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Finding Solutions to Ecological and Environmental Crisis with a New Ethics

Nowa etyka w poszukiwaniu sposobów rozwiązania kryzysu ekologicznego i środowiskowego

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Abstract: Ecological and environmental crises are related to the development of an anthropocentric human culture. They threaten the values on which human life and development on Earth depend, and therefore the need for a new ethic arises. The aim of this paper, which is based on a qualitative analysis of theoretical sources, is to highlight the gravity of these crises and to present a 'new ethics', which is referred to as the ethics of the future, the ethics of responsibility for the future or the ethics of sustainability. We draw on the work of H. Jonas and other thinkers who point out that the traditional ethics, which is also referred to as anthropocentric, is no longer sufficient in today's world. It cannot contribute to solving these crises. We argue in favour of a 'new ethics' that takes into account the distant future and relies on a new dimension of responsibility, but also of justice. It urges people to be able to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions and not to endanger the survival of humanity on the planet and also of all life. With this in mind, it should also play a part in shaping their moral character.

Keywords: new ethics, anthropocentric ethics, environmental ethics, ecological crisis, environmental crisis, new dimension of responsibility

Streszczenie: Kryzysy ekologiczne i środowiskowe związane są z rozwojem antropocentrycznej kultury człowieka. Zagrożają one wartościom, od których zależy życie i rozwój człowieka na Ziemi, co rodzi potrzebę sformułowania nowej etyki. Celem niniejszego artykułu, opartego na jakościowej analizie źródeł teoretycznych, jest podkreślenie powagi tych kryzysów oraz przedstawienie pojęcia "nowej etyki", którą określa się jako etykę przyszłości, etykę odpowiedzialności za przyszłość czy etykę zrównoważonego rozwoju. Artykuł nawiązuje do prac H. Jonasa i innych myślicieli, którzy wskazują, że tradycyjna etyka, nazywana także antropocentryczną, nie jest już wystarczająca w dzisiejszym świecie, ponieważ nie może przyczynić się do rozwiązania owych kryzysów. Opowiadamy się za "nową etyką", która uwzględnia odległą przyszłość i opiera się na nowym wymiarze odpowiedzialności, ale także sprawiedliwości. Wzywa ona ludzi do wzięcia odpowiedzialności za konsekwencje swoich czynów oraz do zaprzestania działań stawiających pod znakiem zapytania przetrwanie ludzkości a także wszelkiego życia na naszej planecie. Nowa etyka powinna także służyć kształtowaniu postawy moralnej współczesnego człowieka.

Słowa kluczowe: nowa etyka, etyka antropocentryczna, etyka środowiskowa, kryzys ekologiczny, kryzys środowiskowy, nowy wymiar odpowiedzialności

Introduction

From the perspective of natural sciences, we are living in a new geological and climatic epoch defined as the Anthropocene. Man is at the centre of culture and as a result his culture is described as anthropocentric. Certainly, from the beginning, humans have been forced to modify and adapt the natural environment for human purposes, adapting it to their needs, in terms of specific human goals that go beyond biological needs. This process, referred to as the humanization of nature, is linked to the historical process of transforming the world, of adapting it for human purposes. However, society and nature, respectively culture and nature, gradually began to oppose each other. Particularly, in industrial society, the human impact on nature has led to an excessive burden on nature through productive and unproductive human activity, to serious changes in the environment and to a socio-cultural burden on nature, which has resulted in the crises¹ that have been described as ecological and environmental. Such crises arise as a result of the conflict between humanity and terrestrial nature. They are the result of the failure of the planet's inhabitants to respect the environment and responsibly manage natural resources. Particularly, in industrial and contemporary post-industrial society, the environment is burdened by the development of an economy that threatens natural resources, exceeds the planet's reproductive capacity and thus, ultimately, also threatens the sustainability of life on Earth. This demonstrates the primacy of economic values and the interests of contemporary man over other values and highlights the contradiction between the ever-expanding sphere of needs in a consumerist society and the finite nature of the Earth's resources.

¹ The origin of the word "crisis" is found in the Greek *krino* which means to choose, to judge, to choose between two opposite options. In Latin, crisis represents a critical culminating point in the development of an event or process (Rak et al. 2021).

There is no doubt that, for the survival of humanity on this planet, these global crises must be seriously addressed and solved by a number of different scientific disciplines. Our aim is not to examine in detail the causes and reasons for their emergence, but to reflect on how ethics can help to find solutions to them. After all, as a practical philosophy, it has the task of seeking answers to practical questions in our lives, of solving practical tasks, problems and dilemmas that promote the development of man and of humanity as a whole. There is no doubt that the crises mentioned above also threaten the lives of people, mankind, and overall – life on the planet.

In this paper, we point out that ethics, as a human science, should address these crises, assuming that it can suggest some changes in the behaviour of contemporary people so that at least they are mitigated. In this context, our aim is to draw attention to the new ethics and its contribution to finding the solutions to the ecological and environmental crisis.

This paper is based on theoretical research, on qualitative analysis of theoretical sources, which are information sources from the field of social sciences and humanities, mainly from philosophy and ethics. Our aim is not to analyse in detail the causes, roots and consequences of the ecological crisis, nor of the environmental crisis, but to point out the threat they pose to humanity and to life on Earth in general. In this context, we justify the need for a new ethics that can contribute to finding solutions to these crises or at least help to mitigate them.

First, we draw attention to the question why these crises are considered to be social, moral and ethical, and then we justify why it is not sufficient to find solutions to the ecological and environmental crises, which are currently global in nature, by means of traditional ethics. The main focus is on *the new ethics* – we clarify the problems it deals with in comparison with traditional ethics and, relying on several thinkers, we present some types of new ethics, especially

the ethics of responsibility for the future or the ethics of the future, the ethics for technological civilization, the ethics of sustainability but also the global ethics. We clarify what is their contribution to the solution of the aforementioned crises and to the preservation of sustainable life on Earth. Along with this, we will also address one of the tasks of the new ethics – to participate in the development of the moral profile of the contemporary human personality.

1. Ecological and Environmental Crisis and the Reasons for Involving Ethics in their Solution²

The ecological crisis that is worsening living conditions on Earth has multiple causes. As it is stated, “The causes of the ecological crisis of modern society are so deeply rooted that their discovery requires far-reaching reflection on the foundations of European culture, modern civilisation and contemporary man” (Znoj et al. 1991, 975).

Certainly, this crisis is associated with the development of industrial society, which caused a great socio-cultural burden on nature, on the environment. There was often irrational management of natural resources, promotion of consumerism, creation of large amounts of waste that our Earth could not “digest” and other problems,

² We consider important to distinguish between an environmental crisis and an ecological crisis, like, for example, R. Stáhel (2019). He clarifies that the ecological crisis is a natural scientific concept and refers to a certain state, or the set of phenomena and processes of the ecosystem and concerns the fate of contemporary humanity as a whole, while the term environmental crisis refers to the situation, relations and interaction of man, humanity and nature not only from the biological aspect, but also from other aspects (social, psychological, philosophical, ethical, aesthetic, theological, historical, legal, economic or political). Similarly, according to I. Dubnička, the “environmental” attribute means that this crisis is not understood in purely biological terms (i.e. “only” as a disruption of the relationships between living organisms and their environment). It is a crisis of humanity itself in a much broader context (Dubnička 2001, 1).

the consequences of which the current society is bearing, and which will probably persist in the future, because the restoration of damaged ecosystems and depleted resources is a long-term process. Also, according to A. Kumar (1992), the roots of the global ecological crisis are to be found in modern industrial society. They lie in our way of thinking, in our values and precisely in the fact that humans consider themselves superior to nature.

However, pressures to further exploitation of nature and its resources are not significantly weakening even in a post-industrial society.³ The evidence of this are several ecological problems (building of industrial parks on arable land, destruction of greenery in urban settlements, building of houses, industrial buildings, recreational facilities in protected areas, illegal storage of waste in landfills, etc.). Climate change, pollution of the biosphere and, consequently, threats to sustainable development are occurring in this society, mainly as a result of the development of an economy which, in this society, focuses on the service sector, the development of which relies on technologies that clearly cannot be considered beneficial for the development of man, society and, in general, for the sustainability of life on Earth.⁴ It shows that: “The ethics of Earth usage is still completely dominated by economic interests, just as it was with social ethics a century ago” (Leopold 1991, 1015).

³ The concept of post-industrial society was developed by D. Bell in 1919. Post-industrial society is characterized by several features, where information and knowledge are the dominant productive resources. The main resource of production in this society is the qualification of personnel, while social relations are also based on knowledge, information becomes a commodity (Bell 1973; Keller et al. 2011). This society relies mainly on the service sector.

⁴ Sustainable development or „sustainability” is the integration of four components (goals): social development, environmental protection, responsible use of natural resources and the maintenance of a high and stable level of economic growth (see, for example, WCED 1987).

Today's economy not only runs up against limited natural resources, but also threatens a healthy environment, without considering the planet's limited capacity to cope with waste. Certainly, the economic development of these societies is not the only cause of the mentioned crises.⁵ As it is stated, in relation to the ecological crisis: "It is a crisis of human living in the world, of human dealing with the world, a crisis of human being" (Kohák 1996, 12). Satisfying individual goals and achieving one's own utility, without regard for the ability of other people and other generations to satisfy their goals and needs, damages the Earth and complicates sustainability of life. "The vast majority of academics claim that the environmental changes are anthropogenic. While searching for the solutions to the crisis, we must return to the questions regarding its roots as well as the character of man's presence in the world" (Sadowski 2023, 1). The critique of anthropocentrism⁶ as the origin of both ecologi-

cal and environmental crisis is also found in the work of other authors (see, e.g., Minteer and Manning 2005; Capra 2002; Kusin 2014, etc.). We lean towards and agree with them that these crises have an anthropocentric background, caused by people who, in their efforts to meet their current needs and interests, take an unsustainable and – overall – irresponsible approach to nature and environmental values.⁷ The manifestation of anthropocentrism is people's masterful attitude towards nature, it is an expression of their free will, whereby people understand *nature as a thing* to serve human interests and needs.⁸ At the same time, we consider the ecological crisis as well as the environmental crisis as *social crises*, because they affect the life of society and its members, or they can also be described as crises of the relationship between culture and nature. In this context, it seems to us more appropriate to refer to this crisis as an "environmental" crisis.

5 On the roots of the ecological crisis, see e.g. White 2000.

6 Anthropocentrism literally means – human-centred. In philosophical form, it is the ethical belief that only humans have inherent value, and other beings have value only in that they can serve humans, or in their instrumental value. From an anthropocentric position, humans have moral standing, they are goals in themselves; other things (individual living beings, systems) are means to human goals. As L. Goralnik and M.P. Nelson (2012) argue, in a certain sense, all ethics is anthropocentric because probably only humans have the cognitive capacity to formulate and recognize moral values. This ability puts humans at the centre of any ethical system we design. We do encounter a one-sided conception of anthropocentrism as the position that nature is to be used for human purposes and exploitation (see e.g. Hála 2016), or, alternatively, anthropocentrism is seen as interchangeable with human chauvinism, whereby morality is understood as something that concerns only humans, and non-human objects are seen as only having value if they serve human interests or purposes. For more details see: Routley and Routley 1979). Apart from strong anthropocentrism, which considers nature as a storehouse of materials for human use, weak anthropocentrism does not completely subordinate nature to humans, and indeed finds arguments for its protection or for the cultivated manipulation of its components

"A term that is used to describe the sum of the environmental problems that we face today. Key contemporary environmental problems include the greenhouse effect and global warming, the hole in the ozone layer, acid rain, and tropical forest clearance. New dimensions to the environmental crisis include emerging threats and the global nature, rapid build-up, and persistence of the problems. Whilst the problems appear to be largely physical (environmental), the causes and solutions lie much more in people's attitudes, values, and expectations" (Oxford Reference 2023).

Interdisciplinary approaches are required in the study of the environmental crisis, as confirmed, for example, by earlier efforts to develop Environmental Education

(For more details see: Norton 1984, 6; Binka 2008; and others).

7 These are water, air, soil, minerals, organisms, ecosystems and energy, which are considered to be components of the environment according to Act No. 17/1992 Coll. on the Environment (Slov-Lex Právny a informačný portál 1992).

8 See more (Hegel 2009).

Programmes focusing on Interdisciplinary Approaches in Environmental Education (see e.g. Unesco-UNEP 1985; Monnier 2012; etc.). Interdisciplinary approaches are also important in the search for solutions to this crisis, which has also been described as a crisis in the relationship of our modern, so-called Euro-American culture to nature (see e.g. Špirko 1999). The sources mentioned above also confirm, in some way, that it is appropriate to look for ways out of this crisis also by means of ethics.

R. Kolářský, who reflects on the ecological crisis in his works, refers to this crisis as a *moral crisis*. The environmental crisis can also be described as such. Like Kolářský, we consider it as a manifestation of human irresponsibility and agree that without a considerate responsible relationship with the earthly nature it becomes no longer possible to fulfil moral obligations to other people and to oneself (Kolářský 2011). According to K. Lorenz (2014), it is not only human irresponsibility, but even blind vandalism, which destroys nature and humanity by ecological destruction. This statement of his also suggests that, among other things, this is a moral crisis.

Such irresponsible and even predatory attitudes of people towards nature and the environment need to be changed. This is a difficult task, because people today do not sufficiently understand the importance of the health of the Earth, the ability of the Earth to regenerate itself and the importance of a responsible approach to the natural world. Even A. Leopold rightly stated that, “Conservation is our effort to understand and protect this capacity” (1991, 1022). Such an effort is missing in contemporary humans. The problem we see is that they do not give the necessary importance to the values that sustainable life on Earth must be based on. In our view, efforts to find solutions to or mitigate both crises must be based on proper understanding of the values that are threatened by the crisis and an awareness of the responsibility

to protect and sustain them (see more also in Mravcová 2019).

For example, V. Gluchman (1998) expressed concern about the crisis of morality, its values, or the crisis of human civilization, and identified humanity as responsible for it. It bears responsibility for the greatly devastated environment, and ultimately, for the miserable state of the entire planet, which threatens the sustainability of life on Earth. According to this thinker, the threat to the environment can in some ways be compared to the sinking of the Titanic, with music playing on board and the passengers having a jolly good time. However, he is convinced that despite this serious threat, which also has a moral dimension, humanity is able to save itself, precisely thanks to the still functioning instinct of self-preservation (Gluchman 1998, 199). Although we do not deny that contemporary man has the instinct of self-preservation, we believe that humanity can save itself and not only survive, but also live a good life and develop, mainly thanks to the reason. As M. Weber (1998) stated, reason and rationalization, or the process of escalating rationality of thought and action, leads to disenchantment, to liberation of thought, to a change of worldview and to people’s orientation in the world and also to their free acting. But free acting must at the same time be responsible acting. Responsibility presupposes the ability to anticipate what may happen and to consider it when acting. It assigns or attributes the consequences of an action to its own action and so takes responsibility for them (Weber 1990).⁹

Based on the above-mentioned statements, we believe that nowadays it is reasonable to think about a moral crisis of values and the need for a new ethics. In view

⁹ The term responsibility is characterised by a multiplicity of meanings. It has its roots in Roman law but is found in everyday communication. At the core of responsibility is the idea of imputation, which implies a causal link between an act and its agent. See more in approaches of M. Weber, A. Giuliani and P. Ricoeur in (Smreková 2013).

of the crises that concern us in today's globalised world, it is obvious that there is a moral crisis of values. The problem is that, to this day, not enough attention has been paid to examining the ethical aspects of the environment and, in this context, to the problems associated with sustainability and responsibility for future life on Earth.

As Leopold said: "We do not yet have an ethics that deals with the relationship of man to the Earth, to the animals and plants that live on it. The Earth, like Odysseus' slaves, is still property. The relationship to the land is still strictly economic, bringing benefits but not obligations" (Leopold 1991, 1012).¹⁰ In addition to identifying the environmental crisis as a moral crisis, it is also an *ethical crisis*.¹¹ As it appears, the current ethics, labelled as traditional ethics, is in crisis, and so a new ethics is needed that must address issues such as sustainability of life on Earth, new ethical challenges in the environment, the Tragedy of Commons, responsibility for the preservation of humanity, environmental responsibility, and others, in comparison to traditional ethics. And, at the same time – human attitudes and relationships to nature, old virtues that would encourage people to behave responsibly towards living and non-living nature, the environment and other values that are "compatible with a sustainable way of life."¹²

¹⁰ G. Leonhard, like Jonas, is dealing with technological civilization. Right in the beginning of his book *Technology VS. Humanity* he asks the question: "How will humanity maintain its superiority in facing the exponential technological changes coming from all sides?" (Leonhard 2016).

¹¹ Even Kolářský, who is thinking about the ecological crisis, considers this crisis to be an ethical one. It is "a crisis of ethical thinking, to the extent that ethical theories underestimate and neglect the moral significance of human relations to terrestrial nature" (Kolářský 2011, 29). In addition, he considers the current ecological crisis as a philosophical crisis, since it is gradually impossible to clarify basic concepts and values, to interpret philosophical theories without bearing in mind the fact that the Earth is so devastated that it may become a wasteland in the near future.

¹² See more in (Vavroušek 1994).

The new ethics should promote a new value orientation of people. As many experts (for example, Huba 2006; Vavroušek 1994; Smith-Sebasto 1997; etc.) have argued, it is people's values and value orientations that can be described as the most essential and the most difficulty defined attribute of moving towards sustainability.

Throughout history, people's values and their relationship to nature have changed and, as mentioned above, even today people are treating nature in an unsustainable or even predatory manner, resulting in crises, especially ecological and environmental crisis. The need for the new ethics to address these and other problems and to help mitigate and combat these crises is thus becoming increasingly urgent.

However, thinkers differ in their views on whether it is sufficient to address the conflicts between humans and nature and the problems threatening a healthy environment using traditional ethical principles or whether this requires a new ethical theory. As Kolářský (2011) argues, new philosophical concepts or the *new ethics* that would address the relationship between humans and the environment and address ecological problems would only be necessary if it is not possible to justify the interest in the sustainability of the Earth using traditional concepts. In doing so, he refers to J. Passmore (1975), who at first did not consider it necessary to create a new ethics because the protection of the environment is in the interest of humans. Later, however, he admitted that traditional conceptions of ethics would not be able to justify the human interest "in the permanent habitability of the Earth" and that both a new philosophy and a new ethics would be needed. Within a few years, other thinkers began to realize that the state of the Earth and its continuing devastation require new philosophical and ethical theories (see, e.g., Naess 1973; Jonas 1997; Hála 2016; and others).

2. New Ethics and a New Dimension of Responsibility

The emergence of new problems in societies that have been identified as both industrial and post-industrial, and their consequences, have gradually encouraged some thinkers to reflect on the need for the new ethics. For example, C. Diatka (2004) stated that ethics in the past did not have to consider the global conditions of human life and worry about the existence of humanity as such. However, in the contemporary world, a new understanding of the rights and duties of human beings towards themselves and the world is required because the old approaches no longer can stand in the face of this reality. Similarly, V. Hála pointed out that ethics, until relatively recent times (roughly until the 1970s), was concerned almost exclusively with interpersonal relations (possibly with an overlap with religion). “As far as «ultimacy» was concerned, it was the ultimacy of human existence. It was practically only the awareness of the ultimacy, or non-renewability, of natural resources that became the impulse that forced representatives of various disciplines – and also of philosophy – to reflect on this relationship as an urgent ethical problem” (Hála 2016, 63). As E. Kohák openly stated, “What we now refer to as the ecological crisis is essentially the recognition that we cannot continue to live with this primitive but self-evident ethics” (Kohák 2011, 17).

According to J. Šmajš, we cannot be satisfied with traditional morality, which initially integrated and harmonized society, but at the same time separated it from the surrounding biotic community. Today, in a society dominated by consumer culture, this morality, according to him, is not only losing its previous role, but is weakening and dying, and so, in his opinion, a new morality is needed – a *biophilic morality*, a morality of compassion for the injured Earth. It should consider the experience of the existential threat to the assumptions of culture. But at the same time, Šmajš notes that we do not yet have such a morality, and so

its traditional form is already only a marginal sociocultural regulative. As he states, “the starting point of the new ethics that we need to overcome the ecological crisis could be the still little-known concept of evolutionary ontology” (Šmajš 2013, 806). According to him, ethics needs a new ontological argumentation to be able to recognize good and evil. It should be based on the knowledge of what benefits and what harms the natural system, because it is the natural system that created the universal human nature that we are obliged to protect (Šmajš 2013).

Also H. Jonas correctly noticed the new situation and recognized that today the focus cannot only be on the development and protection of human life, but on the protection of everything that appears to be threatened, including future generations and nature. This is because the context within which we think about the ethical dimensions of action has radically changed and “to that for which we must be responsible because we have power over it, the subject of an entirely new order has come, namely, the entire biosphere of the planet” (Jonas 1997, 27). This new situation raises the need to think about new dimensions of responsibility and the need for the new ethics.¹³ In his attempt at an ethics for a technological civilization, he expressed his concern about the so-called *technological power*¹⁴, which allows contemporary man to carry out various projects, while technical interventions can hurt nature. The problem is that this power exceeds the ability of humans to anticipate, judge and evaluate certain impacts and consequences. In particular, it is the long-term consequences of projects on

13 On the modern concept of responsibility and moral responsibility, see more details in (Hála 2013).

14 Similarly, Šmajš points out that the current problem is the dominance of technological power over man and culture. “It lies in the fact that it reacts slowly and hiddenly, and that people in their rashness, blindness and pride can destroy the sensually imperceptible preconditions of the healthy natural reproduction of their own species” (Šmajš 2013, 809).

life in the future that will be faced by future generations, which increases the demands on the responsibility of this or that generation. It thus calls for human responsibility for nature and for the life of mankind. He realizes that “Nature as that for which man is responsible is certainly something new that ethical theory must reflect on” (Jonas 1997, 27-28). He rejects anthropocentric ethics because, in his view, it cannot give a “guide” on how to behave and he considers human irresponsibility as the root of the ecological crisis. Traditional ethics, or classical ethics, as Jonas called it, has failed because of anthropocentrism, which has “dehumanized” man himself, and it is the new ethics – an *ethics for a technological civilization* – that must be based on a new responsibility that is compatible with preserving the future of humanity and also with the continuation of truly human life on Earth. It is, in fact, an ethic of responsibility towards future humans that Jonas sees as the solution to the moral crisis created by devastation of the Earth.¹⁵ In the context of ensuring such responsibility, he points to people’s fear of possible threats and anxiety in the face of possible consequences of their own failure.

The new ethics deals with problems that ethics has not dealt with before. According to Jonas, previous ethics has relied on non-cumulative behaviour, whereas cumulative behaviour, the self-expansion of technological change in the world, continually overcomes the conditions of each of the acts that contribute to that change and proceeds

¹⁵ The ethics of responsibility with a forward-looking focus is also found in other representatives. For example, in Weber, who distinguishes between the ethics of belief and the ethics of responsibility. Both are associated with the problem of moral responsibility. In accordance with the ethics of responsibility, a person is supposed to take the burden for the predictable consequences of his or her actions, for more details see (Weber 1990). H. Skolimowski connects the ethics of responsibility with environmental justice, which is a consequence of respect for life and also a prerequisite for its preservation and enrichment (Skolimowski 1996).

through completely unprecedented situations in which the lessons drawn from experience are powerless (Jonas 1997, 28). This opens a gap between the power of prevailing knowledge and the power to act, which, according to Jonas, creates a new ethical problem. The problem is both the “technical practice” that focuses on the achievement of near goals, or short-term goals, and the cumulative nature of technical practice, the effects of which are compounded. As a concrete case today, we can mention the ecological footprint, which is a cumulative indicator of the impact of social actors on the environment.¹⁶

It is not only technological power but crises such as ecological and environmental crisis have created an urgent need to address new problems linked to people’s irresponsible attitudes towards nature and the environment, which threaten the sustainability of life on Earth. The nature of human action has changed, and to what we must take responsibility for has been added a whole new order, namely the entire biosphere of the planet (Jonas 1997).

Jonas explicitly stated that we have responsibilities for future humanity, for other human beings, while the responsibility “for someone” belongs inseparably to the human being. It is a property of the subject inherent in being an existing human being. For Jonas, it is first a responsibility towards man as such, an “ontological responsibility for the idea of man” (Jonas 1997, 78). In this sense, he formulates a new imperative of responsibility that is appropriate to the new type of acting subject: “Act in such a way that the effects of your action are compatible with the duration of truly

¹⁶ Ecological footprint is a method for measuring the impact of human activities on planet Earth. It is based on the concept of an environmental indicator of the ecological carrying capacity (CC) of a territory. “It measures our relationship with all of nature, ranging from photosynthesis to the carbon cycle, and it is the only metric that seeks to provide a truly global perspective on human demands against the planet’s regenerative capacity” (WWF 2022).

human life on Earth.” Or: “Do not endanger the conditions of the unlimited duration of humanity on Earth!” (Jonas 1997, 35). This imperative is relevant to the new ethics and requires an obligation to preserve the unlimited survival of humanity, that is, the sustainability of human life. According to it, we should act responsibly, preserving the conditions for life, regardless of how future generations will act.

The new ethics is to regulate human action in a way that is compatible with the duration of truly human life on Earth. This implies providing the conditions for a dignified and quality life for human beings, but not at the expense of future generations. This is an obligation arising from an ethics of responsibility for the present generation, and it is important to note that this ethics is not based on reciprocity. “In the ethics of the future, the reciprocity falls away” (Jonas 1997, 73). We cannot ask questions like: what has the future done for me? Respectively, to ask this question is meaningless because what does not exist makes no claims. Nor can it reciprocate any moral considerations. Contemporary people cannot calculate with the future in terms of reciprocal utility. The future can do nothing for present people, while present people can do a lot for the future. By not abusing their freedom and by being responsible to the environment and to the use of natural resources and, in general, by trying to mitigate the negative effects of their actions on nature and the environment in order to maintain the conditions for life on Earth.

Like Jonas, G. Lipovetsky thinks that in the face of the threat of the destruction of life it is necessary to declare an entirely new categorical imperative. He formulates it similarly: “Do not violate the conditions for the infinite survival of humanity on Earth” (Lipovetsky 2011, 291). The Earth is in mortal danger, which, according to him, has raised the need to extend human responsibility to other living beings, things, and the entire biosphere, because man possesses such means by which he can endanger the future

life on the planet. Like Jonas, he is referring to modern technology, which has such unprecedented and potentially catastrophic consequences that a transformation of ethical principles is necessary. As he points out, “An «ethics of the future» is needed in a technical civilization” (Lipovetsky 2011, 291).

Jonas and Lipovetsky agree that protection of nature and the environment must become a primary goal in today’s technological civilization. Obligations to protect them arise from the endangered wealth of the natural world. Both draw attention to a new dimension of responsibility and previously unknown obligations that go beyond traditional ethics. These applied to people and to the social subjects of this generation in general, and to the relationships between. As both argue, there is now a need to extend responsibility to future generations. The new ethics requires self-restraint from present people, emphasising the need to take responsibility for the consequences of our actions that will be bear by future generations.¹⁷ The formulation of their imperatives may suggest that they are primarily concerned with preservation of human life on Earth, but such action also requires some consideration for nature. Not only because humans depend on it.¹⁸

¹⁷ This raises the question of whether this new dimension of responsibility is associated with imputation. Given the qualitatively changed nature of human action, for more details see e.g. (Ricoeur 1994) people cannot predict, they do not have knowledge of the impact of their power, knowledge of the possible future negative consequences of their actions. Nor will they be able to pay the bills for their actions.

¹⁸ Jonas addresses the question – whether nature has a moral right of its own, reasoning that even though it is subordinated to the power of man, it has apparently become a good committed to man and has something of a moral claim on humans. At the same time, he adds that if this were true, it would require a change of mindset regarding the foundations of ethics. Not only for our sake, but also for its own sake, by its own right. He considers that the anthropological limitation of earlier ethics is no longer valid and sees the problem as the fact that earlier ethics did not prepare people for the role of stewards, for more details see (Jonas 1997).

The responsibility for the life on Earth and the overall responsibility towards the Earth is also openly demanded by Leopold in his work *The Land Ethic*. He considers responsibility not only to humans and to future generations, but also to nature and all ecosystems as the most important duty in the new millennium. Earth ethics, in his view, “changes the role of homo sapiens from that of a conqueror of the Earth community to one of its many members and citizens” (Leopold 1999, 235). All people on Earth should be aware that they are part of nature and thus have no right to predatory behaviour towards the Earth, its inhabitants, its non-renewable resources and the whole nature. Leopold derives value neither from man nor from life, but from the balance of the whole ecosystem. His ethics is holistic, he sees nature as an interconnected entity, as an ecosystem or community where individuals have a mission, which determines their position, their duties and, overall, their function in the preservation of society. In order to preserve the balance of life, it extends ethics beyond human relationships, to all life, and relates it to the condition of sustainability.¹⁹

Similarly, according to J. Lovelock, the stability, balance and integrity or beauty of the whole system on Earth matters. He also recognizes the dependence of human lives on the Earth, which he sees as the organism that humanity has created as its central nervous system. However, this pollutes the Earth, destroying ecosystems and the diversity of life, disrupting the balance. Survival becomes a serious problem for humanity, and so he believes that the imperative of growth must be replaced by the imperative of survival (Lovelock 2014).²⁰ He is concerned with the survival

of humanity on the planet, which presupposes a responsibility for what conditions humans will create for future generations.

In this context, the need for the so-called *planetary* or *global responsibility* arises. According to H. Küng (1992), it should apply to all people as inhabitants of this planet. He argues that we are in a situation of crisis and so the fate of the planet should concern all people equally. Planetary, or global responsibility, concerns everyone. We are all equally responsible for preserving life on the planet, and the role of the new ethics is to explain this responsibility to people, while at the same time encouraging them to put it into practice.

The *global ethics*, which addresses ethical issues and problems arising from the global interconnectedness and interdependence of the world's population, is based on *global responsibility*, but also on global justice and other values. According to K. Hutchings (2010), it is meant to regulate the behaviour of individuals and collectives as members of the global world and to help people living in a globalised world to realise that as members of a global community of people, they have a responsibility for what happens on the planet and should therefore be concerned about its fate (see more also in Mravcová 2020). They should bear in mind values such as: human rights, religious pluralism, gender equality, the rule of law, environmental protection, sustainable global economic growth, poverty alleviation, stopping conflicts between countries, humanitarian aid and the preservation of cultural diversity, etc.²¹ Like Hutchings, for example, Küng

to raise living standards and quality of life. But this imperative does not automatically ensure an increase in the quality of life.

²¹ The fundamental principled ideas that form the core of the new global ethics are outlined in the *Our Creative Diversity* Report. These are human rights, democracy, protection of minorities, commitment to peaceful conflict resolution, and intergenerational equality. It also emphasises women's human rights and protection from gender discrimination. The fundamental principled ideas are intended to pro-

¹⁹ In this context, a fundamental (onto-axiological) turn is contemplated in the form of extending the scope of ethics in general – to the sphere of non-human living beings or entire natural systems (ecocentric or cosmocentric ethics), for more details see (Nash 1989).

²⁰ He apparently has in mind the imperative of economic growth. Economic growth is seen as a promise

(2000) calls for a kind of necessary minimum of common human values, criteria and basic attitudes and a consensus of people on binding values, non-revocable criteria and basic attitudes, in spite of various religious and ideological differences, to which all religions adhere in spite of their dogmatic differences.²²

We believe that global ethics, which is one type of new ethics, can also help people living on our planet to deal with global crises, including global ecological and environmental crisis. It should also respond forcefully to people's negative attitudes towards certain shared values, highlight the need for change or call for a global ethical consensus to secure world order. Given that one of the values on which it is based is the protection of the environment, we believe that it should openly point out the threat posed by environmental pollution that does not respect national borders. The environment is our common value, we all have a responsibility for its condition, and it is our duty to care for it together. Certainly, this fact calls for effective action, which must be global,²³ but this should be preceded by an awareness of some of the values that are the basis of life on Earth.

About the need for a new ethics, which should focus on providing a good life for one's generation, but also for future generations, indirectly thinks also A. Naess (1996), who laid the foundations of deep ecology.²⁴ This author also radically moves away from anthropocentrism and sees the way to overcome the current

vide a minimum standard to which every political community should adhere (World Commission on Culture and Development 1995).

22 Similarly see (Walzer 2002).

23 For more details see (Mravcová 2019; Singer 2006; 2009).

24 The deep ecology based on ecocentric values, in addition to Naess is also supported by F. Capra, who similarly advocates that all living beings are members of ecological communities and form a web of interdependence. He argues that if we are aware of this on a daily basis, a radically new system of ethics will emerge, see more in (Capra 1997a; 1997b).

environmental crisis in a profound transformation of civilisation. He calls for a transition to an ecosophical lifestyle which, although recognising values such as wealth, abundance, well-being or luxury, defines them in terms of quality of life and not standard of living. In his theory, he drew attention to the need to ensure a sustainable life not only for human beings but for all living species, and he encourages his contemporaries to be both responsible and sustainable. Implicitly, he reflects on the need for an ethic that calls on people to care not only for other people but also for nature. This can be inferred in the light of the formulated principles of ethically and ecologically responsible *friluftsliv*²⁵, for more details see (Naess 1996). They emphasise the need to show respect for nature, for natural lifestyles, but also to respect the carrying capacity of nature and call on people to care for nature together, and in this way also to find ways to other people.

Ch.J. Kibert et al. (2012), on the other hand, refer to the new ethics as the "ethics of sustainability." It is based on an ethical commitment to the well-being not only of the current inhabitants but is concerned with the well-being and improvement of opportunities for future generations. As they state: "Concern for future generations is at the heart of the ethics of sustainability" (Kibert et al. 2012, 117). They emphasize that in addition to responsibility, *justice* is an essential component of the ethics of sustainability. It refers to the distribution of benefits arising from the use of natural resources to members of one generation, but especially to their distribution between the present and future generations. This equity is based on the recognition that the capacity of natural systems is limited, which requires protecting nature in particular, on which future human generations will depend. Thus, the present generation should not gain anything at the cost

25 As Naess explains, the Norwegian word – *friluftsliv* – means "life under the open sky" or "natural life." Real *friluftsliv* should be understood as a way to change the paradigm (Naess 1996).

of disadvantaging the next generations. These thinkers also draw attention to a new dimension of responsibility – responsibility for future generations, or responsibility for the sustainable development of society.

Considering the tasks of the new ethics, which also relies on the new dimension of responsibility, but also justice, in our opinion, it is also necessary to point out that in order to find solutions to ecological, environmental and some other crises, the new ethics should participate in the formation of the moral character of contemporary man²⁶. The crises that affect the life of contemporary society arise and deepen because many contemporary people do not act responsibly, justly, honestly, etc. Towards human beings, social subjects, but also towards nature, the environment and the entire biosphere, thereby endangering the conditions for sustainable development on Earth. To some extent, this is attributed to the fact that, up to now, traditional ethics, which has only marginally dealt with man's relationship to nature and his relationship to the environment, has been involved in the formation of individuals, their moral character, and has paid almost no attention to the problem of sustainable development and the permanent habitability of the Earth and so on. In this regard, it is also important to stress that the new ethics should be involved in shaping the moral character of individuals as members of societies and inhabitants of the planet. So that they are personalities who can act responsibly and justly, not only in interpersonal relations, but also in relation to nature, to individual

ecosystems, and to the environment since they represent common values for all. The new ethics should draw their attention to respect for nature, to the fact that man should not be a predator or conqueror, but a responsible steward of nature, who should, among other things, strive to improve the relationship between humanity and the environment. We see the formation of the moral character of contemporary man through the new ethics as one of its tasks, aimed at mitigating the impact of the environmental crisis and promoting sustainable life on Earth.

Conclusion

The search for solutions to ecological, environmental, and other crises, which today pose a threat not only to the development of life, to sustainable development, but even to the survival of humanity, requires an interdisciplinary approach, and so the new ethics can contribute to this.

Together with the thinkers to whom we refer in this study, we have concluded that the irresponsible management of natural resources by humans, and their equally irresponsible attitude towards the environment in both industrial and post-industrial societies, can be considered as the main reasons for the emergence of the above-mentioned crises and their persistence. Indeed, we consider anthropocentrism to be a serious obstacle to moving towards a more sustainable future, and we have therefore turned our attention to the current issue that humanity should actively address, namely: how to strengthen the responsibility of the present generation for the world and how to ensure the sustainable development.

This is the problem that the new ethics is addressing, and in this way, it can contribute to solving both crises, which are social, moral, and ethical crises as well. They point out that the imperative of survival is coming to the fore, which, among other things, underlines the need to extend ethics beyond human relations, to all life, and to link it to sustainability. Given that they concern not

²⁶ We approach the problem of moral character from the perspective of the ethical theory of A. MacIntyre. The requirements for a person's character are determined in a particular community where the individual adopts moral beliefs, social tradition, and culture, identifying with a particular social community in which he or she develops character traits. Character becomes a moral representative of the culture of that community, even as it uniquely reflects and embodies the life, moral beliefs, and ideas of the culture and that community, for more details, see (MacIntyre 2007).

only the lives of human beings or the survival of humanity, but all living beings on our planet, it is not enough to rely solely on anthropocentric ethics or traditional ethics to solve them.

Since traditional ethics has hardly dealt with problems such as – responsibility for the preservation of humanity, responsibility for future generations, responsible relationship of people to nature and environmental values, expanding technological power and its irresponsible use, or values “compatible with a sustainable way of life” and so on, or only marginally, in the search for answers to the above-mentioned questions, we, together with other thinkers, have highlighted the new ethics and especially some types of the new ethics (the ethics of sustainability, the ethics of responsibility for the future, respectively, the ethics of the future or ethics of responsibility towards future generations, etc.). All of them move away from anthropocentrism and their common denominator is a new responsibility, or a new dimension of responsibility, which includes responsibility for the consequences of actions, as well as responsibility for the sustainable development of society, responsibility for future generations, responsibility for the protection of environmental values, but also responsibility for the non-human world and, indeed, for the planet as a whole.

Efforts to find ways out of both crises or to mitigate them must, in our opinion, be based on such ethics, which does not only examine and regulate relations between people and social entities, does not only focus on their development and protection, but also appeals to the responsibility for nature and overall – for the preservation of life on Earth.

The goal is to achieve that people give up their selfish demands, to become aware of their obligations to nature and to take responsibility for their behaviour on and towards the Earth. The task of the new ethics is to prepare them for their role as stewards of nature rather than as conquerors,

based on new dimensions of responsibility that also entail new responsibilities for present and future people. Responsibility for upholding these duties is also to be achieved by contributing to the shaping of the moral character of individuals as members of societies and inhabitants of the planet. Instead of conquerors, who freely but often also carelessly treat nature and the environment, it should help to form people as responsible inhabitants of the planet, who, while satisfying their needs, also think about resources and other values that are necessary for the preservation of life on the planet in the future.

The survival of humanity and the planet as a whole, which are threatened by the global environmental crisis, cannot be ensured by the new ethics alone, but it can contribute to it. Although, by itself it cannot find concrete approaches, methods, etc. for solving ecological, environmental, or other crises that trouble contemporary society, it can suggest ways out of these crises.

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