

## Conatus - Journal of Philosophy

Vol 8, No 1 (2023)

Conatus - Journal of Philosophy



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doi: [10.12681/cjp.33353](https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.33353)

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### To cite this article:

Donev, D., & Skalovski, D. (2023). Responsibility in the Time of Crisis . *Conatus - Journal of Philosophy*, 8(1), 87–109.  
<https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.33353>

# Responsibility in the Time of Crisis

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### Abstract

*One of the crucial questions that this text seeks to answer is whether again it is just one of the current crises of the value system that we can call “western” or it is a definite end of the functioning of a particular system and its hierarchy, whose principle of growth and imperial development is predominantly determined by the economic logic of profit/capitalism and the “infinity” of its progress. The answer implies the return/internalization of positive utopian energies and a new universalist moral optimism (macro ethics) as a dialectical antipode of postmodern “liberal” antihumanism and self-destructive relativism and total nihilism. Moreover, it requires a commitment to the creation/construction of new systems of thinking and acting and great importance of the moral-political responsibility of all social subjects in those new systems of social technology.*

**Keywords:** *crises; bioethics; responsibility; life; system; subjectivity; evolution*

## I. Bioethical axioms in the post-conventional understanding of responsibility

*The decisive force can only be a new ethos.*  
Karl Jaspers

Although there are many paradigms in contemporary *bioethical theory*, we start from the bioethical axioms in the works of Hans Jonas, among other things, because of the almost acclaimed statement that he is “one of the deepest analysts of our current moral troubles” which are an expression of the general moral uncertainty,

confusion, and profound ethical *crisis* of postmodern theory, and within which, for the same reasons, his ethical theory and normative ethics cannot be classified. Hence, it is most appropriate to speak of a kind of *post-conventional* ethics, especially when it comes to the notion of *responsibility*. In the case of Jonas, his philosophical analysis begins with Aristotle and “ends” with the always inevitable Immanuel Kant and his ethical “legacy.” As a critique of the Promethean utopia, that relies particularly heavily on well-known Bacon’s program for mastering nature through science and technology, his ethics (*The Imperative of Responsibility*) is strongly influenced by the *theory of power* (from Nietzsche to Foucault), which reinforces the role and responsibility of the *global power* in modern technological civilization for its uncertain/dangerous future, emphasizing the (geo)political outcome point and the moral responsibility of the international *political/state* factor for the present and *future* state of civilization on a global/universal level.<sup>1</sup> With this, according to several historians of recent ethics, Jonas lays the *principle/foundation* for a new social and political ethics, in which “the transformation of ethics into the ethics of responsibility leads to the transformation of the ethics of responsibility into a *political philosophy*.”<sup>2</sup>

Jonas’s philosophical/ethical views are the *ontological basis* in constituting the modern bioethical paradigm, of course, of the one that we have chosen as such, and which is often simply called the “ontology of responsibility” (as an explicit antipode to the “ontologization of the responsibility” of Ernst Bloch).<sup>3</sup> By relativizing the boundaries between the natural, technical, social, and spiritual/humanistic sciences, *philosophical biology* is the one that records and explores the primordial phenomena of “freedom” and “subjectivity” in the organic world.<sup>4</sup> With the development of modern technological civilization, which is a result of the development of sciences, especially natural and medical, there is a considerable increase and multiplication of *human power* of self-therapy, prolongation of death and self-creation, and

<sup>1</sup> Karl-Otto Apel, *Diskurs und Verantwortung: Das Problem des Übergangs zur postkonventionellen Moral* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), 179-216. Also Zigmund Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 32-67, and Alexander Zinoviev, *Velika prekretnica: kritika zapadne hegemonije* (Beograd: Naš dom/L’Age D’Homme, 1999), 62-71.

<sup>2</sup> Annemarie Pieper, ed., *Geschichte der neueren Ethik 1-2* (Tübingen, and Basel: Francke Verlag, 1992), 126-127.

<sup>3</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 750.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Jonas, *Organismus und Freiheit. Ansätze zu einer philosophischen Biologie* (Göttingen: Sammlung Vandenhoeck, 1973), 340-342.

also of new *impotence* of self-reflection, self-control and ethical and any other self-regulation and *regulation* of the limits of freedom.<sup>5</sup>

The new condition endangers the existence of the *human subject* itself, and the survival of all other biological species, whose life depends on the free will of the same human subject. At the same time, this, vice versa, does not abolish the necessity and *dependence* of the human subject from the survival and existence of other biological species and all-natural resources. Hence, the new state of *mutual conditionality* and threat is formulated in a famous slogan: “Too much victory endangers the winner himself” or “Everyone is a cause, but also a consequence of their disappearance!” In other words, paradoxically, the more we struggle to *free* ourselves from dependence on nature, the more our survival *necessarily depends* on the survival of nature. Unfortunately, many philosophers/ethicists, among others and the great Hegel, have *underestimated* the importance and significance of nature – *inside* and *outside* of us. But, of course, this already comes out of the “ethical” context that is the subject of this specific analysis.

In a highly developed technological society, there is a maximum relativization and “loneliness” of the *power of the subject*, which requires new ethics with post-conventional, or “postmodern” normative moral, which the traditional moral of *duty* still considers valid, *but not sufficient*.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in the conditions of technological civilization, there is a normative moral stagnation (ethical vacuum), so that the “new” moral has a necessary need to *supplement* with the *consequentialism* of the ethics of responsibility, which extends the scope of its normative moral action *far into the future*, and expands it on the *totality of the living world* on the planet (*animoehtics* and *geaethics*).<sup>7</sup> Namely, it is about pleading for a voluntary “self-censorship of science in the sign of responsibility which must not allow our growing power to overcome ourselves or those who will come after us.”<sup>8</sup> With that, the macroethics of responsibility become axiomatics of post-conventional moral in general and bioethical moral in particular.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> In today’s modern language we would say “red lines,” a situation that is absurd in modern times, a kind of “paradox of power” in which power over nature simultaneously leads to absolute human submission: “At the top of the triumph is revealed its lack, contradiction, and loss of self-control!” Dejan Donev, “The Imperative Responsibility: The Return of Ethics in Science,” *Annuaire Faculté De Philosophie* 74 (2021): 28.

<sup>6</sup> Hans Jonas, *Macht oder Ohnmacht der Subjektivität: Das Leib-Seele-Problem im Vorfeld des Prinzips Verantwortung* (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1981), 13-84. Also Apel, 93-105.

<sup>7</sup> Hans Jonas, *Daz Prinzip Verantwortung* (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1979), 42-44, and Dejan Donev, *Voved vo etikata* (Skopje: UKIM, 2018), 159-164.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Jonas, *Technik, Medizin und Ethik. Zur Praxis des Prinzips Verantwortung* (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1987), 80.

<sup>9</sup> Abdulah Šarčević, “Etika odgovornosti u krizi znanstveno-tehničke civilizacije: Makroetika

a) *Being and non-being as a matter of life and death*

Ontologically, the struggle for life is an explicit confrontation of being with non-being. Due to the need to satisfy the internal biological needs, through the exchange of matter, *life* contains in itself the possibility of non-being, as its own, constantly present in it, antithesis, i.e. danger and threat, which seeks and forces on care, and causes constant concern and *struggle for survival*. Hence, the affirmation and constant self-affirmation of one's own life negate non-being, a negation of non-existence and a constant *free choice* of life. "Thanks to that denied non-being, the being becomes a positive aspiration, meaning a constant choice of the self."<sup>10</sup> *The choice of life*, the willingness and the readiness to continue to live, and to survive, is a constant affirmative answer – a big Yes – to Hamlet's question toward which we are faced every day: to be or not to be!? The act of keeping alive puts a stamp on the self-affirmation of being. It is always, again and again, the cognition and recognition of the incomparable and irreplaceable value and advantage of life *before* death, and life *above* death; struggle to overcome *evil* and defeat death; the *light* of prevailing over darkness, and another win of the battle in the eternal war of *Eros* and *Thanatos*.

From a logical point of view, "life is mortal" is a paradox and a fundamental, dialectical contradiction, but at the same time, it is inseparable from its essence. One can think of life precisely because of life and for the sake of life, instead of and thanks to its mortality, that is, death as such. Life is mortal, not even though it is life, but because it is life, because it is so and such, according to its original constitution. However, the belief and the knowledge that being, i.e. life, is the primary state of things, has always been valid, so that death became a confusing and astonishing *secret* of that same life. Hence, death has become a problem, and the *problem* of death is, *historically*, the first real problem that the *spirit* was given the task of solving, and whose birth and development was yet to come, says Jonas. The appearance of the phenomenon of death "as an explicit problem, signifies the awakening of the questioning spirit, before any conceptual level of theory has been reached."<sup>11</sup> Consequently, *panvitalism* is (also)

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Hansa Jonasa," in Hans Jonas, *Princip odgovornosti*, trans. Slobodan Novakov (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1990), 327-375, and Denko Skalovski, *Vo prvo lice ednina (mal ličen kulurološki rečnik) – Tom 2, od Liber. do Psiho* (Skopje: Az-Buki, 2012), 182-183.

<sup>10</sup> Jonas, *Daz Prinzip Verantwortung*, 114-119.

<sup>11</sup> Jonas, *Organismus und Freiheit*, 19-21.

a primordial human thought. It is embodied in myth, cult and *religion*, and mainly in all forms of early metaphysics, in which all states of consciousness fought death, either to assimilate it into life or to treat it as something external and alien, as evidenced, among other things, by all forms of belief in the afterlife, proving the original, *ontological dominance of life*.<sup>12</sup>

However, with the advent of the *modern age* and the development of the natural and technical sciences, especially with the breakthrough of technology in *medicine* as a field of the most *practical* application of *biological* discoveries, and with the breakthrough in the totality of “production” and the maintenance of life in general, this constancy of life, through death, will be seriously endangered, and today more and more by experimenting with *human genes*.<sup>13</sup> Because of – with the help of *technique* – the enormously increased *power* of life for “*abnormal*” which means “immoral” prolongation of life and procrastination of death, in recent decades, rises the number of philosophers/ethicists talking about the “obligation for dying” or according to Jonas, the *right* of dying, i.e. the moral *duty* to die.<sup>14</sup> This is an obligation prescribed to man by God himself (or, if we like, “mother nature”), and it is from this fateful obligation that the wandering Prometheus (namely man) wants to get rid of, by constantly and persistently striving to take the place of Zeus, namely the God. By doing so, man wants to destroy pain and wants to become a creator of himself, of course, in the image of his creator God. So – again with the help of technique – man wants to fulfil his primordial desire to become *immortal*, but this time not only mentally but also physically, which is a much *more dangerous* desire because there is no greater danger to man/humanity than people who have imagined that they have become gods and that as such they can do whatever they want – including the most remarkable crimes – and go *unpunished*. In this ontological/anthropological/political context, it is essential to mention a similar meaning in the radical interpretation of the Old Testament and its tradition given by Erich Fromm, with the famous slogan: “Man can become like God, but he cannot become

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 11-41, and Ana Fritzhand, and Dejan Donev, “Between Ego(centr)ism and Cooperation: Would People Become Morally Disengaged or more Altruistic after the Covid-19 Pandemic?” in *Practical Ethics – Studies: Medicine and Ethics in Times of Corona*, eds. Martin Woessler, and Hans Martin Sass, 411-419 (Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Jonas, *Technik, Medizin und Ethik*, 162-241, and Suzana Simonovska, “Ethical Dimensions of Genetic Engineering,” *Annuaire Faculté De Philosophie* 59 (2006): 669-678.

<sup>14</sup> Jonas, *Technik, Medizin und Ethik*, 242-268.

God.”<sup>15</sup> Not to mention Fromm’s dystopian prediction that humanity will enter an age in which a new “fascism with a smiling face” will rule (already ruling?!) and that the new rulers will be people who believe that they have become gods.

And when we finally summarize all the relations of being and non-being as questions of life and death, then logically follows Jonas’ warning that we must *heuristically* assume that the immortal man would probably no longer be human, “because birth and death go together [...]. Happiness is that there are always and again newborn creatures for which everything is new, who see the world with new eyes.”<sup>16</sup> After all, this is not something new in the history of philosophy – from Plato to Ernst Bloch – but Jonas is right when he *warns* that with technological intervention in human life, this “always new and young” will be maximally relativized and *endangered*, even with real chances/dangers for self-destruction of life, i.e. with the *possibility of non-being*.<sup>17</sup>

#### *b) The organism and the paradoxes of freedom*

*Man can get rid of everything, except from the being.*  
Emmanuel Mounier

Exposing a kind of prolegomena for a possible “ontology” of the biological phenomenon, Jonas’ main intention is to overcome Descartes’ dualism in understanding the *organic world*, because in a certain sense, the history of modern philosophy, primarily philosophical anthropology, is “revolving” around Descartes’ alternative principle, and philosophical biology is the one that eliminates and removes this artificial dichotomy of spheres, so when considering the organism, it never loses sight of the fact that he is not a whole only in a functional sense, but he is a *whole* and in the physical-mental sense.<sup>18</sup> This, even more since the philosophical development after Descartes, especially of rationalism, and then of subjective idealism (even in Kant and Schopenhauer’s voluntarism). Aware of this Cartesian fallacy, he “sought to smooth out this dualism as much as possible, trying to dissolve the notion of nature and, ultimately, the whole content of experience – into the ego, understood *transcendental*.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Erich Fromm, *You Shall Be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and Its Tradition* (New York: Fawcett Premier, 1969), 53.

<sup>16</sup> Jonas, *Daz Prinzip Verantwortung*, 312-314.

<sup>17</sup> Skalovski, *Vo prvo lice ednina – Tom. 2*, 186.

<sup>18</sup> Helmuth Plessner, *The Levels of Organic Life and the Human: Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology*, ed. Phillip Honenberger, trans. Millay Hyatt (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 161.

<sup>19</sup> Max Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason (Radical Thinkers)*, trans. Matthew



As a long-term consequence of this dualism, man turns to *introspection*. But it is no longer a reflection of human consciousness about the state of its own soul and body, but anthropocentric cognitive care that is interested only for its own content. Moreover, part of Descartes' legacy left to philosophy is the problem of the soul-body relationship and the problem of the interaction of mind and body, that is, spirit and body, which remains one of the most relevant philosophical questions.<sup>20</sup> So, in general, "the essence of the Cartesian cogitatio is in fact cogito which always means cogito me cogitare, and which must lead to certainty because nothing is involved here except what consciousness itself has produced; no one intervenes except the producer of the product: man is faced with nothing and no one, but himself."<sup>21</sup>

Today, however, even the most intoxicated and euphoric anthropocentrists gather the courage to acknowledge the unsustainability of their philosophical/anthropological position. In that spirit, and so that it does not turn out that we rely too much on Jonas and his arguments too, we will quote the words of Edgar Morin, who *self-critically* admits his extreme anthropocentric/humanistic "sins":

My anthropologism has perverted itself in humanistic Vulgate, in which only man is a value, and in which only he, that being completely separated from the Universe and the world, is irrevocably destined to become *the subject of the world and its owner*. Today, [...] I do not give up from anthropologism at all, but I am inclined to instill deeper and deeper *biological understandings* in it and fit it into a *cosmologism*. Today I reject isolationist-proprietary *humanism*.<sup>22</sup>

We cite these findings of Morin not only because they occur at about the same time and coincide with those of Jonas – after a series of problems, and even after the problem of understanding the phenomenon of death – but also because almost in the same period (60'/70'/80' of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) they coincide with the critical "diagnostics" of the Frankfurt

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O'Connell (London: Verso, 2013), 76-77.

<sup>20</sup> Vladimir Davčev, *Analitičkata filosofija i "duh-telo" interakcijata* (Skopje: Az-Buki, 2010), 62-72.

<sup>21</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Human Condition* (Chicago, and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 273-280.

<sup>22</sup> Edgar Morin, *L'Homme et la Mort* (Paris: Points, 1976), 409.



School (from Horkheimer to Habermas), which, in turn, is best known for continuing along the tracks and paths of the dialectical philosophical “methodology” of Hegel’s/Marx’s intellectual heritage.<sup>23</sup>

In the spirit of the same self-awareness and self-criticism, Jonas believes that the exchange of matter, movement, the satisfaction of needs, feelings and perceptions that reign in the organic, “already in their lowest creations, prepare the spiritual, and that the spirit, even in its highest distant kingdoms, remains part of the organic.”<sup>24</sup> And if today the prevailing opinion is that Cartesian dualism is surpassed by the notion of the unity of life, and if Marx’s rule that “consciousness is a conscious being” holds true, then this holds true for Jonas: “The soul is the soul of this body. And the spirit is the spirit of this bodily-mental unity.”<sup>25</sup>

So that the creation of one *philosophy of life* (perhaps a new kind of individually immanent cosmologism), which is one of the main intentions of Jonas, in its subject necessarily includes the philosophy of the organic and the philosophy of the spirit, which means that on certain degree biology “transcends” “climbs” into ethics. And the condition for any ethics – we know – is the notion of *freedom*. It is founded in the lowest layers *not only* of human biology, and as such, it has first ontological-biological, and only then socio-historical and cultural genesis. But, returning the notion of freedom to the lap of the organic and the natural, Jonas believes that this does not contradict the conclusion about the antinomy and dialectic of the character of organic freedom. On the contrary, wherever we start and wherever we arrive, “we always encounter the *dialectical structure* that pervades the whole ontological character of life, and from all sides, it shows as a *paradox* of material existence.”<sup>26</sup> However, the destiny of man is inseparable from *being*, Jonas constantly repeats. Therefore, the path of seeking the essence of man cannot lead to avoidance but the interception of/with being. The very possibility/power of such a meeting with oneself and with being is an essential dimension and ontic capacity of the human *subject*; means freedom – whose birthplace is *history* – is itself possible only through the transhistorical, ontic essence of the subject. Thus, “history as an ontic possibility implanted in man, is a construct

<sup>23</sup> For further reading see Max Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason*, and Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> Jonas, *Organismus und Freiheit*, 11-13.

<sup>25</sup> Hans Jonas, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung: Gespräch mit Ingo Herman* (Göttingen: Lamuv Verlag, 1991), 105-106.

<sup>26</sup> Jonas, *Organismus und Freiheit*, 292-316.

of his freedom, which, as such, is not historically, but *ontologically* generated.”<sup>27</sup>

This completes the critical elements of Jonas’s philosophical biology, developed almost twenty years before his ethical, bioethical, and biomedical theory of responsibility. We can call this period “early Jonas” unlike the later one, in which he completes his general ethical point of view, and also the new, special, *bioethically* categorical “worldview” which most explicitly emphasizes the notion of responsibility as a critical ethical notion.

*c) The (non)power of subjectivity and the ontological seat of goals*

*Subjectivity, which elevates the subject,  
also condemns him to ruin [...].  
The complete transformation of each individual area of being  
into a field of means leads to the abolition of the subject  
that is supposed to use them.*

Max Horkheimer

Based on the previous simplified representation of philosophical performances, it is not difficult to assume that Jonas will seek to relativize *the power of the subjective*. However, he will still consider its reality as “objective” like that on bodily things. “Soul” and “will” are principles among the principles of nature, and here neither dualistic nor materialistic principles satisfy. However, the effectiveness of goals is not tied only to rationality and free choice, but its beginnings – insists Jonas – are based far *before* and *beyond* man.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, persistent in his “model” of a possible unification of ethics with natural science, Jonas is deeply aware of the pernicious dangers, *especially for ethics*, and of the mind in general, if in elaborating the question of subjectivity, the thesis of the “powerlessness of the psychic and the epiphenomenon-argument” reigns, which lead to “right to the suicide of the mind.”<sup>29</sup> Hence, aware of the need to relativize the power of the free subject in relation to his own natural necessity, Jonas is also aware of the danger of reducing it to an *epiphenomenon* of natural evolution.

Therefore, subjectivity must have the treatment of a *new foot*, which has the power to exert “violence” on the substrate from which it arose, and which co-determines it, meaning subjectivity must be regarded as something of *continuity*, “so that we can let the highest,

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 11-18.

<sup>28</sup> Jonas, *Macht oder Ohnmacht der Subjektivität*, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 65-85, and Skalovski, *Vo prvo lice ednina – Tom. 2*, 191-192.

the richest, to teach us what is below.”<sup>30</sup> In this way, the expedient action, hitherto almost entirely “reserved” only for man, is “refunded” *beyond* human subjectivity. Henceforth, it is treated as unifying with the notions of philosophy and the science of nature and is naked only as of the pinnacle of a great iceberg.

Finally, [...] and for the sake of ethics – we want the ontological seat of the goal in general, to extend it from what is discovered in the top of the subject, to what is hidden in the breadth of the being, and then, not to use what is hidden to *explain* the one who hides it – who has a completely different face.<sup>31</sup>

This “completely different person” is crucial to Jonas in preserving the *autonomy* of subjectivity, namely morality, fully aware that – consequently in his biological-organic metaphysics – subjectivity is on the verge of epiphenomenalism. Yet, Jonas dislocates goals, namely expediency, beyond any subjective consciousness, extending it diffusely downward to the whole physical/biological world as its own original *principle*. “And to what extent down, all to the elementary forms of being does its rule among the living reach, that may remain an *open question*.”<sup>32</sup> Although he does not dare to claim that some explicit “it” is the definite goal of nature, Jonas claims that nature, with the birth of life, declares, albeit tautologically, *at least one* such goal – *life itself*.

As we see, as far as “subjectivity” itself, it is so pervasive that the notion of an individual subject is slowly but surely lost, and *nature* could be labeled as an *impersonal subject*. Jonas believes in a kind of subjectivity without subject, or transsubjectivity, which means that he would rather believe

in the scattering of the core appetite inside through innumerable individual elements, rather than in their initial unity in a total metaphysical subject [...]. “Units” of discrete alliances of multiplicity, whether organic or inorganic, would already be an advanced result, to say a crystallization of scattered targeting, and would be inseparable from differentiation and individualization [...].<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Jonas, *Daz Prinzip Verantwortung*, 103-107.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-107.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

However, further such speculations regarding the issue of subjectivity and the ontological seat of goals, as Jonas himself assesses, go beyond what he and we need for our ethical, namely *bioethical goals*, i.e. for an elementary introduction with the bioethical axioms in his works, which, as we said at the beginning, we take as one of the possible bioethical paradigms for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## II. Controversies around the system/systems and crisis

*The philosophy of history springs from criticism.  
Criticism is a harbinger of the crisis.*  
Reinhart Koselleck

*With crises, we associate a performance of an objective force that deprives an entity of some of the sovereignty that normally belongs to it. Understanding an event as a crisis, we tacitly give it a normative meaning: the solution to the crisis brings the subject relief from trouble.*  
Jürgen Habermas

*The global economic crisis was caused  
by white people with blue eyes.*  
Luis Inacio Lula Da Silva

In our next short presentation, we will rely mainly on the observations of the term crisis given by Habermas in modern philosophy and social theory, back in the early '70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the crisis was increasingly and more frequently discussed, first as cyclical *economic* crises (both in early and late capitalism), and then as a crisis of a whole *system of values* (from ethical to aesthetic/cultural) and its hierarchy, which we can simply call *Western* dating back to the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Edmund Husserl's observations, known as the "crisis of the western sciences" are often taken as the first "diagnoses" for such a modern philosophical understanding of the crisis.<sup>34</sup> But, of course, in modern times, crises have been discussed since the time of Marx, which will be mentioned as well later in the case of Habermas.

It is indicative and significant for us today, especially from the position of bioethical axioms, that even Habermas (who was never an explicit bioethicist) dates the term crisis back to the "pre-scientific" age, in the field/language of *medicine* (as crisis/absence of health). From which (from Aristotle to Hegel, i.e. to Durkheim and Merton and American functionalism), it is transmitted to all areas of human life and (self)creation, and among other things to aesthetics, where "crisis means a turning point in a fateful process," often conflicting, paradoxical and contradictory, and which happens to people in a specific time/historical period, and in a certain, *specific*, social/living space. And when we are talking about aesthetics, then we are also talking

<sup>34</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 9-44.

about the classical/ancient tragedy, from which the notion of crisis is derived, and which in the philosophy of history in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is “transferred” to the *evolutionary theories* of society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some analysts believe that one can also speak of a parallel with the notion of crisis in the history of the *theological* notion of “salvation,” with which the discourse on the crisis acquires the broadest, almost “cosmic” character (*krisis kosmou*), above all in what we conditionally call it *Western*, Christian civilization and culture.<sup>35</sup>

On top of this, we can only add that in the vocabulary of some, to say non-Christian civilizations and cultures, the word “crisis” *does not exist*, i.e. that it makes *sense* to speak of a crisis *only* from the position of some infinite imperial/colonial/postcolonial development/progress towards ever higher qualitative instances/levels of growth and development of the *human world of life*.<sup>36</sup> So, to talk about the term *crisis* only makes sense if we talk about the term *progress*, and vice versa, and in this correlation, one can “read” a whole Hegel(ian) “philosophy” of the history of Western imperialism as “progressive” process of global expansion that continues to this day. However, in the conditions of technological civilization (of which Jonas speaks), that “progress” becomes self-destructive and destructive to nature on which it depends and thus reaches the highest *limits* of growth/development and causes its *own end*.<sup>37</sup> So, the new popular slogan for “sustainable development” is *contradictio in adjecto*. That is why lately (especially within the Critical Theory to which Habermas belongs) there is more and more talk about the “end of progress” and the beginning of a *new era*, in which we all expect a “reassessment of all values” (Nietzsche) and a difficult/tough global (bioethical) *struggle for survival*.

Nevertheless, Habermas and Koselleck rightly state that the all-serious analysis and development of the socio-scientific notion of a *crisis of a system* (including philosophically, namely Hegel’s), begins with Marx, especially with the help of his notion of *social formation*, and on that basis is inevitably based the whole today/contemporary discourse on social, *economic*, political, namely cultural/moral crises. Thus, the (post)modern notion of crisis inevitably refers to Marx (and the logical/dialectical structure of the notion of *capital* as a fundamental notion of the social ontology of capitalism) as the founder of contemporary general *theory of crisis*.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 10, and Denko Skalovski, *Vo prvo lice ednina (mal ličen kulurološki rečnik) – Tom 1, od Ang. do Kult* (Skopje: Az-Buki, 2010), 195-200.

<sup>36</sup> Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 9-17.

<sup>37</sup> Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 201.

<sup>38</sup> Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 10-17.

Namely, today the systemically-theoretically understood notion of crisis dominates convincingly. Crises occur when the *structure* of a social system allows fewer opportunities to solve problems than is necessary for the maintenance/self-reproduction of the structure of that system. In that sense, we can also see crises as permanent obstacles in the *integration of systems*. And when crises arise, the question/problem of *direction/exit* is always asked, or in other words, popular words, “which way to go” to get out of the “dark tunnel in which a ray of light is (not) seen.” And when it comes to structures, i.e. the *structurally* based/layered/insoluble contradictions that cause the crisis, as Habermas and Luhmann emphasize, then the elements that can be changed must be distinguished from those that can be changed will change/abolish/destroy its *identity*.<sup>39</sup>

And social systems also have their own *identities* that they can create and lose, as evidenced by the revolutionary ups and downs of the great empires in human history, with objective historians being able to distinguish revolutionary changes in a state or the collapse of an empire from ordinary structural changes, e.g. in the same establishment. In other words, the same *social class* remains in power despite the transition from liberal to organized/“state” capitalism. Thus, Habermas concludes, “it is not possible to see unequivocally the difference whether a new system has been created or the old one has regenerated.”<sup>40</sup> This is all the more so, because breaking a specific tradition can be a wrong criterion for a crisis, because the tradition itself and its mediators often change “invisibly.” The modern awareness of the crisis often turns out to be false post festum. On the other hand, Habermas warns that this does not apply to traditional *family* structures either, as family statuses and relationships have been shown to determine overall social communication and “simultaneously guarantee social and *systemic* integration.”<sup>41</sup> We would add that even today (after 50 years) this is a strong argument in the hands of those who still believe that it is most important to nurture and defend/protect family values from the onslaught of nihilistic liberalism, and to prevent a *total crisis* of those values, additionally also caused by a number of other reasons, among which we can cite the commitment to same-sex marriage and the right to adopt children, and then the emergence of surrogacy, genetic engineering, the rights of LGBT communities, etc.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Jürgen Habermas, and Niklas Luhmann, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder sozial Technologie?* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971), 147, and further.

<sup>40</sup> Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>42</sup> Simonovska, 669-678, and Suzana Simonovska, and Denko Skalovski, *Etikata i rodot* (Skopje: Filozofski fakultet, 2012).

However, and with everyone's right to their own free opinion and free choice, instead of general conclusions about the genesis and outcomes of the phenomenon of *cyclical crises* that occur in both "liberal" and "organized" capitalism, we will enclose the following relativizations, "warnings" and "directions" of Habermas:

A society does not fall into crisis only when its members say so, nor is it in crisis when they say so. How can we distinguish *crisis ideologies* from the fundamental *experiences* of crises if social crises can be determined only with the help of phenomena of consciousness? Crisis events have their *objectivity* thanks to the circumstances arising from unresolved *targeting problems*. In doing so, the *subjects* acting are generally *unaware* of the problem of targeting. Still, they create accompanying problems that, in a specific way, affect their consciousness – and precisely by endangering *social integration*. However, the question is when the targeting problems that meet that requirement arise. The notion of crisis, exemplified in the social sciences, must, therefore, encompass the *connection* between systemic and social *integration*.<sup>43</sup>

We will conclude this brief sketch of Habermas' views with just a brief note that at the time of this work (*Legitimation Problems in Late Capitalism*), Habermas *also* warned of the danger of an "end of the individual." With that, his views are, in essence, similar, if not the same, to those of Jonas, which we have previously presented. This only once again confirms the conclusion that philosophical/ethical theories that at first glance seem radically opposed and antipode (in this case Jonas and his followers and Habermas and his followers), over time and the historical distance in their interpretation, prove to be convergent/complementary, which especially refers to situations that all modern humanity shares without a remnant.<sup>44</sup> But, of course, this topic for the *individual*, i.e. for the subject and his treatment at Habermas, will leave it for some next occasion due to its complexity and exceptional importance.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 13.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-157.

<sup>45</sup> Skalovski, *Vo prvo lice ednina – Tom. 1*, 167-170.



### III. Responsibility in times of crisis as a time of crisis of responsibility

The title of this short chapter does not intend to make semantic, quasi-dialectical rhetoric of words and their meaning, but with the serious intention of making a critical analysis of the discourse so far, whether in the form of a short logical excursion or a short logical “intermezzo.”

Namely, exactly on the example of Hans Jonas, who died almost 30 years ago, it can be seen how *unfulfilled* his commitments were (or rather unfulfilled hopes) by today’s political-economic and intellectual world elite: to be more responsible than the previous ones, namely responsible for all the dire consequences of the development of technological civilization, which, as we all agree, led us to the brink of self-destruction. Unfortunately, disagreements over the causes of climate change and global warming and ways to address these major global problems/dangers show that responsibility has not become part of the consciousness of the same elites, even more, the processes/consequences that continue to multiply on a global scale are becoming *even worse*. On top of that, we continue to defocus and underestimate the dangers of climate and other environmental change and divert attention to irrelevant/ephemeral phenomena with a profitable short-term character.

As an example of defocusing from the main problems of humanity, we can take the general “digitalization” of the world as the most common technical make-up for rejuvenation/regeneration of the “old” capitalism/imperialism, and not to improve the planet’s ecological and general conditions, and prevent of disasters. These “facilitators” of human daily private and professional life and communication show that the very sense/awareness of *responsibility* for the fate of the planet is *further declining*, further falling into *crisis*, as *power* is declining – first of all economic, and then political and ideological – of the great (imperial) powers that have *hitherto* been the main prototypes and “controllers” of the “old” and “new” world postcolonial order/system, and as such the *most responsible* for the present state of the world and its *future*. This contrasts Jonas’s commitment to “grading” moral and political responsibility, which insists on the unwritten ethical imperative: The *more* powerful you are, the *more* responsible you are! In other words, the *system* of (ir)responsible thinking and action that led us to this mess remains the same, so that the *bad* consequences of its further implementation will remain largely the *same*, or *even worse*. Not to mention that there are ethicists who have long assessed the moral crisis as a state of “after virtue”; “a state in which we are ruled by the new barbarians [...], namely exactly by the most powerful and richest, which means – the *most responsible*.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 196.

We believe that the situation will improve/change *if and only if* we change the system (and its hierarchy of values) of our previous thinking and acting and think and build a *new one*. For whom (which) we can be optimistic, *but without sociolutoptus illusions* (in Jonas's words, "non-utopian ethics of responsibility"), to believe and hope that it is *achievable*, and that will enable *common* survival and prosperity of world civilization, regardless of its great internal *cultural diversity*.<sup>47</sup> We will try to outline these new (and some old) projections/ideas/visions for the future of humanity (e.g. the idea of socialism) in the next two short chapters of our text.

#### IV. Need for new systems/new beginnings/new visions

*The world we have created with the way of thinking so far  
contains problems that cannot be solved  
with the thinking with which we created the same world.*

Albert Einstein

*We will have to ask ourselves the key question: What is wrong with our system, so we found ourselves  
unprepared for the catastrophe that befell us, despite the fact that scientists have been warning us for years?*

Slavoj Žižek

*In the history, there are examples, when great events derived from insignificant beginnings. No matter how  
insignificant it might seem, the beginning is important.*

Karel Kosík

After all, Christianity began with Jesus and the twelve Apostles! From a historical point of view, at least as far as the emergence of modern social theories/philosophies is concerned, the need to create *new* theories/systems of thinking and acting (new economic-political formations and different modes of human socialization) is most explicitly stated by Marx, precisely as a result of the emergence of crises in the development of modern/early capitalism, whose contemporary he was himself. As we have already pointed out, the use of the word *crisis* dates back to much earlier. It is created in other areas of human daily practical life, especially in *medicine*, which is the most indicative when it comes to Jonas and his modern understanding and role of medicine and the mass health care of the population and the prolongation of human life. This has become a global process that is best seen in pandemics, which in the language of medicine are called mass "health" crises.<sup>48</sup> And again Marx is the central figure, to whom more or less, implicitly or explicitly, everyone invokes, especially when it comes to moments that represent great historical *milestones/revolutions* in the course of some fateful social processes/movements, today already global/general, and then also specific, such as the current pandemic.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Jonas, *Daz Prinzip Verantwortung*, 311.

<sup>48</sup> Jonas, *Technik, Medizin und Ethik*, 162; 203; 218.

<sup>49</sup> Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 9-11.

However, in the spirit of the needs of our *bioethical* positions, we will not continue on the paths that in history/evolution so far, mainly in the West, have been built and interpreted “from above” with the primary role/supremacy of the human *spirit* over his body, or with a dominant determination of the *social/cultural* factor in the (self) creation of human history. Instead, perhaps unexpectedly for the potential reader, we will turn to two theorists/humanists of the middle of the last century, who are unfortunately forgotten but relevant, and will *still* be relevant/useful in conceptualizing *new bioethical paradigms*. It is about Pierre-Thierry de Chardin and Theodosius Dobzhansky. Their analyzes and projections explicitly correspond and synthetically complement each other in a relatively coherent theory and projection of the *evolution of humanity*, according to which, if a man wants to survive, he will have to change radically its ontological relation to the natural environment in which he is born and on which he depends and develops, i.e. to build *systems of social survival* that will *have to be* in *greater harmony* with nature, its processes, laws and the *ecosystem/biosphere* as a whole. With Chardin and Dobzhansky, we return to the ethical theory of Jonas, which is an implicit/creative continuation and elaboration of the axioms already outlined in their almost common biological/cultural theory.

a) *Chardin and Dobzhansky and the controversial relationship biology culture*

*Man has not only evolved, but fortunately or unfortunately, he continues to evolve. [...] Man is not the center of the universe physically, but can be his spiritual center. Man, and only man, knows that the world is evolving and that he is evolving with it.*  
Theodosius Dobzhansky

At the end of his extensive and in-depth study of the *evolution of humanity*, and reflecting on the *passed road and the road ahead*, Dobzhansky invokes Chardin's views, assessing it as perhaps the most inspiring attempt in times of deep and chronic *crises*, depressions and nihilistic nonsense and disorientation, to delineate the contours of a possible optimistically *systematized* philosophy of cosmic, biological, and human *evolution*.<sup>50</sup> Chardin, according to Dobzhansky, must be read as a science, as a metaphysics, and as a theology, even as something that Chardin himself did not intend – *as poetry*. In this, to call it a theosophical bioethical worldview, the evolution of matter, the evolution of life, and the evolution of man are viewed as integral

<sup>50</sup> Theodosius Dobzhansky, *Mankind Evolving* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962), 319-345, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1961), 165.

parts of a single process of cosmic development, as a single and in itself consistent history of the entire universe; a process in which Chardin recognizes clear directions, tendencies or trends, which to this day are not interrupted or stopped. Evaluating the universe and its evolution/history as seemingly meaningless and inconceivable, Chardin's idea of evolution comes to us as a ray of hope, and as such, meets the demands and needs of landmarks and "directions" (Habermas) to get out of this challenging time, "filled" with gaps, alienation, realization, nothingness and restlessness.

Faced amid all these destructive and hopeless human conditions, Chardin tries to give to man, to restore its "universal will to live that converts to him and is homogenizes in himself."<sup>51</sup> Although in the millennial history of our anthropocentric and egocentric *western culture*, we have long and naively believed that we are the center of the universe, Chardin "offers" the "disappointed" man something he considers more magnificent and *much more beautiful* than that, namely

[...] man is the pinnacle of a *great biological synthesis* that is constantly ascending. A man who, for himself, constitutes the last formed layer, who is the freshest, the most complex, the richest with transfusions from all the stratified *layers of life*.<sup>52</sup>

From all these insights, it can be clearly seen that Jonas was strongly influenced, among others, by the philosophy of Chardin's biology, especially when it comes to his ethical theory of responsibility, which Jonas wrote about 40 years later. The same applies to the thorough research, analysis and conclusions of Dobzhansky, which coincide and result in similar visions of the future as those of Jonas. However, they were written 20 years earlier.

#### V. Responsibility in the new systems or: Instead of conclusion

Perhaps at the beginning of this joint text, we did not emphasize enough that our starting point of discourse is the bioethical paradigm that Jonas gave at the end of the last century, which refers specifically to his theory of responsibility, on which, more or less, and we rely on in the critiques of our current situation, incredibly ethically, and also in our projections of the future of human civilization, especially

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<sup>51</sup> Chardin, 262.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 20.

when it comes to the notion of responsibility and the chances of its universalization. Of course, this does not mean that some other positions are unacceptable for us, e.g., Habermas, especially when some of his analyses and projections coincide and correspond with Jonas's. However, Habermas' approach is to say more sociological and political-economic, namely Hegelian-Marxist.

Perhaps the most challenging task that is rightly posed to any modern philosopher/scientist is the task, the expectation, for him to predict the future, regardless of whether his predictions are optimistic or pessimistic, which, we consider, is more in the realm of psychology, than in the field of social philosophy/ethics and social theory in general. We even think that due to a number of factors, Kant's question about "What should I do?" is more difficult than the question "What can I know?" for the simple reason that, extremely vulgarly speaking, without metaphysics, one can *somehow* survive, but without "social physics" and clear rules (moral and legal) that we will manage in our daily lives and relationships with others – there is *no way* to survive! It is these and such rules/guidelines that we lack today, and that is precisely what we need more than ever before in history. That is why it is crucial for us *what (will) happen with the responsibility* of the current generations of people for our descendants' fate and their descendants. Last but not least, we must not forget that in conditions of a multipolar, polycentric and *multicultural* world, Kant's question "What should I do?" will receive similar and *different* answers. In other words, despite *being gens una sumus*, the human race is also too heterogeneous to expect any general/global moral renewal of humanity.

In the course of this short joint text, we have tried to present at least some of the possible ethical imperatives for the future, which are far from being acceptable to all humankind for several reasons, and whose presentation goes far beyond borders of the capacities of this text. As such, we would leave them for another occasion. On this occasion, we are forced to make a laconic, "diplomatic" statement that the question of global responsibility for the global state of humanity remains – an *open question*! Even more, perhaps this is our inability to answer a question which Kant himself left – partially answered. Or this is a treacherous way for us to escape our responsibility!? However, with the review of several authors and with their help, we also tried to give at least a partial answer to the question of responsibility, which, fortunately, or unfortunately, as to whom will *still be intensively posed*, precisely by the deep *crisis* in which several proven *humanistic*

*values* have fallen and *collapsed*, including the sense/awareness of responsibility – personal to *each of us*, and common to *all of us*.

This is all the more so because humanity has never been in such a harmful and so dangerous state, natural and social, as it occurs and will continue to occur with *climate change* as the most significant global danger, and for which, the measures for prevention/mitigation are remaining extremely *irresponsibly* delayed or not accepted by those who are the biggest/most potent causes and “culprits” for such a catastrophic ecological situation that escalates and threatens to destroy the entire planet. Of course, this is just one of the difficult issues that will have to be resolved if we want the survival of humanity and in the future, and which again and again, who knows how many times brings us back to the question of the *responsibility of the present for the future of next generations*. We agree with Žižek that the current pandemic, as the most prominent *world crisis* so far, has shown and proved to us that “now we are all on the same ship,” but what Žižek forgets to say is the fact that on the ship, as before, there are a minority of captains and officers. In contrast, others are the majority of slaves and rowers but undeck. What we fully agree with Žižek, and several others who have said this long before, including Jonas and a range of Marxists, is that “we must change our social and economic system” and build “a more modest world order” with *lower* goals, and also that “we still do not agree on *how* we will change it, in which direction and with what measures.”<sup>53</sup> And this is what should *worry* us, because any further delay (the ship is sinking!) is precisely an expression of new, *global irresponsibility* of the world’s transnational financial, geopolitical and every other kind of *elites*, among whom we *must not* forget the *responsibility* of the world’s *intellectual* elites, as the leading creators of the old and the new ideologies. On top of everything, and precisely as responsible intellectuals, we must not close our eyes<sup>54</sup> to the obvious manifestations of a new, militant, world, regional and local “fascism with a smiling face.”<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic! COVID-19 Shakes the World* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020), 79.

<sup>54</sup> At the end of our joint text, we can mention the *re-actualization* of the *idea of socialism* as an *idea for a new system* of thinking and social action that will provide a way out of the crisis of modern civil societies, which is promoted by Axel Honneth, but which, due to complexity of its historical genesis, we will leave it for some next occasion. Further see Axel Honneth, *Die Idee des Sozialismus: Versuch einer Aktualisierung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015).

<sup>55</sup> Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 9; 141.

## Author contribution statement

Both authors contributed equally to the conception, design, and authorship of this paper. Both authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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