

**Epochal Orientation, New Ethical Culture and
Integrative Bioethics**
**劃時代的取向—新倫理文化與整合生命倫
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Abstract

The authors present the concept and project of *integrative bioethics*, including pluriperspectivity as its key notion, by situating it in the context of emerging new ethical culture as a search for the epochal orientation in the light of the dangers of scientific-technological civilisation and the existential disorientation.

Keywords

ethics, bioethics, integrative bioethics, historical perspective, epochal orientation, new ethical culture, pluriperspectivity

Orientation and Meaning

Our time is marked by criticality at all levels of individual and collective existence of man. So, it is not about a time of crisis but a critical time. *Criticality* as opposed to *crisis* means the loss of the foundation of existence, its unfoundedness, and the search for a new existential support. But the foundation, when it comes to existence, does not consist in the material basis of life but in the framework of meaning, in the spiritual horizon in which life takes place in its material aspects. The practical bond of the material basis of life and the spiritual horizon in which life takes on meaning is called – *orientation*. The break in time we live in can thus be defined as a time of the loss of orientation, as a time of existential disorientation.

A critical time emphasises tasks of thinking and seeks the focus of thinking on creating a new spiritual horizon and building a practical bond with the material basis of life. In other words, in a critical time, thinking has to establish a new orientation. But thinking is a diffuse term, which we will not closely delimit here, but merely point out that the thinking which establishes a new orientation has to be on that path itself. Thinking, as a creational process of the knowledge of the world, reifies itself in knowledge. The character or way of thinking thus becomes a formative principle or paradigm that forms a certain type of knowledge. Though thinking is an individual act, knowledge is a universal phenomenon which at the level of the historical epoch forms as a dominant understanding of the world. Thus we can say that epochs in the history of the world are not based on historical events, which are usually used for their delineation, but on the dominant type of knowledge and the valid paradigm according to which it is created.⁴⁹

It is only on this basis that the history of the world can be broken down into the wholes of time we call *epochs*. Thus a critical time in which the loss of orientation occurs is called *a break in epochs* or *turn of epochs*. Criticality of time is recognized precisely by the loss of orientation and the need to develop a new orientation framework. The loss of orientation means that the material basis of life has lost the spiritual footholds from which the meaning of its development is generated. Orientation is nothing but establishing a bond of the material

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⁴⁹ See Ante Čović, “Integrativno mišljenje i nova paradigma znanja” [Integrative Thought and the New Paradigm of Knowledge], *Filozofska istraživanja*, Zagreb: Croatian Philosophical Society, Volume 34 (2014), Issue 4, pp. 469-470.

basis of life with an epochal frame of meaning in which life in all its layers should take place and according to which it should conduct itself. The “material basis of life” refers not only to the biological substrate but also to all metaphorical stratifications of the meaning of the word ‘life’, from economic and social, through political, all the way to the most general level of cultural life that in its own way closes the circle and participates or should participate in creating a frame of meaning.

Breaking Point and Loss of Epochal Orientation

A time of a break in epochs or a turn of epochs is characterised by disorientation, turmoil, and the search for new existential footing. The critical time in which we live is marked, on the one hand, by the end of the Modern Age as the epoch of scientific-technological civilisation and the parallel birth of the need to create a new horizon of historical meaning. The completion of the techno-scientific epoch is most evident at the very breaking point, at the point where scientific and technological progress has emerged as a threat to the survival of humankind and life in general. Raising awareness about the danger for survival in itself implied the collapse of an epochal orientation framework established by modern science in the form of the idea of progress. The idea of progress took on the role of the idea of good that, with its eschatological character, gave meaning to movements in the epochal framework of the Modern Age and guaranteed existential security to the modern man.

The awareness of the dangers of scientific-technological civilisation for the survival of humankind and for the preservation of life crushed the epochal orientation framework of the idea of progress, which led to a loss of confidence in the modern form of science and the loss of the authoritative role of such science in real life. This, however, does not mean that the scientific-technological drive of contemporary civilisation has lost its potency, but only that it came out of the framework of historical meaning and that, with a daunting moment of inertia, it continued to self-sufficiently persist and determine the material basis of life. With this, it further enhanced the state of existential danger and historical risk in the situation of a break in epochs or a turn of epochs.

The loss of epochal orientation is related to those features in the methodological constitution of modern science that have annulled its orientation role. It is a monopolistic pretension to the truth and about reducing cognition to technical forms of knowledge, which we can narrow down to the common denominator of *scientific monoperspectivism*. It is thus understandable that the establishment of the orientation framework for a new epoch began precisely with the rehabilitation of the perspectivist methodology and the perspectivist way of thinking.

Toward New Orientation Framework⁵⁰

Perspectivism as an explicit philosophical orientation, a built system, or a philosophical school does not really exist, but it is possible, even quite likely that, precisely in counterbalance to monoperspectivism of the Modern Age, perspectivist philosophy, the pluriperspective concept of truth, and the corresponding integrative methodology of the “third science”⁵¹ become dominant spiritual characteristic of the upcoming epoch. This, however, does not mean that the perspectivist line of thought is not present even in the current history of philosophy. Although the philosophers with whom perspectivism is terminologically related, Friedrich Nietzsche and José Ortega y Gasset, belonged to the aphoristic and emphatic school of thought, the perspectivist line of understanding the truth can be systematically reconstructed, independently

⁵⁰ For a more comprehensive elaboration of issues considered in this chapter see Ante Čović, “Integrativna bioetika i pluriperspektivizam” [Integrative Bioethics and Pluriperspectivism], in: Velimir Valjan (ed.), *Integrativna bioetika i izazovi suvremene civilizacije*, Sarajevo: Bioetičko društvo u BiH, 2007, pp. 65-76.

⁵¹ See Ante Čović, *Etika i bioetika [Ethics and Bioethics]*, Zagreb: Pergamena, 2004, p. 65.

from the history of the term. As is the case with all reconstructions of philosophical categories and views, the historical-philosophical reconstruction of perspectivism has its motive and gains importance, as well as a whole new accent, precisely in the spiritual situation in which it is undertaken. We have already called this situation – a break in epochs or a turn of epochs.

That the reconstruction and revitalisation of perspectivist thinking is directly triggered by this situation, and that it represents the answer to the objectivistic monoperspectivism of modern science and to its monopolistic pretensions to the truth is clearly testified by an author of the most serious attempt to renew and evoke the philosophy of perspectivism, Friedrich Kaulbach:

“In the centre of perspectivist philosophy is the idea that the truth about our world depends on the position we take in relation to Being, and the way which is appropriate to that position and in which we interpret this world, in which we ‘see’ it and in which aspect we act in it. In perspectivist thought basically lies the intent to absolve man from the requirement of an absolutely binding truth about the ‘objectively’ existing.”⁵²

Following this intent, Kaulbach will perform a categorial distinction between the *object truth* (*Objektwahrheit*) and the *meaning truth* (*Sinnwahrheit*), in order to relativize the scientific monopoly to the truth, rehabilitate the non-scientific domain of the meaning truth, and re-legitimize in it “the knowledge which provides orientation in the world” (*weltorientierende Erkenntnis*).⁵³

The one-sidedness of perspective of contemporary science and the modern paradigm of knowledge, which Kaulbach establishes and seeks to overcome by means of the aforementioned distinction, is also expressed by Jürgen Mittelstraß with a similar conceptual delimitation and elaborated in programmatic formulations during the eighties of the last century, assembled in the book *Science as a Form of Life* with an articulate subtitle *Speeches on Philosophical Orienting in Science and University*.⁵⁴ Mittelstraß defines science as a special form of social activity in which knowledge is created, and the university as a place where it is created and mediated, while observing that the original idea was forgotten that science and the university are not only institutions which extend knowledge but also institutions which provide orientation in social life. Moreover, it can be stated that in modern industrial societies, that Mittelstraß calls “technical cultures”, the orientational form of knowledge has almost completely disappeared. To describe this state, Mittelstraß establishes a conceptual distinction between “(partial) knowledge of mastering nature and society” and “(universal) knowledge of orientation in nature and society”, which is strikingly summarised in the categorial differentiation of *instrumental knowledge* (*Verfügungswissen*) and *orientational knowledge* (*Orientierungswissen*).⁵⁵ Regardless of the circumstance that Mittelstraß does not consider the problem in epochal proportions but only at the level of contemporary society, he defines it precisely by reaching its ultimate epochal consequences. It is only from the offered solutions that one can see that he himself remains a captive of the epochal illusion that modern science can and should produce orientational knowledge:

“To the extent that science nowadays is almost generally understood as building and mediating the knowledge of mastery (of nature and society), its older meaning as the knowledge of

⁵² Friedrich Kaulbach, *Philosophie des Perspektivismus, 1. Teil: Wahrheit und Perspektive bei Kant, Hegel und Nietzsche* [*Philosophy of Perspectivism, Part 1: Truth and Perspective in Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche*], Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (P. Siebeck), 1990, p. 1.

⁵³ “Cognition that provides orientation in the world has a perspectivist meaning, it is not based on the knowledge of the objective Being of the world.” – Ibid., p. 214.

⁵⁴ Jürgen Mittelstraß, *Wissenschaft als Lebensform: Reden über philosophische Orientierungen in Wissenschaft und Universität* [*Science as a Form of Life: Speeches on Philosophical Orienting in Science and University*], Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1982.

⁵⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 7, 20, 28, 50, 58.

orientation (in nature and society) has become collapsed. Therefore, a change of scientific consciousness and scientific relations is also offered here, so that science would not remain entirely without its role to organise theoretical and practical knowledge of our life circumstances under the idea of autonomous life forms.”⁵⁶

Danger and Responsibility: Birth of New Ethical Culture

As already pointed out, the danger to survival has appeared in the form of absolutisation and domination of techno-scientific knowledge. In our time, it turned out in full clarity that scientific-technological progress does not only bring benefits but also dangers to man, to other living beings, and to the survival of life in general.

However, since “where the danger is, also grows the saving power” (Friedrich Hölderlin), in counterbalance towards reductionism of “dangerous knowledge” and beyond the traditional ethics, a new ethical culture as a common horizon of numerous ethical projects and initiatives is emerging. The new ethical culture is a prerequisite for a “culture of knowledge”, and the culture of knowledge is a prerequisite for establishing a new epoch in the history of the world, because, as also already mentioned, epochs are not based on events but on the dominant type or paradigm of knowledge.

Speaking of the emergence of a new ethical culture, long-standing concepts and projects such as Hans Küng’s “World Ethos Project”⁵⁷ and Peter Ulrich’s “integrative economic ethics”⁵⁸ can certainly be taken as excellent examples. In them, the search for new footholds of human thinking and action, focusing on the categories of meaning and orientation, is equally directed toward ethical grounds (which can be found in different philosophical theories and in different religious traditions), and toward the fact of cultural diversity on the global level, and toward possible economic and political solutions for today’s problems, i.e. toward the creation of an economic-political framework in which the principles, norms, and values of an integrative and global ethics could be realised.

However, despite significant contributions to the creation of a new ethical culture, Küng and Ulrich are not explicitly concerned with the issue of endangering of the material basis of life, the issue of survival and particular bioethical issues (ecological and biomedical), nor do they tackle the problem of knowledge and science, which is indispensable in considering these issues.

In this regard – and in terms of the new and fateful moral dilemmas, to which neither traditional philosophical ethics nor traditional moral codes could provide adequate answers – clearer guidelines for orientation in a critical time will be found in Hans Jonas whose “ethics of responsibility”, as part of an “integrative philosophy of life”, reflects well what we have called a “new ethical culture”, i.e. the need for building a new type of knowledge and new ethical approaches.

Jonas places his ethics of responsibility as a search of “an ethics for the technological age”⁵⁹ in the context of technological civilisation, in life conditions so far non-existent for humanity. Man, namely, according to Jonas, has never had such power as he has today – thanks to the development of science and technology. This power not only expanded the scope of human

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

⁵⁷ See e.g. *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*, 4 September 1993, Chicago; Hans Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

⁵⁸ See Peter Ulrich, *Integrative Economic Ethics: Foundations of a Civilized Market Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁵⁹ Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

action but also changed the very essence of human action. And since every ethics in the centre of its sight has human action, the changed essence of human action requires a new ethics. Jonas says modern technology has brought us into an “unknown land of collective practice”, which is still “nobody’s land for ethical theory”, and this situation can be described as a gap between the apparent omnipotence acquired by man thanks to technology and his total disorientation in that created world, i.e. as an “ethical vacuum”. This is the point where traditional ethics with its instruments stops, because:

“For the very same movement which put us in possession of the powers that have now to be regulated by norms – the movement of modern knowledge called science – has by a necessary complementarity eroded the foundations from which norms could be derived; it has destroyed the very idea of norm as such. Not, fortunately, the feeling for norm and even for particular norms. But this feeling becomes uncertain of itself when contradicted by alleged knowledge or at least denied all support by it. (...) Now we shiver in the nakedness of a nihilism in which near-omnipotence is paired with near-emptiness, greatest capacity with knowing least for what ends to use it.”⁶⁰

As the main limitations of traditional ethics, Jonas cites anthropocentrism, simultaneity, and individualism. Traditional ethics, thinks Jonas, excludes from its scope nature, the future, and global care for the survival of humanity. It has functioned at a lower level of knowledge – the level of “knowledge as power”. Jonas therefore ironically calls it “ethics of simultaneity” or “neighbour ethics”. In the new epochal situation, nature becomes an ethical category and enters the area of human responsibility, as well as the future and the conditions of life, i.e. the preservation of the human species and other forms of life.

The new ethics required cannot, therefore, be limited to the current moment of humanity, as was the case with all the previous ethics. Human action by its consequences goes beyond the horizon of the present, so it has to be done also by an ethics appropriate to such action. Therefore, the new ethics has to be “future-oriented ethics”, and not only in the sense that it should be ethics best suited to the challenges of the future but also that it must be focused on the future in its essence and in all its components, opening ethical reflection for the dimension of the future, first of all in the sense that the future is to be at all.

In line with Jonas’s understanding of future-orientedness is also his concept of responsibility, which is set at the principle level. In Jonas, responsibility is clearly defined as responsibility for the future. Today, since we in essence act differently, we must also be responsible differently. Today, namely, we have to be responsible for both the current and local spatial-time community, as well as the spatial-time community that goes beyond us. It is, therefore, about a horizontal and vertical extension of ethics.

Jonas, in line with the new definition of ethics, articulates a new categorical imperative:

“‘Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life’; or expressed negatively: ‘Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future possibility of such life’; or simply: ‘Do not compromise the conditions for an indefinite continuation of humanity on earth’; or, again turned positive: ‘In your present choices, include the future wholeness of Man among the object of your will’.”⁶¹

This imperative implies the preservation of the conditions of human life on Earth, which implies the preservation of non-human nature and life as a whole.

Jonas built his ethics of responsibility as ethics of the future on the philosophical ground,

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 11.

using philosophical categories and with a support of the philosophical tradition, which is of the utmost importance for the construction of a new ethics and a new ethical culture.

Not so much philosophically founded, but due to its original vision and later influence, an inevitable contribution to the emergence of a new ethical culture is found in the seminal bioethical conception offered in the early 1970s and further developed by Van Rensselaer Potter.⁶²

Bearing in mind that Potter was a successful biochemist and an oncologist, therefore a person deeply immersed in the world of science, technology, and medicine, it is important to cite a passage from which one can read the frustration that brought Potter to formulate a comprehensive theoretical conception he called *bioethics*:

“As individuals we cannot afford to leave our destiny in the hands of scientists, engineers, technologists, and politicians who have forgotten or who never knew these simple truths. In our modern world we have botanists who study plants and zoologists who study animals, but most of them are specialists who do not deal with the ramifications of their limited knowledge.”⁶³

On this background, Potter comes to the concept of “dangerous knowledge”,⁶⁴ by which he points to the dangers of a decontextualized, ahistorical, culturally insensitive, narrowly specialist, and inevitably reductionist understanding of science, which claims to be the only criterion for assessing scientificity of every science, and the meaning and orientational importance of every knowledge.

With the purpose of solving the burning questions of humanity and with the help of what he called bioethics, Potter’s intention was to contribute to the bridging of the gap between the sciences for humanity to be able to build a solid “bridge to the future”.

Following the trail of American forester, conservationist, and writer Aldo Leopold,⁶⁵ Potter gained insight into a network of problems concerning life, into a network of the micro- and macro-levels of life, into the fact that life represents an intricate system of interactions. This insight into a network of problems implies the need to network approaches, i.e. the need for an all-embracing perspective on the issues of the health and survival of humanity, other living beings and nature or – life as a whole. In this sense, the primary task of bioethics is the integration of *biological knowledge* with *the knowledge of human value systems*:

“I take the position that the science of survival must be built on the science of biology and enlarged beyond the traditional boundaries to include the most essential elements of the social sciences and the humanities with emphasis on philosophy in the strict sense, meaning ‘love of wisdom’. A science of survival must be more than science alone, and I therefore propose the term *Bioethics* in order to emphasize the two most important ingredients in achieving the new wisdom that is so desperately needed: biological knowledge and human

⁶² See Van Rensselaer Potter, *Bioethics: Bridge to the Future*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971; Van Rensselaer Potter, *Global Bioethics: Building on the Leopold Legacy*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1988. For a more comprehensive elaboration of issues considered in the following paragraphs, see Hrvoje Jurić, “The Footholds of an Integrative Bioethics in the Work of Van Rensselaer Potter”, *Facta Universitatis*, Niš: Faculty of Law, University of Niš, Volume 15 (2017), Issue 2, pp. 127-144.

⁶³ V. R. Potter, *Bioethics: Bridge to the Future*, p. 1.

⁶⁴ “Knowledge can become dangerous in the hands of specialists who lack a sufficiently broad background to envisage all of the implications of their work.” – Ibid., p. 69.

⁶⁵ See Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

values.”⁶⁶

Correspondingly, the starting point of Potter’s bioethics is the thesis that *ethics cannot be separated from biological facts*. Potter’s insight into a network of problems and the need to network approaches to these problems, i.e. the problems of the whole life and the life as a whole, involves both an all-embracing and a long-term perspective, which is to focus on what Potter holds to be the aim of bioethics – the survival of humanity and the planet Earth. According to Potter, this goal could only be achieved if, focusing on the survival of life, the gaps between humanities and social sciences, on the one hand, and natural and biomedical sciences, on the other (“bridge bioethics”), are bridged, and if moral considerations extend – in the light of the future – to all forms of life and the very living conditions (“global bioethics”). Although the short-term (medical-bioethical) perspective is focused on human problems (on human and personal health, and a healthy environment), the long-term (ecological-bioethical) perspective focuses on the survival of the species and a healthy ecosystem, which no longer involves only people.

Concept and Project of Integrative Bioethics

A kind of synthesis of the mentioned contributions to the creation of a new ethical culture and their upgrading (in terms of recognition, elaboration, and further development of their potential), with a significant addition of their own original elements, represents the concept of “integrative bioethics”. It can be defined as “an open field of encounters and dialogue between different sciences and professions, and diverse approaches and worldviews, which gather to articulate, discuss and solve ethical questions concerning life, life as a whole and each of its parts, life in all its forms, shapes, degrees, stages and manifestations”.⁶⁷

Thus, integrative bioethics in terms of subject matter is characterised by a wide range of subjects, ranging from moral dilemmas in medical practice and biomedical research, through defining the moral status of non-human living beings, thematising global ecological issues, the role of science and technology in contemporary civilisation, discussing the character of our epoch and the signs of a turn of epochs, all the way to the theoretical foundation of a new world-historical epoch. In the methodological view, integrative bioethics is characterised by a strong multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinarity, appreciation and involvement in the discussion of the relevant circle of special scientific disciplines, as well as the circle of non-scientific perspectives that we call – cultural perspectives (different modes of reflection, such as art; different traditions of thought and culture, such as continental European and Anglo-American, mostly Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Indian, Chinese, American indigenous, etc.; and diverse views that rest on cultural, religious, gender, political, and other specificities). In this context, the concept of *pluriperspectivism* was also developed as a methodological definition of integrative bioethics, a concept that integrates scientific and cultural perspectives, i.e. includes all the orientation potentials of man in a fusion of scientific and cultural perspectives. The methodological framework of pluriperspectivism, developed as a part of the project of integrative bioethics, introduces cultural perspectives in the new paradigm of knowledge and thus establishes the culture of knowledge or knowledge as culture, as opposed to techno-scientific reduction of knowledge.

Integrative bioethics seeks, in Potter’s words, to build a “bridge to the future”, but not just by building a bridge between “two cultures” in the sphere of science, i.e. natural and biomedical sciences and the humanities,⁶⁸ but also between different cultures in a strict sense, i.e. different culture-based views that significantly affect articulating and discussing moral issues regarding life and life manipulations on a large and a small scale.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

⁶⁷ H. Jurić, “The Footholds of an Integrative Bioethics in the Work of Van Rensselaer Potter”, p. 132.

⁶⁸ See V. R. Potter, *Bioethics: Bridge to the Future*, p. VII.

However, integrative bioethics is not only “a nice idea”, but also a comprehensive and durable project, which also helped in shaping and crystallisation of the very idea of integrative bioethics. The intellectual and institutional centre of integrative bioethics project is in Croatia, although the integrative bioethics network is far wider: it embraces entire Southeast Europe and some countries of Central Europe (especially Germany), with regular collaborators in some North American, South American, and Asian countries. Here we will mention only the fact that in the last 15 years the diverse activities within this general project have been conducted in the following areas: conducting the scientific research through different research projects and programs; developing the scientific dialogue through regular international interdisciplinary conferences; publishing bioethical monographs, books of proceedings, journals, and separate articles; bioethical education through organising regular summer schools, developing MA and PhD curricula, and caring about high school and university teaching of bioethics; implementation of the research results (participation of integrative bioethicists in different activities aimed at social impact of bioethical research and dialogue: from public debates and public media, through collaboration with bioethically sensible NGOs, to guidelines proclaimed by the local communities and national laws); building and developing the bioethical infrastructure (founding the bioethics societies, establishing documentation and research centres, etc.).

Historical Viewpoint and Historical Role of (Integrative) Bioethics

Bioethics is much more than a new scientific or academic discipline. It has become a “sign of time”, a special sign that marks the turn of epochs of the world history. Even more, it has become the protagonist of processes of coming to an end of the Modern Age as the age of scientific- technological civilisation, and dawning of the new epoch. However, in order for it to become the sign and protagonist of the emergence of the new epoch, bioethics itself had to go through intensive developmental transformation from the stage of “new medical ethics” to the stage of “integrative bioethics”. It was a path from detecting “dangerous knowledge” and Potter’s vision of bioethics as a “bridge to the future” to the stage of methodological development of bioethics as the orientational science, i.e. “science of survival” (Potter).

While integrative bioethics intensively discusses a wide range of bioethically relevant issues (from medical practice, biomedical research, and public health, through human relationship to non-human beings, to global ecological problems), its main contribution lies in framing or, put differently, preparing the ground for discussion of any and all bioethical issues; therefore, on the conceptual and methodological level. In this sense, integrative bioethics seeks to clarify key concepts of bioethics (from the concept of life, *bios*, and beyond), to consider modern science, its conceptual background, structure, and action (including a critique of techno-scientific and other particularistic and reductive approaches to life, and a reconceptualization of the purpose and meaning of science and knowledge), to design a connection of theoretical considerations with social practice, and especially to introduce cultural and historical perspectives into bioethical reflection and bioethical discussions.

The demand for cultural extending and historical deepening of bioethical reflection and bioethical discussion does not at all draw attention from important current issues but merely strengthens the critical mechanisms with which sciences united by bioethics and bioethics itself approach and can approach these issues. Aside from any “cultural relativism”, integrative bioethics promotes recognition of the importance of cultural features and cultural specificities in shaping discourse about bioethical problems, as well as the heuristic potential of neglected cultural perspectives (religious, gender, artistic, etc.). As for the historical perspective, integrative bioethics strongly emphasizes the importance of tackling the profound, philosophical-historical dimension of bioethical problems, as this is the precondition for recognising the “signs of time” and for finding epochal orientation, and then also for articulating, discussing, and solving ethical and bioethical problems of the contemporary

world.

To support this, some authors consider the disregard of history and generally the neglect of the historical dimension of bioethical problems as the main factor in the obstruction of the expression of bioethics' potential. Thus, Peter J. Whitehouse thinks that bioethics after Van Rensselaer Potter – which reduced Potterian “bridge bioethics” and “global bioethics” to technicised “(bio)medical ethics” – experienced “dementia” due to “selective amnesia of the past and inattention to certain critical issues for the survival of life on the planet”. This dementia, according to Whitehouse, issues from “a dysexecutive disconnection syndrome, which relates to distorted goals and values”.⁶⁹

Similarly, but referring to the “European father of bioethics”, Fritz Jahr, and not the “American father of bioethics”, Van Rensselaer Potter, Hans-Martin Sass critically assesses recent movements in ethics and bioethics, in which bioethics often tries to adapt to the dominant techno-scientific model, and says:

“Modern fields of applied philosophy and applied ethics tend to reduce or even eliminate the historical dimension of reasoning, analysing, debating and finding new solutions, concepts, models, and strategies for implementing principles, virtues and values into new and old fields of personal and professional challenge. Applied ethics seems to follow methods of arguing and researching which is found in cutting edge natural sciences and technology.”⁷⁰

Reductionist approaches to life and the reduced concept of life – deprived of cultural and historical layers – necessarily reduce, with their destructive inertia, the material basis of life as well, not just concerning the theoretical but also the practical level, so one should carefully listen to Georg Picht who says: “Modern natural science destroys nature”,⁷¹ from which follows that “science which destroys nature cannot be true knowledge of nature”⁷² and therefore it cannot be the only valid criterion for the relationship toward nature and life in its differentiation and fullness.

In short, the construction of a new ethical culture – to which integrative bioethics seeks to contribute as a theoretical articulation of the “new epoch”, including new sensibility, new worldview, new conceptual framework, new model of science and education, and new forms of social activity – implies a different approach to the phenomenon of life and the manipulation of life, and such an approach (negatively expressed: anti-reductionist, and positively expressed: pluriperspectivist) implies the (re)affirmation of those (bio)ethical conceptions that take into account both the mentioned cultural breadth and the mentioned

⁶⁹ Peter J. Whitehouse, “The Rebirth of Bioethics: Extending the Original Formulations of Van Rensselaer Potter”, *The American Journal of Bioethics*, Cambridge, MA: Taylor & Francis, Volume 3 (2003), Issue 4, p. 30.

⁷⁰ Hans-Martin Sass, “Can Bioethics Live without Tradition and History? How Fritz Jahr Translated the 5th Commandment into the Present and Future. A Methodological and Conceptual Case Study”, *Jahr*, Rijeka: Department of Social Sciences and Medical Humanities, School of Medicine, University of Rijeka; Documentation and Research Centre for European Bioethics “Fritz Jahr”, University of Rijeka, Vol. 2 (2011), Issue 2, pp. 395-396. Sass, also, points to a related phenomenon that “quotes and citations in bioethics and medical ethics refer to material younger than five years; very rarely are classical studies or century old authorities discussed” (ibid., p. 396). As a counterpoint to such a view, Sass emphasises Fritz Jahr and his bioethical viewpoint: “Fritz Jahr, the father of modern bioethics, gives an impressive example of how to use classical tradition to analyse modern issues in ethics and how to develop and introduce future-oriented virtues and principles based on such a dialogue with tradition” (ibid.).

⁷¹ Georg Picht, *Der Begriff der Natur und seine Geschichte [The Notion of Nature and Its History]*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1993, p. 12.

⁷² Ibid., p. 15.

historical depth.⁷³

Such an approach could be a cure for the “illnesses” of modern scientific-technological civilisation, both in the therapeutic view, i.e. in terms of treatment not only of the symptoms but also of the causes of the “illness”, and in the preventive view, i.e. in terms of vaccination against monoperspectivist-reductionist deviations that, from a historical perspective, have led to the problems we are facing today and to existential disorientation because of which we are still unable to fully solve these problems on a global scale.

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⁷³ Besides Jonas’s, Potter’s, Küng’s and Ulrich’s conceptions, Albert Schweitzer’s “ethics of reverence for life”, Fritz Jahr’s “bio-ethics”, Arne Næss’s “ecosophy”, Klaus-Michael Meyer-Abich’s “practical philosophy of nature”, and some other conceptions, could also be taken as good examples of attempting to develop a new theoretical and practical framework called “new ethical culture”.

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