An Attempt to Give Existential Foundation to Bioethics

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Abstract
The detachment of man and nature, the strict positioning of the object postulated by the subject is the scientific paradigm of modernity with Cartesian roots, which organically determines the boundaries and frameworks of our everyday thinking. The Heideggerian and Jonasian existential line of thinking, postulating that the Being-Here is originally determined by the environment and drawn into the world, offers a real alternative to the former. The concept of life, though it cannot be defined in the strict sense of the word, can be satisfactorily described on the basis of modern natural sciences, and, relying on the testimony of prominent bioethicists, an existentialist bioethics, laying the foundations for the respect of life, can be built around it, showing a new relationship between environment and man, as well as a practical attitude more compatible with the moral challenges of the age.

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Introduction

"*Man* lives on *nature* – means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die. That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature. [Italics are mine – B. L.]"[1]

Man and nature. I and the world. Subject and object. These and such complementary pairs of our conceptual thinking derive their validity from the premise formed by the duality of observing and thinking entity

[1] Karl Marx, "The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844", in *Karl Marx: A Reader*, ed. Jon Elster, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 41.

versus observed and thought entity. Man first postulates himself, then, the "outer world" as opposed to himself. Let us remember Fichte's use of concepts: everything is opposed to the original opening of the "I" which does not belong to it, which is therefore "non-I". But what is that which does not belong to the "I"? Can clear boundaries be drawn to divide the subject and the environment of cognition; boundaries which would justify the epistemological caesura between man and nature traditionally present in the western history of philosophy?

Marx's well-known idea, which we have chosen as the motto of the present prologue, undoubtedly opposes its own philosophical tradition, the legacy of German idealism. Man is a part of nature – taught Marx. What did he mean by this? He meant that there is no essential difference between the human and non-human sphere, namely that there are no reasons at all for speaking about two separate "spheres". If, however, such a division is relevant somewhere, it is in epistemology, since it is undeniable that in the conceptual acquisition of existence man has priority compared to other forms of existence. In the present case we can highlight as Marx's merit the effort he made to draw attention to the original unity, homogeneity of beings. Although the mental division and classification of existence is indispensable for human cognition – especially if our cognition really has such an unchangeable *a priori* structure of categories as Kant supposed –, this does not mean that the difference present to our mind is "real".

Nature always, prior to any experience, is given as a totality for the one trying to get to know it, and the conscious, thoughtful observation, which enriches, corrects, and refines the experience takes place only after this. Humans "pre-reflectively constitute *what* is as the meaningful whole *'nature'*."[1] Martin Heidegger is of the same opinion when he speaks about the "preliminary understanding of being", which belongs to the existential structure of the Dasein, and this is the basis, for example, of scientific cognition. Jean Paul Sartre – explicitly too – was connected to this conceptuality, when in his early masterpiece he wrote the following lines: "The concrete can be only the synthetic totality of which consciousness, like the phenomenon, constitutes only moments. The concrete is man within the world in that specific union of man with

[1] Erazim Kohák, "Az ökológiai tapasztalat változatai", in *Természet és szabadság. Humánökológiai olvasókönyv* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2000), 88. English translation from: Erazim Kohák, "Varieties of Ecological Experience", in *Philosophies of Nature: The Human Dimension*, ed. Robert S. Cohen and Alfred I. Tauber (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 258.

the world which Heidegger, for example, calls 'being-in-the-world'. (…) The relation of the regions of being is an original emergence and is a part of the very structure of these beings. But we discovered this in our first observations."[1]

To this same existential philosophical line belongs the former Heidegger student, Hans Jonas who also argued for the original undividedness of man and nature. He attempted to prove his supposition in detail in several works, and he drew attention to the fact that our age, the age of technology confronts us with new challenges which demand new answers and solutions. According to his conviction, in order to reintroduce man to his natural environment, making once again familiar to him the great family of life from which he has torn himself, it is necessary to reveal and describe the fact of biology with the methodology of phenomenology, which can ensure the conditions for a future ethical foundation.

In the ethical paradigm of modernity man is the only evaluator. The hegemony of the Christian belief in God having ceased, and then this belief having fast declined, man has been placed to the centre of the moral universe of values, as in the age of European Antiquity. This is shown in the fact that morality has become pluralistic, and in the disunity created by the clash of different traditions. Beginning with the second half of the 20th century, the branches of the new, so called applied philosophy such as environmental philosophy, economic ethics, medical ethics, etc. began to emerge in great number, claiming the right to judge in moral questions. The traditional academic line branded these branches as pseudo-philosophies discrediting the true nature of philosophy, and their practitioners as philodoxes.[2] The following standpoint illustrates this excellently: "[Applied philosophy] is the almost complete neglect of deep thinking, the luxury of shallow thoughtlessness, the sale of the saleable things, of the things demanded by a market oriented view;

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[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, transl. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 1969), 3–4.

[2] "The successes of non traditional philosophy and philosophizing make traditionalist academicians anxious. Questions are replaced by practice, for philosophy and ethics have been admitted to ecology, technology, economic life, politics, and management, and it suppressed traditional themes and problems. For many persons philosophy has lost by this its magic and dignity." Pavel Fobel, "Alkalmazott filozófia és etika" (Applied Philosophy and Ethics), in *Az alkalmazott filozófia esélyei* (The Chances of Applied Philosophy), ed. Sándor Karikó (Budapest: Áron Kiadó, 2002), 17.

consume in every form and measure. They claim that they are philosophy, but they are only the expression of the philistine views, they meet the expectations of the crowd, they produce what can be sold – as a load of coal on the stock market. Their slogan is insignificance; their colour is grey, which absorbs all."[1]

Applied philosophy, whatever qualification its relationship with philosophical tradition may receive, in one thing has undoubtedly broken with former philosophy: it "lends" merely the methodology of thinking to the discussion of issues closely related to other scientific fields, but, in the essentials, it hardly interferes at all with the process of moral reflection. Its critics in all probability bring it to account mainly for this, namely the particular essence of thinking, the *noesis noeseos*, while, presumably, this same fact explains that the modern scientific world indulging in the idea of interdisciplinarity is willing to "admit" to its lines the, in his eyes, somewhat outmoded and dusty knowledge mediating, furthermore exclusivist and haughty philosophy. János Boros outlines the situation thus created in this way: "Philosophy has given up its universal claim to interpretation, but it has preserved its ability to wander between the provinces of knowledge, ethics, and aesthetics, and to analyze in social life and in science the relationship of different practices, or even to thematise the borderline questions hard to grasp by a discipline."[2]

Is it possible for philosophy, in conformity with its traditions and at the same time adapting itself to the new circumstances, to lay the foundations for the original integrity, for the renewed integration of man and nature? Can the Jonasian programme, borrowing the results of biology to the existential analysis it is to develop, be completed, or is Heidegger right in saying: "these ontological foundations can never be disclosed by subsequent hypotheses derived from empirical material, but they are always 'there' already, even when that empirical material simply gets *collected*."[3]? Or, perhaps, it is unnecessary to decide in this question

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[1] Zoltán Gyenge, "Az erény kiárusítása" (The Sale of Virtue), in Zoltán Gyenge, *Az egzisztencia évszázada. Esszék, tanulmányok* (The Century of Existence. Essays, Studies), (Veszprém: Veszprémi Humán Tudományokért Alapítvány, 2001), 28.

[2] János Boros, "A filozófusok felelőssége. A filozófia alkalmazhatóságának kérdései" (The Responsibility of Philosophers. Questions Regarding the Applicability of Philosophy), in *Az alkalmazott filozófia esélyei*, 83.

[3] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, transl. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 76.

in order to demonstrate: the initiatives trying to extend the perspective of human morals beyond humanity are not at all groundless.

The goal of our study was conceived in the spirit of the Jonasian biological philosophy. We attempt to open an ethical field – or at least to show the possibility of this – which is consistent with the biological results of modern (natural) science. The horizon of our investigations will be determined by the search for the "smallest common", which is the *sine qua non* of every living being, which is therefore substantial for the living as such. We shall, however, bear in mind throughout the study that life is never an abstraction, but always the life of a particular living being. "Life, in its own right, is a kind of Being; but essentially it is accessible only in Dasein"[1] – Heidegger believed. We agree with this statement as far as we believe: truly the Dasein, namely man is the one able to ask questions; asking opening for him the truth of the beings' nature, the self-revealing hiddenness, which is itself disclosedness, namely *aletheia*.

The goal of the final synthesis of this study is to consider the following question: is it possible to get to choose the sanctity, namely the value of life as an ethical principle in a rational[2] discourse? Without anticipating the answer to this question, I should like to make clear that in my opinion the primary condition of any bioethics is the postulation of the unity of life, the acceptance of the basic unity of man and nature. But it is the role of the following preliminary observations to clarify what the bioethics our study wishes to discuss is.

Preliminary observations

The word 'bioethics' comprises two terms of ancient Greek origin: 'bio' and 'ethics'. The meaning of the first one, 'bio' is: life. The living "imbued" with life – is alive as opposed to the dead stiffened to immobility. To life always the notion of some activity, movement is attached, ceaseless vitality, which is present in some beings, and it is not in others. Life, on the other hand, is not substantially present in some privileged beings of the physical world, but it is so to speak able to separate from the "receiving" material, body. Life and soul (*psyche*, or *pneuma*) were therefore synonymous notions in antique thought. The mobility *per se* of life was related to the notion of value even in this early age. For Hellenes *physis*, nature signified some ceaseless motion, the

[1] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 76.

[2] By *rational* we mean here obeying principles originating from the laws of reason, and not – for example – the prescriptions of a religious authority.

revealing of the overflowing abundance of existence, signalled with elementary power by the fact that their gods "were able to animate" anything (let us only think of such immortals living in nature as satyrs or nymphs). If we compare this approach – for example – with the Jewish idea, we find out that the people of Israel derived the basic rules of morality from the "dead" words of a frightening cosmic sky god engraved on stone tablets, while in case of the Greeks the paradigm for the origin of values was mainly the merry "example" of deities quite close to humans. The word 'bios' originally was therefore none other than life, vividness, activity, affirmation.

The expression ethics, also of Old Greek roots, has its etymological origin in the words 'ethos' and 'ēthos'. 'Ethos' is custom, tradition, propriety; 'ēthos' is strength of character, that is, virtue.[1] Ethics first appeared as a domain of philosophy in Aristotle's thinking. According to him ethics was a branch of practical philosophy, which focused on human activity, which *sui generis* dealt with happiness, virtues and man's moral perfection. Later on several important philosophers wrote an ethics of "their own", which we do not intend to discuss this time. Nevertheless, we should like to stress that ethics, due both to its traditions and to its specific intention, is a philosophical discipline; the discipline discussing actual morals, questions raised in the field of morality, generally speaking: behavioural patterns of humans' social coexistence. Because of this it is often called moral philosophy.

Now, it seems quite simple to clarify the concept of bioethics: it is that segment of moral philosophy which tries to find answers to dilemmas related to life. This definition, as we can perceive, is so wide that it is almost meaningless. The cause of this may lie in the second part of the definition, in the concept of life. What is "life" at all? Can it be definitely defined, or is it, as "evidence" understood by everyone, an honoured member of the well-divided society of our notions? At the very beginning we are confronted with the difficulty that the concept of bioethics, though it is widely spread and is becoming accepted in philosophical circles, is far from resembling a clear water mountain lake. The word has at least two generally used meanings, out of which one is included in the other. We, however, are using the expression in a third, different meaning in our paper. Nevertheless, our choice is not in the

[1] Cf. Tamás Nyíri, *Alapvető etika* (Basic Ethics) (Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 2003), 12.

least arbitrary, on the contrary, it is based on strict conceptual deliberations. But it is high time for us to clarify the concept of bioethics!

The interest in ethics always increases when tradition is no longer sufficient for answering the new moral questions. This also led to the birth of bioethics, brought about by the perplexity occurring hand in hand with the moral dilemmas raised by modern medical technology.[1]

The expression 'bioethics' was first written down by the oncologist Van Rensselaer Potter (1911–2001) in a paper published in 1970. "His book entitled *Bioethics: Bridge to the Future* was published in the following year. The essence of his realization is that technical progress and ethics have become divided, and this may lead to the destruction of all mankind, of the entire living world. If we wish to save ourselves and the world, we must limit, and direct technical progress adequately."[2] If we look closely at these two references, we may instantly observe that there is a narrower and a wider interpretation of the field. On the one hand, bioethics is the professional ethics which took the place of medical ethics beginning with the 1970s, which, therefore, tries to find adequate answers to the moral dilemmas occurring in the field of medicine. "We must consider it [bioethics as medical ethics] a discipline of global bioethics, which deals with the interactions between the physician, the patient and society."[3] In a wider sense there is, however, a global bioethics, whose suit is not so tightly cut. The European Association of Global Bioethics (EAGB) for example approaches the subject in this way: "Bioethics can be defined as an interdisciplinary science based on natural and social sciences, dealing with the ethical questions of biology and medicine."[4]

Among the objects of (global) bioethics are usually mentioned the issues of cloning, abortion, euthanasia, eugenics, gene technology,

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[1] József Kovács, *A modern orvosi etika alapjai. Bevezetés a bioetikába* (The Bases of Modern Medical Ethics. Introduction to Bioethics) (Budapest: Medicina Könyvkiadó, 1999), 22.

[2] Gyula Gaizler and Kálmán Nyéki, *Bioetika* (Bioethics) (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2003), 24.

[3] Brunetto Chiarelli, "Az etika biológiai és evolucionista alapjai" (The Biological and Evolutionistic Bases to Ethics), in *Bioetikai olvasókönyv: Multidiszciplináris megközelítés* (Bioethical Reader: Multidisciplinary Approach), ed. Charles Susanne (Pécs–Budapest: Dialog Campus Kiadó, 1999), 24.

[4] Charles Susanne and Magdolna Szente, *Előszó a Bioetikai Szöveggyűjteményhez* (Preface to the Bioethical Reader), in *Bioetikai olvasókönyv*, 11–14.

cerebral investigations, as well as animal experimentation or ecophilosophy, and environmental ethics. We can see indeed what a wide range of human practices it comprises. Philosophy, and within this ethics, has a primarily instrumental role in bioethics conceived thus: thanks to its elaborated methods, its argumentative capacities, and, naturally, its propensity for polemics, bioethics, uniting sciences, condescendingly admits her, the ancient lover of wisdom, to the scientific team.

Well, in our opinion, bioethics, if it really lays claim to the name "ethics", – due to what has been said above related to ethics – should reckon more seriously with philosophy. Consequently, in our study, we mean by bioethics that which makes possible all that is done by the field understood in the above mentioned two ways. Bioethics is bioethics to the extent to which it clears itself from the charge of superficiality lying in scientific eclecticism. In order to be able to do this, it should consult and interiorize the teachings of those 20th century philosophers who created lasting works on the triple issue of man, life, and ethics. That life has an unalienable sanctity is the belief of billions of men. To be able to speak about ethics, we must know rationally what we understand by life, furthermore, where this "sanctity" originates from, what it means at all, whether it can and should be separated from its religious roots.

The natural scientific view on "life"

"For, incredible as it may seem, science searches for the origins of life without knowing what it is really searching for."[1]

Surveying modern natural scientific theories, we may conclude that biology is rooted in the soil of physics, but by the time it sprouts and begins to grow, it realizes that its roots have lost their connection with the soil. The plant of life, in spite of this, does not die, but begins to swell wildly! The determinant laws well-known from the field of mechanistic physics created only the possibility-conditions to the fascinating spontaneity of life. As Schrödinger put it: physics deals with the laws of the dead material, it represents the disintegration of life.[2] Life, on the contrary, is order, organization, relation and unity itself. While the second principle of thermodynamics ought to direct the material toward

[1] Tibor Gánti, *Kontra Crick avagy AZ ÉLET MIVOLTA* (Contra Crick or the NATURE OF LIFE) (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 1989), 63.
[2] Erwin Schrödinger, "Mi az élet?" (What Is Life?), in *Válogatott tanulmányok* (Selected Studies) (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 1985), 117–217.

an infinitely simple, homogenous and unordered state of balance, life, by its sheer existence contradicts and actively opposes the disorganizing principle of entropy, for it is highly ordered. "Life is the orderly and regular behaviour of the matter" – formulated Schrödinger his realization.[1] The living material tries hard to avoid falling into neutral equilibrium, which is the basic characteristic of lifeless material. If the difference between life and the lifeless is quite obvious in something, this something is exactly this activity – the striving of each living being to keep itself in existence. And not anyhow, but as a living being. The organizational complexity provoked by evolution came to being in order that life might face – with the promise of success – the ever new external challenges. The outer "chaos", tending and drawing towards disorder, is in opposition with the inner "cosmos", which builds and recreates itself until the end.

At the same time, life is organically accompanied by death, the functional capitulation of individual organization, the disintegration of individual life. One of life's most essential features is its stability in change: the individual dies, but s/he passes on the secret designated by the word "life" to his/her descendant. The "universal alphabet" of the genome is the set of instruments which makes possible for beings to develop with boundless variety, as well as for the replicative and structural/functional information, minimally changing from time to time through mutations, to be coded, and thus communicated, passed on. For, if we wished to emphasize what is common in the living beings, the powerful reason would be precisely the universality present in the biochemical language.

The basic characteristic of beings is openness. The biological organism can only be itself, namely a system with a dissipative structure, as an open system. For only thus can it transform the highly organized (organic) material and energy extracted from the environment into a simpler material with a lower energy level, emitting it later as refuse and heat, while using the greatest part of the energy to maintain itself and its structures and to retrieve its losses. Living organisms could not exist as closed systems.

Living organisms are therefore autonomous to a certain degree, they regulate themselves; they form their own laws. They can do this because they are systems far from balance, and several of the main physical laws do not apply to them. This makes chance the most

[1] Ibid., 193.

influential principle both on a macro level – regarding evolution – and on a micro level – in case of the individual processes. In order that the living beings might be spontaneous, active, and self-organizing, they need the countless feedbacks which enable them to perceive the changes in their environment, and then to react to them. Prigogine showed that the more complex an organization is, the more differentiated it is organized, the higher level it represents from an evolutionary point of view, since it obtains more varied "knowledge" on its environment, and it can adapt itself to the challenges of this better. The high degree of complicatedness should be associated with a fast communicational apparatus between the parts; otherwise the system can easily become chaotic. Fast communication, therefore, is crucial in the organism's struggle for life.[1]

Good organization is ensured by the enzymes, which catalyze chemical reactions, aiding the system to meet the above mentioned requirements (superfast communication). The first and foremost interest of the living beings is to preserve approximately stabile circumstances. This is achieved by the homeostasis, which reaches its goal precisely by means of feedbacks and enzyme reactions (accelerations, impediments). The complexity dominant in the living system must therefore be coached by all means; it must be in constant communication and under permanent supervision, so that this stability may be constantly granted.

In short, the most important general characteristics of life are activity, metabolism, reproduction, and coached/informative complexity.

The existentialist logos of the bios: Jonas' biological physics

"(…) the qualitatively new character of some of our deeds revealed completely new dimensions of ethical issues, unreckoned with by the canons and view points of traditional ethics"[2]

"The phenomenon of life itself negates the boundaries that customarily divide our disciplines and fields."[3] Life is by its origins an organic whole, which modern biological science unable to go beyond

[1] Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Az új szövetség. A tudomány metamorfózisa* (The New Alliance. The Metamorphosis of Science) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1995), 159–166.

[2] Hans Jonas, "Az emberi cselekvés megváltozott természete" (The Altered Nature of Human Activity), *Természet és szabadság. Humánökológiai olvasókönyv* (Nature and Freedom. A Reader in Human Ecology), ed. András Lányi (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2000), 142.

[3] Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life. Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston (Illinois): Northwestern University Press, 2001), xxiv.

Cartesian theories cannot grasp within its paradigm and with its limited tools. The "existentialist interpretation of biological facts" – this is what Jonas proposed in his volume entitled *The Phenomenon of Life. Toward a Philosophical Biology*.[1] The inwardness characteristic to every form of life but inaccessible for biology dividing radically object and subject even in the study of life, according to Jonas, is present in the new philosophical biology. This new discipline, therefore, tries to demonstrate: the complementary dichotomies discovered by man in himself – such as freedom and necessity, autonomy and dependence, self and world, connection and isolation – are similarly present at every level of life. In this way the basic distinction between man and the other beings looses its ground, since they are all built up according to the uniform rules of uniform life; though they form different discrete "levels" within the whole.

Jonas created some kind of hierarchy of life – and thus of living beings – by using the philosophical concept of mediacy. He argued that the differences between the living beings originate from the differentiated mediacy extant between the organism and its environment, as well as – consequently – from the ever greater achievement of freedom. By metabolism Jonas understood any interaction which takes place between the organism and its environment, namely, besides nutrition, anabolism and catabolism all kinds of communications, as it will be revealed later. Metabolism is therefore the basic relation or concern, which the organism maintains with its environment in order to obtain from it the things it needs.

Jonas made the following interesting observation here: in the centre of metabolic activity there is always some kind of normativity. According to this each organism has an evaluative, preferential centre, which determines what kind of interactions to maintain and to avoid with its environment. The main measure of this scale is viability; which means to what extent the given metabolic activity is relevant for the organism. This is where value is created: all that serves to build, improve, strengthen, and nourish the living organism is valuable. What, on the other hand, is useless, disorganizing, and harmful is valueless. We can see that this does not need man's diligent evaluating activity: life itself offers directions for each life form. The basic ethical law of life is therefore the Spinozian conatus.

[1] "This volume offers an 'existential' interpretation of biological facts." Ibid., xxiii.

Transitions are those which create ever more differentiated moduses of mediacy. On the first level, vegetal life is relatively direct, though, related to metabolism, it is worth speaking of the plant's mediated sameness and continuity.[1] The plant lives mainly on its immediate environment; it does not have, unless in rare cases, direct relationships with things remote in time or space. The animal level differs from vegetal life in three decisive aspects: motility, perception, and emotion. The common element in these three is distance, which implies a more differentiated form of mediacy. World is the new concept which is added to the notion of animal life and which is meant to surpass the "environment" concept of vegetal life. World is that to which the animal relates actively, which it senses, fights with – in short: to which it is opposed actively. The direct connection of the outwardness of vegetal life is opposed here to the mediated turn towards the things of the outer world characteristic to animality, which latter draws the outer things into its own metabolism only through perception, desire, achievement and action.[2]

The freedom of the animal level is thus revealed in the distinction between the inner need and the outer goal to be achieved, and which thus places the actions, taking into consideration their intention and outcome, into the matrix of right/wrong and successful/unsuccessful. Motility is the central factor of animal life – Jonas stated. There is a spatial distance between need and fulfilment, which can be bridged only by motility. Need turns into striving for goals to be achieved and into desire; on the other hand, the fear of danger also appears. Without these mediating emotions the fulfilment of needs is not possible, as without the metabolism storing the energy required for movement the freedom necessary for action is not possible either. Thus the layers of mediacy are created, which – beyond being mere instrument in the organism's survival – construct their own scale of concerns.[3] Pleasure and pain belong to animal experience as the inner rewards or punishments of behaviour, thus they can be perceived as the functional agents of animal evaluation. Pure perception does not yet confer pleasure at this level, and

[1] Cf. Ibid., Third Essay, 64–92.
[2] Cf. Ibid., 183.
[3] Cf. Ibid., 183. It is important to emphasize that the expression "concern" means not only "relatedness" but also "care", which will become exceedingly important later.

experience, cognition is still functional, animals do not want experience for its own sake.[1] This will be, naturally, the prerogative of man.

Jonas perceived a significant difference between the goal-seeking and value-generating mechanisms. The formers, though they have inner intentionality, that is, they are able to focus on a goal, do not have metabolism in the strict sense of the word. Similar to the working principle of Bertalanffy's cybernetic systems, Jonas's goal-seeking mechanisms, do not have metabolism, but they can feel and react, that is, they are able to receive and transmit information.[2] The significant difference between the two structures is that values may be created in cybernetic systems (must-value) without metabolism, since there is feedback in them, while Jonas emphasized exactly the fact that: there is no feedback in goal-seeking mechanisms, therefore they cannot create values. Metabolism is exactly that function – specifically connected to living beings – which makes possible for the living organism through constant feedbacks to set up values.

The ability of sight – though many animals have it – is the borderline between man and animal in the more and more complicated hierarchy of mediacy.[3] It makes possible for us to compass the variety of the world's different beings in a single act of perception. The other senses are based rather on directness: hearing on temporal integration, touch on the perceiver's direct contact with the outer world. Sight makes a perceived object into a whole independent of the perceiver. The passive, receiving experience of sight creates the conditions which are indispensable for objectivity and theory forming. On the basis of visual perception the ability of image-making is born in man, which is a new, great leap of freedom as compared to the animal level.[4] For, beforehand, only adaptation to the circumstances was possible; freedom, in the case of animal life, means only the freedom to change place, where environment is still an overpowering determinant element. But, in man, due to the ability of image-making a new world is constituted: the mental representation of the perceived beings is born. This representation has a radical role in changing the relationships between man and environment, on which I presume we need not dwell. It is enough to consider that – for

[1] Ibid.
[2] Cf. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *…ám az emberről semmit sem tudunk* (Robots, Men and Minds) (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Kiadó, 1991).
[3] Cf. Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 135–157.
[4] Cf. ibid., 157–183.

example – this makes possible huge and deliberate modifications in language, communication, knowledge, or in environment.

The rise of bioethics from among 20th century ideas

The past century exemplifies well what happens if wider masses remain without moral principles. The "long 19th century" was rich in ethical theories – not attempting to give a complete list, wishing only to give an idea of the unparalleled abundance, let us enumerate a few prominent moral philosophy writers: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, or we may mention the name of Bentham and J. S. Mill too. The 20th century, on the other hand, because of several – discovered or obscure – reasons, brought a moral perplexity and created many new challenges. In Europe the waning influence of Christian churches, the devastation and inhuman mass murders of World War I and II, the former affecting mainly Europe, the latter having global effects, the environmental damages which had become obvious since the middle of the century, as well as the marked demand for ethical plurality, which began to be outlined around the same time, were ethical problems to which there was none to offer solutions. A good example to this is the proliferation of meta-ethical theories, extant since the first half of the century in Anglo-Saxon ethics. The theoreticians who rejected or at least avoided the traditional guiding role of ethics in social practice played mere "logical games" with the classic value concepts, rejecting the normativity belonging to the field since Aristotle.

This being the case, one should not wonder that unparalleled inhumanities marked by the words holocaust, ethnic cleansing, genocide were committed. The early 20th century man, thinking in the dichotomy of communism-fascism, either clod his imperialist dreams in "red", or he aligned them in the shadow of the fasces, and the demagogues' ideologies were sundered from the traditionally rational discourses of moral. But, especially after World War II, the idea was born and developed that the actions of the human species in the last few centuries had been based on a paradigm which fatally endangered its own existence, therefore it had to be either rejected or radically modified. For, otherwise, mankind would destroy itself either directly (the danger of an atomic catastrophe) or indirectly (by destroying the biosphere). Thus, beginning with the mid-20th century the new discipline, applied philosophy, began to be outlined in order to try to find suitable answers and solutions to the new challenges.

So that we may see which the ideas to be fought against were, we are going to summarize in brief the theoretical paradigm which provoked philosophers to make the uncomfortable realization. Firstly, we must think of the Cartesian dualism, which, combined with the Baconian desire to subjugate nature, objectified natural beings extremely, bereaving them of all their traditional sanctity and dignity, postulating them simple objects of use.[1] Secondly, we must think of the "mess of ideas", the ethical relativism we have referred to above, and regarding which we can only mention here that, since the victory of Christianity in Europe (A.D. 325), such moral plurality had never occurred. This was further increased by the fact that, beginning with the 1940s and 1950s, the European (Hellenistic, Roman, medieval Christian) moral philosophical tradition, that far the only influence in ethical discourses, had to share its position and to get on with an increasing number of other, completely different ethical traditions. For, shortly after the decolonization, it became clear that European values could no longer be imposed on other people. Consequently, it became ever more essential that different cultures (Islam, Far Eastern, Buddhist, Hindu, and European) should develop a high degree of solidarity and empathy for one another and that they should be able to reach consensus (often even at the price of partially giving up their own principles).

Bioethics, therefore – together with many other scientific fields – was meant to consider the "mistakes" of the former, obviously erroneous paradigm, and to offer satisfactory alternatives to the customary – and at the same time problematic – human practice. It could be defined as a branch of applied philosophy, if it had not been, since the first moment of its existence, emphatically interdisciplinary. The beginnings of bioethics are usually traced back to Aldo Leopold's conception of "land ethics", which was elaborated in the essay collection entitled *A Sand County Almanac* some half a century ago (1949), but, because the concept is not unified, it is questionable if it is any sense in pointing out a single event as its origin. To get closer to the concept of bioethics accepted, and moreover, preferred by us, we shall rely on the

[1] This was supported and reinforced by technical innovations the number of which increased beginning with the 18th century, by the fast development of chemistry, physics, and biology, by the bourgeoisie's gaining ground, by the second industrial revolution, by demographic explosion, and, moreover, by Anglo-Saxon pragmatism and utilitarianism.

definition made by Brunetto Chiarelli, Professor in Anthropology at the University of Florence.[1]

According to him, the innermost nature and historical heritage of bioethics is that it must point out the present and future problems of man as an individual and as a species related to survival. Because of this, it is directed towards the relationship between man and nature; as an interdisciplinary science, it gathers the information from the most important trends in biology, ecology, and sociology. At the same time, it compiles the different materials with the aid of philosophical methods, focusing on the *Homo sapiens*.

We could add to this definition that bioethics does not only comment on the problematic situations related to human life and it does not only consider man's future, but it refers all this to every living being. That is, as Jonas formulated it, since life is uniform, the same relationships influence its structure and operation at the level of any living being, thus it is senseless and unwarranted to isolate man as the only subject of moral considerations from the big unified family of life.

Leopold pointed out that ethics is evolutionary, differentiating three levels.[2] The first ethics regulated the relation between individuals, as Moses' Ten Commandments. Later concerns dealt with the relationship between man and society. But so far there has been no such ethics which would regulate man's relation to the land and to the animals and plants living on it. The expansion of ethics to this third component of man's environment is an evolutionary possibility and an ecologic necessity at the same time.

Such a historical typology of ethics is, of course, extremely naive and irrelevant, but not the philosophical genuineness is important for our train of ideas, but the evident demand present in Leopold's ethical pattern. Environmental ethics emerges as an "ecologic necessity" from the smooth surfaced sea of human indifference, as if it were the belated but from a logical point of view evidently the next stage of development. Seeing the destruction inflicted on the environment by man, realizing the inadequacy of the paradigm which postulated that nature is an invulnerable entity, a moral man must step forward. But he must take this step fully aware of the fact that it will leave deep marks on the biosphere, and that the damage caused by him can be hidden no longer. In these

[1] Chiarelli, "Az etika biológiai...", 24.

[2] Aldo Leopold, "Föld-etika" (Land Ethics), in *Természet és szabadság. Humánökológiai olvasókönyv* (Nature and Freedom. A Reader in Human Ecology), ed. András Lányi (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2000), 104.

circumstances, the only reasonable step is to face the problems and to attempt to introduce the ethical principles supporting the protection of life into public thinking in order to reduce the ecological marks of our activity.

Land ethics, environmental ethics, deep ecology

Leopold himself was neither philosopher, nor ethicist. He walked in nature often, and his experiences gained there, in the "wilderness", urged him to write his essays on the protection of nature. These essays were published posthumously in his last collection entitled *Land Ethic*. In it he tried to draw attention to the fact that man himself – despite all the appearances created and sustained by him – is a part of nature.[1] It is expressly harmful to think in the duality of society and nature which separates man from his natural origins creating an artificial world in addition to the natural one, which gives no possibility for such a division. Leopold believed that man has the same role in the cycle of life as any other living being, but, since human activity has undoubtedly a harmful influence on the so-called "biotic pyramid", man has, nevertheless, a "privileged" position: he can destroy that which is the basis of his existence – life. Man is the only being which can uproot himself from the community of living beings and, therefore, he must be reintegrated to it.

"The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land."[2] The third, current stage of Leopold's evolutionary ethics does not allow for ethics to remain further on exclusively in human circles. Man has to change "from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it", the author wrote, for Earth can be made sick. With the metaphor "the biotic pyramid", Leopold expressed that the height of the ever higher and more and more developed pyramid created by the evolutionary processes, namely, biological diversity, due to the direct and indirect human influence began to decrease in a stunningly short time. The diversity of life which had developed in the course of many billion years began to fade fast during a few human lifetimes. It is important to emphasize that this was not only a loss of aesthetical values but the powerful omen of a catastrophe which would shake the pillars of life. It showed that there are deep bounds between species and big

[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., 104. The English excerpts taken from: Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (http://www.neohasid.org/pdf/landethic.pdf). (Translator's note.)

ecosystems living seemingly indifferently to one another of which we have not (and could not) dream. "That man-made changes are of a different order than evolutionary changes, and have effects more comprehensive than is intended or foreseen."[1]

Summing up Leopold's doctrines, man must take upon himself to preserve the "wholesomeness" of nature assuming responsibility not only for his fellow men, but for each natural entity too. He must revaluate his relationship with them; he must not give over-hasty answers to the occurring questions and problems, and, first of all, he must bear in mind the first moral principle of "land ethics": "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community."[2]

In his study entitled *Challenges in Environmental Ethics* (1993), Holmes Rolston too condemned the separation of man and nature in the modern age. He wrote: "Science describes natural history, natural law; ethics prescribes human conduct, moral law, and to confuse the two makes a category mistake. Nature simply is, without objective value; the preferences of human subjects establish value; and these human values, appropriately considered, generate human duties. Only humans are ethical subjects and only humans are ethical objects. Nature is amoral; the moral community is interhuman."[3]

This idea is radically erroneous according to Rolston. "Man may be the only measurer of things, but is man the only measure of things?"[4] We have no reason to rely on the unproved premise that, since only we are able to pronounce judgements on things, we are consequently the only moral subjects. It is possible, considered Rolston, that indeed only man is able to make moral judgements, in other words, that man is the only moral evaluator. But why should this imply that his ethics must be anthropocentric? That would practically mean – moreover – that it is racially boundlessly xenophobic. Holmes believed that exactly an interspecies ethic is necessary which would grant continuity between the natural and human sphere.

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[1] Ibid., 112.
[2] Ibid., 115.
[3] Holmes Rolston, "Challenges in Environmental Ethics", in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, ed. Michael E. Zimmerman et al. [Upper Saddle River (New Jersey): Prentice Hall, 1998], 124.
[4] Ibid., 125.

"All ethics seeks an appropriate respect for life, but respect for human life is only a subset of respect for all life."[1] And such a respect must originate from our realizing that: every living organism is a value generating unit. Living beings can be given more than an instrumental value, useful to man; the intrinsic value they generate by simply existing is much more elementary. The living being is an axiological system, which does not mean, however, that it is moral at the same time. Genes are a normative set which differentiates between what is and what must be.[2] In this respect, therefore, it presents a desirable, achievable state, valuable in comparison to other states. Rolston as a good Aristotelian formulates it in this way: "They promote their own realization, at the same time that they track an environment."[3] The source of value is therefore the individual organism which carries the standards of the species in itself, and which, at the same time, is embedded in the dynamic stratification of the organically connected living relations.

The living being therefore strives to create and preserve a state specific to the species, which is the optimal aid to its survival. This information is stored in the DNA, which can be defined as this optimal "physical state which is idealized in its programmatic form". And this is where – considered Rolston – the *per se* value is generated. The creation of values, which are far from any kind of human preference, is revealed to us in the life preservation strategies coded in the genome. The author concluded that man is neither the measure, nor the measurer of things, for "value is not anthropogenic, it is biogenic".[4] Intrinsic value can be discovered at the level of both individual lives (organisms) and ecosystems (biocommunities), the latter formed by intricately interrelated individuals.

That life has an intrinsic value is the most general common conviction of 20th century bioethics and environmental philosophy. The Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess (b. 1912) published in 1989 the platform of the deep ecology movement which was founded by him and met with warm support. In the first paragraph he stated: "The flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth has intrinsic value. The value of nonhuman life forms is independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes."[5] Naess, though he allowed man to end

[1] Ibid.
[2] Cf. ibid., 131.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Arne Naess, "A mélyökológiai mozgalom", in *Természet és szabadság*, 118.

nonhuman life to satisfy his "vital needs", urged for "a substantial decrease of the human population", for, according to his approach, biological diversity requires this. In other words, man, at the expense of the other living beings, has "overspread" the life space available to him, that is, our planet, making the situation worse by a selfish and exploiting attitude, which confers to his practice an unmistakeably despotic character.

This "biocentric" attitude, however, has been criticized several times, especially by the so-called "sociocentric" authors.[1] Biocentrist are probably right in their observation that[2] the first step towards the domination, exploitation, and destruction of nature was its moral and conceptual objectification, which resulted from the (Cartesian) division of the world in (superior, rational) human subjects and (inferior, irrational) natural objects. The problem in brief is the differentiation between species, the belief that we can deal with the specimens of other species in a manner which we would consider unacceptable with regard to our own race.

The deep ecological solution mentioned by Naess, given to the problem of overpopulation, involving that man deprives other life forms of their resources, may easily change into misanthropy. For, while "biocentrists" declaring all life forms equal see in the present conditions the result of boundless anthropocentric hubris, "sociocentrists" draw attention to the fact that this – Naessian – attitude is "anti-humanistic" and "undervalues human life".[3] In my opinion, it is obvious that this debate is merely positional, that is, it raises in fact the question how the idea of "bio-egalitarianism" should be qualified. One party considers it the unjust dethronement of man's ancestral hegemony, while the other regards it the obvious consequence of the environmental ethical reform which "naturally" leads to the erosion of human rights – for the benefit of other life forms.

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[1] Cf. Leslie Paul Thiele, "Természet és szabadság. A biocentrikus és szociocentrikus környezetvédelem heideggeri kritikája" (Nature and Freedom. A Heideggerian Critique of Biocentric and Sociocentric Environmentalism), in *Természet és szabadság*, 125–141. The author discusses recent environmental ethical discourse as the polemics of "biocentric" and "sociocentric" ecologists; this basic – but somewhat narrow-minded – differentiation is present in this paper too.

[2] Naess, "A mélyökológiai mozgalom", 126–127.

[3] Ibid., 127.

In order not to become enmeshed in the terminological mire of current environmental ethics, we resort to Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), who elaborated one of the most consistent and fascinating bioethical theories. Starting from the more stable conceptual ground created by him, we are going to arrive once again, and for the last time, to Jonas' existential biological philosophy, paying this time special attention to its purely ethical aspects.

Albert Schweitzer and the life-centred ethics of responsibility

We may recall that modern natural science described life as a phenomenon which shapes itself almost in opposition to material laws; here therefore the living being is autonomous, self-regulating as compared to universal law. We should conceive on the analogy of this the way in which life's self-created rules are superseded by a new kind of universality as soon as we pass the boundary of the ethical. The fact of the Darwinian natural selection causes repulsion in many people already at the naive, intuitive level of morality. We do not want the cheetah to devour the clumsy calves, we pity the rabbit killed by the wolf, while – with our common sense – we know that this is rightly done so, otherwise the fragile balance existing due to the equilibrium of interspecies interactions within an ecosystem would be disturbed. Schweitzer formulates this in the following way: "The world is a ghastly drama in which the motions of wills-to-live perpetually oppose one another. One existence preserves itself at the cost of defeating and destroying another. The world is terrible in its magnitude, senseless in its deep meanings, full of suffering in its joyfulness. Ethics is not in harmony with the course of the world; on the contrary, it is revolting against it."[1]

As Leopold, Schweitzer also believed that ethics is evolutionary. In his opinion, ethics so far has ever widened the "circle of solidarity towards other people",[2] but the period has arrived when not only human life is valued. Schweitzer emphasized with discernment that thinking is in fact "the argument between willing and knowing which goes on within me".[3] Will is that which, on the basis of a few, but all the

[1] Albert Schweitzer, "Az etika problémája az emberi gondolkodás továbbfejlődésében" (The Problem of Ethics in the Evolution of Human Thought), in *Albert Schweitzer, a gondolkodó. Válogatás Albert Schweitzer műveiből* (Albert Schweitzer, the Thinker. Selected Works by Albert Schweitzer) (Budapest: A Református Zsinati Iroda Sajtóosztálya, 1989), 74.
[2] Ibid., 64.
[3] Albert Schweitzer, "Az élet tiszteletének etikája" (The Ethics of Reverence for

more firm and "exclusive" preconceptions, always strives to support, aided by our rationality, our already extant – often completely irrational or inconsistent – world view with "rational arguments". Though this attitude is natural and deeply human, however, it is necessary for us to surpass this infantilism of thinking and to grow up to cognition untouched by emotions and interests. In Schweitzer's words: "If knowledge can only tell me what it knows, then it tends to teach the will a single thing: that the will-to-live is everywhere present. (...) Ethics is created when I consider the wish for the world which is given to me naturally in my will-to-live with the wish for life, and when I try to realize this." [1]

In the expression "will-to-live", Schweitzer summed up everything he considered common in the living beings. Autonomy, the instinct of self-preservation (conatus), adaptation, fight against others, and organization are all such factors which can safely be subordinated to this concept. The struggle to make life flourish and to preserve it for what it is while it must permanently be confronted and modified – all these are the "will-to-live", which can be considered as an excellent approach to the "least common" we have been looking for. "I am life which wills to live in the midst of life which wills to live."[2] And how do all these become ethics?

Schweitzer's argumentation – understandably[3] – does not lack religious undertones; moreover, his ethics has a sufficiently strong radiation – emanating from the persuasiveness of a powerful sense of vocation – to be able to stand independently too. The ethics of the reverence for life is the escalation of Christ's maxim of universal love. For Christian (active) love is universal only as far as it refers to human subjects. In Schweitzer's opinion, if we become sufficiently sensitive to the tiny motions of the will-to-live, and if we give up the privileged status granted to us either by the authority of the Bible or by our self-confidence originating from our present performance, we must realize

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Life), in *Albert Schweitzer, a gondolkodó...*, 77. English translations from: Albert Schweitzer, "The Ethics of Reverence for Life", in *The Philosophy of Civilization*, trans. C. T. Campion (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1987), 307–29, http://www1.chapman.edu/schweitzer/sch.reading1.html

[1] Ibid.

[2] Schweitzer, "Az etika problémája…", 75.

[3] Albert Schweitzer, besides working as a physician in Africa for many years, and being, by the by, an excellent organ player, also activated as a dedicated Protestant (Lutheran-Evangelical) theologian and pastor.

that we respect in other people the same thing as in a plant, an animal, or in ourselves: life. The imperative of "let to live" must make us susceptible to all life forms.

Schweitzer formulates it in this way: "As in my own will-to-live there is a longing for wider life and for the mysterious exaltation of the will-to-live which we call pleasure, with dread of annihilation and of the mysterious depreciation of the will-to-live which we call pain; so is it also in the will-to-live all around me, whether it can express itself before me, or remains dumb.

Ethics consist, therefore, in my experiencing the compulsion to show to all will-to-live the same reverence as I do to my own. (...) It is good to maintain and to encourage life; it is bad to destroy life or to obstruct it."[1]

We might think that this moral philosophy is high above realities. For it is necessary to destroy. The law of life is exactly this ceaseless killing among the living beings. Death and killing are as natural, moreover, indispensably necessary as birth, as giving (passing on) life. How can, therefore, an ethics which does not permit to destroy a single life be put in practice? How can we thus obey the instinctive command to protect our own life?

Schweitzer naturally did not forget to consider these obvious questions. Those who commit themselves to the ethics of reverence for life pledge themselves first of all to the belief that life is, pre-reflexively, prior to any conceptual clarification, as it is: saint. They assume as a moral principle the "responsibility without limit towards all that lives",[2] though they are aware of the fact that they cannot spare each and every life in reality. Ethics means exactly to be in continuous intellectual tension, never to have an easy conscience. Ethics, as a restless and irksome warm inside us, is always gnawing off the thick cover of indifference and carelessness from our heart: it is its responsibility. Therefore this ethics is all over relentless; it does not ease the conflicts of the human soul; on the contrary, it asks for an explanation in case of every life put out. It realizes and accepts that the personal will-to-live, that is, man's own life, from time to time crosses other lives in a manner which makes unavoidable the death of one or the other. But it does not permit to consider morally justified the hindering or even the destruction of any life form and to give ourselves absolution for the "sin". "We must

[1] Schweitzer, "Az élet tiszteletének etikája", 79.
[2] Ibid., 80.

never let ourselves become blunted. We are living in truth, when we experience these conflicts more profoundly. The good conscience is an invention of the devil."[1]

Life, namely the deeply felt responsibility for all living beings is an enormous burden on man. At the same time, he owes this to a certain measure to those ancient life forms which – as some less talented, but greatly experienced old people – made possible for him to appear in the family of living beings at all. Schweitzer emphasized exactly the fact that the respect is directed to life itself; be it in me, or in a horse mushroom (*Agaricus arvensis*). "Only the reverence felt by my will-to-live for every other will-to-live is ethical."[2]

Finally, it must be also emphasized that Schweitzer made it clear: the principles he elaborated do not imply in the least a doctrinaire ethics. Man is responsible for his actions, for the community he lives in, as well as for each and every life he encounters during his lifetime – all this is true. But we must never give up – he warns – being our own judges. "Thus we serve society without abandoning ourselves to it. We do not allow it to be our guardian in the matter of ethics."[3] The respect for life can only remain alive for an ethical and responsible man, if he undertakes to become the only judge. Schweitzer cautioned us against authority: "Never for a moment do we lay aside our mistrust of the ideals established by society, and of the convictions which are kept by it in circulation."[4] The individual is able to decide himself about good and evil if he does not try to escape from immeasurable responsibility and his own conscience conferred to him by Schweitzer's bioethics.

The imperative of the concern for life, or the possibility of a bioethics founded on liberty on the basis of Jonas and Heidegger

Life and responsibility: these are the keywords of the bioethical conception represented by Schweitzer, which demands respect for life; as well as of the Jonasian ethics of responsibility elaborated by the philosopher in German in 1979, and in English under the title *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of Ethics for the Technological Age* in 1984. As the title reveals, this book tried to answer the latest challenges: for the technological age, our age, according to Jonas, requires a radically new ethical attitude. He wrote the following passage

[1] Ibid., 87.
[2] Ibid., 94.
[3] Ibid., 97.
[4] Ibid.

in the epilogue of his previous work making a smooth transition from biological philosophy to the realm of ethics: "At any rate, the contention – almost axiomatic in the modern climate of thought – that something like an 'ought' can issue only from man and is alien to everything outside him, is more than a descriptive statement: it is part of a metaphysical position, which has never given full account of itself. To ask for such account is to reopen the ontological question of human within total existence."[1]

This is therefore the same – not exclusively scientific – paradigm we have already mentioned. Jonas considered that the original unity of ontology and ethics, where the former had laid the bases of the latter, was shattered by the reality breaking into two realms, those of subject and object. The objective, in other words, nature had been considered by former ethics as something standing opposite to them (Gegen-stand); as something which could not be harmed by human activity but could be infinitely formed. Moreover, "the whole realm of *techne* (with the exception of medicine) was ethically neutral (...) because it impinged but little on the self-sustaining nature of things and thus raised no question of permanent injury to the integrity of its object, the natural order as a whole".[2] The nature of human activity had, however, changed, Jonas argued, and this fact had a lasting effect on our relationship with nature.

It is unquestionable that human activity in the past centuries proved that nature's capacity to resist can be critically shaken. The living world – including rivers, seas, mountains, that is, environment as well – is vulnerable, and serious, ever deepening wounds have already been inflicted on it. Biodiversity is decreasing with a shocking speed, the equilibrium of the "outside, objective" world has been upset. We are informed on this by UN reports almost weekly, and in this respect, international political consensuses based on globally common principles are becoming ever more urgent. Well, Jonas pointed out the dangerous limitlessness of our technical civilization, as well as the excessive role of politics in the future in his book published thirty years ago: "If the realm of making has invaded the space of essential action, then morality must invade the realm of making, from which it has formerly stayed aloof, and must do so in the form of public policy. Public policy has never had to deal before with issues of such inclusiveness and such lenghts of

[1] Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 283.
[2] Jonas, "Az emberi cselekvés...", 145. English translation from: Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 4.

anticipation. In fact, the changed nature of human action changes the very nature of politics."[1]

The reunion of ontology and ethics is unavoidable, considered Jonas, in case we face at last the most urgent problem of our age: namely, that we have a self-destructive civilizational practice. "Their reunion can be effected (…) through a revision of the idea of nature"– Jonas suggested.[2] The new ethics must stand on the ground of the objective order hidden in the nature of things. It is the task of ontology to discover this order. Thus ethics can be prepared for its reintegration into ontology.

Jonas, by "interpreting the biological facts existentially" in his book entitled *The Phenomenon of Life*, wished to place natural beings to a common basis with man. Jonas practically extended the Heideggerian category of "existence" – which in Heidegger's philosophy can only be the Dasein's mode of being – to living organisms too, saying that "concern" (fürsorgen) is present in them too, as in the case of man.[3] Concern in this case is "concern for their own being". As we have seen in the case of the other mentioned authors (Rolston, Schweitzer), the new bioethics could be based exactly on this principle, on the strive for self-preservation present in every being. The first consequence for ethics is this: "Value and disvalue are not human creations but are essential to life itself."[4]

Jonas was clear-sighted enough to state: only then it is sensible to speak about moral obligation, if there is someone to consider this duty. But this does not imply, he continued, that we have to invent the idea of obligation by all means; we may simply tumble on it.[5] In the latter case, man, as the only living being who is able to discover the idea of responsibility, has the obligation to protect the totality of the living world. At this point Jonas did not shrink from taking a stand in such a delicate issue as the hierarchality of life. According to his standpoint responsibility for the human species is prior to that for other species. He

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[1] Jonas, "Az emberi cselekvés...", 155. English translation from: Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, 9.
[2] Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 283.
[3] Evidently, in the Heideggerian terminology a Dasein-like being capable of *concern* cannot be interpreted, since Heidegger shaped this existentiale for the Dasein. For him natural beings have only an *objectively present* (Vorhandensein) mode of being.
[4] Lawrence Vogel, "Foreword", in Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, xiv.
[5] Cf. Jonas, The Phenomenon of Life, 283.

argued for his principle by saying that life achieved the highest – and at the same time the most dangerous – degree of purposiveness in man, therefore man must be concerned – under suitable control – with the fate of the other living beings. He emphasized at the same time that the reasons for the imperative of protecting the human species ("the future generations") are not conferred by anthropocentric considerations, but rather by a much larger perspective, which regards things from the point of view of the totality of life.

We are therefore the means by which life – that made possible for us to be born from it – protects itself (and thus us too). Man's presence (and survival) in the world is the most important object of our responsibility. For this grants "the *foothold* for a moral universe in the physical world – the existence of mere *candidates* for a moral order."[1] The condition of any morality must be life. The protection of our environment and living conditions has come to depend on our prudence and our technical knowledge. "*Knowledge*, under these circumstances, becomes a prime duty..."[2] We are responsible both for our Earth and for the future generations – for preserving nature for them in such or similar conditions to that in which it is given to us.[3]

Jonas added: "This entails, among other things, the duty to preserve this physical world in such a state that the conditions for that presence remain intact; which in turn means protecting the world's vulnerability from what could imperil those very conditions."[4] A 1995 study by Leslie Paul Thiele, Professor in philosophy of the University of Florida, entitled *Nature and Freedom: A Heideggerian Critique of Biocentric and Sociocentric Environmentalism* may help us to understand the previous thought. Thiele wrote: "In my opinion our often seemingly hostile attitude towards nature is mainly due to the way in which human freedom is generally conceived and practiced."[5] Thiele believed that neither the negative nor the positive idea of freedom is

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[1] Jonas, "Az emberi cselekvés…", 151. English translation from: Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, 10.
[2] Ibid., 149. English translation from: Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, 7.
[3] The necessity of assuming responsibility for future generations was set down in several UNESCO declarations, for example in the 1997 *Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations towards Future Generations*, or in the 2005 *Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights*.
[4] Jonas, "Az emberi cselekvés…", 151. English translation from: Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, 10.
[5] Thiele, "Természet és szabadság...", 125.

sufficient to normalize the relationship between nature and man. Heidegger's existentialistic idea of freedom, on the other hand, is capable of becoming "the greatest driving force of ecological thinking".[1]

The basic state of the Dasein, the In-der-Welt-sein, refers to being, living in the world.[2] Man is always in the world and always assumes an attitude towards this world. The human race's *differentia specifica* is understanding, in Heidegger's words, understanding the existence: "It is peculiar to this entity [the Dasein] that with and through its Being, this Being is disclosed to it. *Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being.*"[3] And if this is so, if knowing and understanding being belongs substantially to man, then it is clear that human freedom can be fulfilled exactly in this epistemological, respectively hermeneutical ability. In this respect, Jonas and Heidegger can be brought into perfect harmony. For, while the former understood by freedom the tendency that the living – especially on its highest level, in man –, by means of ever more elaborate mediations, can make itself independent of the determinations of its actual physical circumstances, Jonas' former master perceived freedom in the fact that we let the world open up. Heidegger wrote: "Freedom now reveals itself as letting beings be. (...) Freedom is not merely what common sense is content to let pass under this name: the caprice, turning up occasionally in our choosing, of inclining in this or that direction. (...) Prior to all this ('negative' and 'positive' freedom), freedom is engagement in the disclosure of beings as such."[4]

The existentialist idea of freedom can be conceived as the reflection of being (Jonas: "We mirror being."[5]) which can be done, in fact, only by man. Heidegger, however, laid greater emphasis to man's privileged position; he did not want to include him in the same category with other beings. Our human freedom can be asserted, he believed, if we save the earth. He understood saving in the following way: "To save really means to set something free into its own presencing."[6] This, in fact, is the responsibility and concern imposed by Jonas, even if

[1] Ibid., 139.
[2] Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 78.
[3] Ibid., 32.
[4] Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth", in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 144–145.
[5] "Man mirrors being". Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life,* 282.
[6] Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language and Thought*, 150. (Quoted by Thiele, "Természet és szabadság...", 133.)

Heidegger would not agree with this use of the terms. Man "is the highest mode of being when it becomes an existing out of and towards freedom", he wrote;[1] but this could have been written by Jonas as well, so similar is their thought at this point. The idea of concern – which was formulated by Heidegger as "saving existence" – stands on the ground of human freedom, and it means "to let things exist as they are".[2]

The rethinking of the man–nature relationship, their reunion must start from the presupposition that "The human being is the shepherd of being."[3] His liberty is not libertinism, his autonomy is not autocracy but testimony; evidence for the different life forms' value instigated by his peerless particularity that he is able – exactly through his freedom – to know his world. The erection of a coherent bioethical support implies "the questioning of that historical presupposition that we are first of all technological beings as well as the rethinking of our freedom in the sense that instead of considering it the possibility and prerogative of physical or conceptual dominion and possession we ought to think of it as the ability to bear testimony to that which it is."[4]

Summary and conclusion

We have finished the presentation of our arguments. We tried to point out, that which is consider by certain authors "sacred" related to the phenomenon of life can, in fact, be reinterpreted, without any essential loss of meaning, as "self-value" or "intrinsic value". This transferred us from the region of religion associated with sacredness to the field of ethics. "Life is a miracle" – this exclamation can be understood and considered true even by irreligious people who neither believe in miracles, nor in "supernatural" entities. For them the sanctity manifest in life has the same meaning as *per se* value, irrespective of the origin of this axiological surplus in the living being. The word "sacred" therefore contains in this case an emotional surplus as compared to the somewhat dry "value", and it is meant to express the observation that life is marvellous (in other words wonderful), therefore we cannot pass it by as we do with inorganic forms of being.

Life is always the life of a living being; therefore our analysis focused on the organism. We became aware of the fact that it conforms

[1] Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 18. (Quoted by Thiele, ibid.)
[2] Thiele, "Természet és szabadság...", 134.
[3] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", in *Pathmarks*, 252.
[4] Thiele, "Természet és szabadság...", 135.

actively to changes, which, in the implicit opinion of several authors, is one of the main sources of value. The living being, which tries to stay alive, to preserve itself, the often very fragile integrity of its organism, plays a radically different role in the theatre of existence than lifeless things. Whenever it is possible, it breaks the laws, evades the – otherwise universal – rules of physics, and it creates new law, new *nomos*. The fluctuation analyzed by Prigogine,[1] which strives to dishevel the unity of the organism, forces the living entities to develop ever more perfect mechanism for maintaining their inner order: this reveals why in dissipative systems disorder is the source of order. The living being is therefore autonomous; in its formation and development not the strict mechanistic regularity is asserted, but spontaneity. The living organism is self-identical and at the same time it is in permanent interaction with its environment: it is separated from this environment, creating its unrepeatably complex and unique existence, but it also belongs organically to it. All this is granted by its openness, with which it waits in ceaseless readiness the environment's renewed challenges, changes.

Naturally, the characteristics and abilities enumerated here are not equally present in every living being; we should only consider how reduced a plant's reactions to outer changes are as compared to a more developed animal, not to mention man. Another source of value, which leads us to the level of races, is equally present in the most primitive life form and man. This is the phenomenon of metabolism, mentioned by Jonas emphatically, which generally characterizes life. To this a third argument can be connected which considers the organism as a self-evaluating system. Each race has an axiological scale of measurement (cf. Rolston), which prescribes the optimal way of preserving itself in the existence which is most characteristically its own. On lower levels this is not accompanied by reflexivity; a plant, for example, is ceaselessly trying to preserve itself in the optimal condition. On higher levels, however, living beings have a greater freedom, which allows them to depart from the ideal characteristic to the race. In the case of a considerable number of animals one can discover the regulative measures of pleasure/pain as reward/punishment by which the "race" tries to put a curb on the freedom already present in the individual trying to make it follow as closely as possible its nature.

Freedom was defined as the possibility of swerving from the specific nature of beings, which, however, has positive consequences too.

[1] Cf. Prigogine and Stengers, *Az új szövetség*..., 132–149.

Freedom is the human ability by which our completely direct connections with our environment, being transformed in something entirely different, may create an extremely complicated system of mediations. Thus the pre-reflexive, synthetic totality of the world, of experience is created, which makes possible for cognition and, through this, for moral behaviour to exist at all. Human freedom, according to Heidegger, is letting beings be, keeping existence safe as a shepherd. Jonas added to this the idea of concern: it is our moral obligation to act for the preservation of those existential circumstances which are given to us. Although man is the only being which can perceive responsibility and value, this hardly implies that these originate from him. Value originates from life itself: this was the opinion of Jonas, Rolston, Schweitzer, Leopold, and Naess alike. But what is this value?

The idea of the "smallest common" was mentioned several times in this paper. Once we have already summed up our conclusions in this respect: life is activity, metabolism, reproduction, and instructed/informative complexity. Value lies behind all these self-supporting instances, and it is nothing else, than the archaic strive for self-preservation itself. The most elementary law of the living is to live. Be our attitude to the things of the world as it may be, may we be exceedingly selfish, or, on the contrary, altruistic, self-sacrificing: we can never rationally wish for our death. This is opposed not only by our basic instinct, but also by every reasonable consideration too.[1] Maybe Schweitzer formulated the most accurately the nature of life's inherent value: "I am life which wills to live in the midst of life which wills to live" – we quoted him before. The "will-to-live" and the respect felt and showed towards it is therefore the "smallest common" which may serve as a principle of bioethics. Erazim Kohák, a Czech professor in bioethics and bioethicist formulated it in this way: "Value does not depend on the reflexive consciousness, but on the presence of an active being having an aim. (...) Where there is life, there is also value, irrespective of the actual, specific human system of values. (...) Well before, as a human being, I could have made a subsequent account of my personal system of values, life, of which I am a possible form of manifestation, has already decreed

[1] As Arthur Schopenhauer observed, suicides do not have a problem with life as such, but with the circumstances they have actually to live in. Anyone could imagine circumstances in which he/she would gladly carry "the burden of existence".

what values considers it significant. All that lives, down to the most modest beings, wishes to stay alive and fears annihilation."[1]

Jonas argued for the necessity of a new ethics as the nature of human activity had changed. This also applies to the state of nature, which suffered considerably in the yoke of technical civilization in the past centuries. Science and technique meddle far more in the course of nature than any time before, so they cannot disclaim the moral issues resulting from their activity. Our power has surpassed our ability to consider, Jonas warned us, and this increase has also enhanced our responsibility exceedingly. Heidegger had expressed beforehand his anxiety that the phenomenon of technicization was not handled according to its seriousness: "behind them [democracy and the constitutional state] there is in my view a notion that technology is in its essence something over which man has control. In my opinion, that is not possible. Technology is in its essence something which man cannot master by himself."[2]

And what are the dangers hidden in technique itself? The idea continues in this way: "Everything is functioning. This is exactly what is so uncanny, that everything is functioning and that the functioning drives us more and more to even further functioning, and that technology tears men loose from the earth and uproots them. (...) According to our human experience and history, at least as far as I see it, I know that everything essential and everything great originated from the fact that man had a home and was rooted in a tradition."[3]

This means that we have to change our (technical) civilizational practice not only because of pragmatic, but also because of cultural reasons. Man's uprootedness means that he gives up his traditions, his old values without being able to replace them by something of similar worth. Is therefore possible to get to choose the sanctity, namely the value of life as an ethical principle in a rational discourse? Well, in the multicultural, globally "functioning" world of the present age it is undoubtedly unavoidable to discover common principles which would make a rational or, eventually, an ethical discourse possible. Nevertheless, this does not imply that bioethics must necessarily become some kind of de-principlizing melting-pot. Moreover, it requires, by all

[1] Kohák, "Az ökológiai tapasztalat változatai", 97.
[2] Martin Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us: *Der Spiegel*'s Interview with Martin Heidegger (September 23, 1966)", in Martin Heidegger, *Philosophical and Political Writings*, ed. Manfred Stassen (New York: Continuum, 2003), 36.
[3] Ibid., 37.

means, a common basis for the collective solution of the common problems. Such a basis could be Naess' basic principle which considers the discrimination of the different species unfounded, or the interspecies ethics suggested by Rolston, which, realizing and remembering the "aboriginal" intrinsic value in each living being, would cease to regard the living beings mere instruments.

Bioethics, may we consider it either as a philosophical discipline, or as an autonomous science separated from philosophy for centuries, is undoubtedly up-to-date, in other words it is the current field for intellectual interactions. As we have seen, it was brought to existence by some moral dilemmas unknown before. Heidegger wrote: "The role which philosophy has played up to now has been taken over by the sciences."[1] Therefore, now sciences have the peerless role of exploring the being. Regarding the question how philosophy can rediscover itself there is no unified view at the present. To make philosophy an applied science is anyway one of the paths.

As a conclusion let us operate the *primum movens* of philosophy, that is, question. After all this, would Heidegger's view on the role of philosophy be retrograde or, on the contrary, substantial? The idea is this: "Any essential questioning of philosophy is necessarily out-of-date. (...) Philosophizing always remains a knowledge which does not allow updating, but, on the contrary: measures the age by its own measure."[2]

Translated by Ágnes Korondi

[1] Ibid., 39.
[2] Martin Heidegger, *Bevezetés a metafizikába* (Introduction to Metaphysics) (Dabas: IKON Kiadó, 1995), 6.