include the following education laws: Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 3 April 2019 on the curriculum for public schools (Journal of Laws 2019, as amended 639); Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 28 May 2020 on the conditions and way of organizing religious education lessons in public preschools and schools (Journal of Laws 2020, item 983); Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 11 September 2002 concerning assessing, classifying and promoting students in public schools (Journal of Laws 2002, No. 155, item 1289) (Rzymkowski 2022).

as alternatives (“alternativization” of them)<sup>5</sup>, which is unfavourable and counter-productive to both of them, as it places them in opposition to each other (Madalińska-Michalak, Jeżowski, Więśław 2017: 35–39). It is because, according to such changes, ethics is to become a compulsory subject, but only in one case: if a student does not participate in religious education classes (Rzymkowski 2022: 2).

The postponed deadline for the introduction of changes in teaching ethics is explained by the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Education and Science, Tomasz Rzymkowski, by the necessity to provide appropriate teaching staff (Rzymkowski 2022: 3). For this reason, the Minister of Education and Science, Przemysław Czarnek, pursuant to Article 464 (1) of the Act of 20 July 2018: Law on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws 2020, item 85) commissioned seven higher education institutions in Poland to carry out postgraduate studies in ethics for teachers (Rzymkowski 2022: 3). The selection of the institutions that received such a commission resulted in numerous controversies, which were discussed in the public debate. With two exceptions (the University of Szczecin and the University of Wrocław), the list of institutions selected by the Ministry of Education and Science included only Roman Catholic universities: Jesuit University Ignatianum in Kraków, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, the Academy of Social and Media Culture in Toruń and the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków.

The critics of the ministerial idea did not mean to undermine the scientific quality of the Church’s universities. The only problem is that ethics has again become the subject of administrative-environmental games, falling prey to religious institutions, whose possessive attitude to ethics has already been outlined in this article. It should not be forgotten, however, that postgraduate courses in ethics, conferring teaching qualifications, had already been carried out by state universities with renowned ethics centres, such as the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin<sup>6</sup> or the Nicolaus Copernicus

5 The term “alternativization” in the scientific discourse is used, inter alia, by literary scholar Natalia Lemann, PhD with habilitation, Professor of the University of Łódź (Lemann 2019: 108, 184, 267, 370, 394).

6 See: <https://www.umcs.pl/pl/wyszukiwarka-studiow,118,etyka,10451.htm?token=5b78032ef5cdd7ff2f97eba52e0f686e> [access: 12.04.2022.].

University in Toruń.<sup>7</sup> Also, on 1 March 2022, the Pedagogical University of Kraków, named after the Commission of National Education, opened three-semester postgraduate studies: “Ethics for teachers.”<sup>8</sup> Such studies, in the e-learning form, named: “Teaching ethics and philosophy,” are also offered by the Wrocław Higher Vocational School.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most eminent Polish axiologists, ethicists and philosophers of culture, Henryk Elzenberg, co-founder of the Toruń school of axiology and ethics, wrote an intimate journal which was originally published in Kraków in 1963 by the Znak Publishing House. The diary was being written over several decades, and it was entitled *The Problem with Existence*. In the diary, the author included a simple yet extremely adequate thought, according to which “Ethics is a science concerning being brave towards existence” (Elzenberg 2002a: note dated 23.08.1922.). The idea of ethics as a fight is understandable and noble, but the question is: what is the fight about? Is it, as it should be, a fight for the repair of morality, or do we first have to fight for its very legitimisation in the educational space of the Polish school?

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7 See: [https://etyka.umk.pl/pages/main\\_page/](https://etyka.umk.pl/pages/main_page/) [access: 12.04.2022].

8 See: <https://ifis.up.krakow.pl/2022/01/14/etyka-dla-nauczycieli-nowe-studia-podyplomowe/>, <https://studiapodyplomowe.up.krakow.pl/direction/etyka-dla-nauczycieli/> [access: 12.04.2022.].

9 See: [https://studia-pedagogiczne.pl/kursy/128/studia/podyplomowe/nauczanie-etyki-i-filozofii-w-szkolach-podstawowych-i-ponadpodstawowych?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIy9GjtNe\\_-QIVA7ayCh2cBAEBEAAAYASAAE-gI6A\\_D\\_BwE](https://studia-pedagogiczne.pl/kursy/128/studia/podyplomowe/nauczanie-etyki-i-filozofii-w-szkolach-podstawowych-i-ponadpodstawowych?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIy9GjtNe_-QIVA7ayCh2cBAEBEAAAYASAAE-gI6A_D_BwE) [access: 12.04.2022.].

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