EXPLORING SPIRITUAL ECO-HUMANISM
Hans Jonas and the concept of utopian responsibility in the light of the ecological crisis

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Abstract

This paper is a philosophical discussion about the link between utopianism and responsibility. It argues that our time demands a *strong* practice of political responsibility in both organizations and society based on what has been called 'real utopianism'. It takes as a starting point Hans Jonas' critique of utopianism. Keeping in mind the horrors of the Second World War this Jewish thinker disconnected the principle of responsibility from the idea of utopianism, and connected it to a 'heuristics of fear' – we should be careful with 'wild' new technologies, but also with new utopian perspectives. In a second step Jonas' predecessors and utopian thinkers Martin Buber, Ernst Bloch and Ernest Callenbach are revisited. They show that a fully conceptualized idea of utopianism includes at least three dimensions of responsibility: subsistence, justice and spirituality. I then argue that if one digs deeper into the work of Jonas, it seems that the concept of responsibility in fact implies the courage to overcome a heuristics of fear. This paper therefore argues that there is no need to radically disjunct responsibility from utopianism and that the concept of responsibility actually opens a path to 'real utopianism'. Such a concept of responsibility can best be supported by a confessionally neutral but nonetheless spiritual eco-humanist worldview that develops a new attitude towards nature, in which (eco)asceticism, morality and spirituality become intertwined.

Keywords: Environmentalism. Real-Utopianism. Eco-Humanism. Spirituality. Responsibility.

EXPLORANDO O ECO-HUMANISMO ESPIRITUAL
Hans Jonas e o conceito de responsabilidade utópica à luz da crise ecológica

Resumo

Este artigo é uma discussão filosófica sobre a ligação entre utopismo e responsabilidade. Argumenta que nosso tempo exige uma forte prática de responsabilidade política tanto nas organizações quanto na sociedade com base no que tem sido chamado de "utopismo real". Toma como ponto de partida a crítica de Hans Jonas ao utopismo. Tendo presente os horrores da Segunda Guerra Mundial, este pensador judeu desconectou o princípio da responsabilidade da ideia de utopismo, ligando-o a uma 'heurística do medo' – devemos ter cuidado com as novas tecnologias 'selvagens', mas também com as novas perspectivas utópicas. Em uma segunda etapa, os predecessores de Jonas e pensadores utópicos Martin Buber, Ernst Bloch e Ernest Callenbach são revisitados. Eles mostram que uma ideia totalmente conceituada de utopismo inclui pelo menos três dimensões de responsabilidade: subsistência, justiça e espiritualidade. Argumento, então, que se aprofundamos a obra de Jonas, parece que o conceito de responsabilidade implica, de fato, a coragem de superar uma heurística do medo. Este artigo, portanto, argumenta que não há necessidade de separar radicalmente a responsabilidade do utopismo e que o conceito de responsabilidade realmente abre um caminho para o "verdadeiro utopismo". Tal conceito de responsabilidade pode ser melhor apoiado por uma visão de mundo eco-humanista confessionalmente neutra, mas ainda assim espiritual, que desenvolve uma nova atitude em relação à natureza, na qual (eco)ascetismo, moralidade e espiritualidade se entrelaçam.

Palavras-chave: Ambientalismo. Real-Utopismo. Eco-Humanismo. Espiritualidade. Responsabilidade.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The political deadlock in western countries concerning imperative reforms of economy, organizations and lifestyle has created a renewed interest in political and social utopian ideals both in scholarly (WILLKE, 2014, 2003; WRIGHT, 2010; CHLADA, 2004) and in popular literature (BREGMAN, 2017; RIFKIN, 2014; KUNKEL, 2014). Whereas the twentieth century's phantasy was mainly interested in dystopia (HUXLEY, 1958, 1932; ORWELL, 1949; WELLS, 1923) and philosophy highly emphasized the dangers of ideological truth claims and the need to put an end to political utopianism (LATOUR, 1991; SAAGE, 1990; HABERMAS, 1985; JONAS, 1979), the twenty-first century seems to be a time of effervescence in matters of social, political and economic alternative imaginaries (MARESCH; RÖTZER, 2004). These political and economic alternatives, which Michel Foucault called *heterotopias* (1984), are in fact a kind of counter-site to the current system. This concept is now inspiring many studies in aesthetics – especially in design and architecture (DEHAENE; DE CAUTER, 2008) – but has also been used to define and understand the occupy-movement (BAILLIE; KABO; READER, 2012). Thomas Schölderle speaks of a transition from modern dystopia to postmodern utopia (2017, p. 131). An important factor in this change, according to Schölderle, was the publication of Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975) which started to have a strong impact at the end of the last century (2017, p. 139). The same could be said about Huxley's *Island* (1962) that – with its humanistic revaluation of nature, spiritualism and decentralized societies based on cooperativist organizational structures – is in fact a prelude to Callenbach's novel. Civil society movements, political, organizational and social alternatives to our current state of affairs, are now so widespread and diverse that we have come to a complex new situation that, with Jürgen Habermas, can be described as a situation of 'intransparancy' (Habermas used the term 'neue Unübersichtlichkeit' in 1985 to describe the intellectual complexity of his time). Transition towns (HOPKINS, 2008), several commons movements (BOLLIER, 2014), new (circular) economy organizations (WEIZSÄCKER, 1989), peer-to-peer ideas (BAUWENS, 2013), ecological or green conservatism (SCRUTON, 2012, 2006), alternative currency movements (LIETAER, 2012), the occupy movement (WOLFF; BARSAMIAN, 2012), new leadership (BALOG; BAKER; WALKER, 2014), degrowth (SCHUMACHER, 1973) and postgrowth initiatives (ROSA, 2016; FELBER, 2015; DALY, 1996), etc., etc. – they are all part of this new complexity.

7

Today however, there is still some reticence towards the classical 'idealistic' idea of utopia, so that some reformulations of it claim to combine utopianism and realism (WRIGHT, 2011) or speak of a new 'existential utopianism', denoting a shift from so-called 'essentialist' notions of communal being (which presuppose a universal idea of the Common Good with supra-temporal ambitions) to the priority of shaping temporal communities and a more historically embedded 'utopia' that is to be built by experimentation and trial and error (VIEIRA; MARDER, 2011, p. 12). Notwithstanding these undefined open aspects, the parameters that make all these experiments possible seem to be less volatile and claim in fact to constitute a new epistemological paradigm of social and economic organization. Erik Olin Wright acknowledges that by combining both these idealistic and pragmatic elements a new, as he calls it, 'realistic utopianism' becomes possible:

> Utopian visions […] are more than just passive individual dreams. In the right circumstances, they can also become powerful collective ideas in political movements […]; these utopian ideas can have powerful effects in the world by shoring up motivations for collective action […]. The challenge of envisioning *real* utopias is to elaborate clear-headed, rigorous, and viable alternatives to existing social institutions that both embody our deepest aspirations for human flourishing and take seriously the problem of practical design. (WRIGHT, 2011, p. 37).

8

Whereas the twentieth century, as a reaction to ninetieth century's (Marxist) attempts at 'smashing capitalism', was about 'taming capitalism', according to Wright (2015), current new movements are entering both a historical phase he calls 'escaping capitalism', creating islands of non-capitalistic economy (e.g. share economies), and a phase he calls 'eroding capitalism', in which there are hybrid markets, introducing vigorous varieties of emancipatory non-capitalist economic activity into the current market system. So, the concepts of 'real' and 'existential' utopia – in line with Foucault's concept of heterotopia – are an effort to translate strong ideas of justice and ethics, related to a fundamentally otherness, into the mold of social and economic reality. The energy of these new utopian movements is taken up by important intellectual currents of continental philosophy, such as the new School of Frankfurt (ROSA, 2016; HONNETH, 2015) and 'postmodern communism' (BADIOU, 2010; ZIZEK, 2010), which respectively have a more constructive and disruptive approach towards utopianism. They all have in common that they try to disentangle the convergence of concepts like 'utopianism' and 'ideology' that was established over the years from Karl Mannheim (1929) to Paul Ricoeur (1986, 1998). Utopianism is not considered to be some nonrealistic dreamery anymore nor is it disregarded as an ideological and merely dogmatic approach to the world.

Western mainstream politics, however, still resembles a sleepwalker that swerves from side to side. As long as there is no coherent concept of a future worth striving for, international agreements are nothing more than hollow phrases that result from reactive, rather than proactive politics.[2] It is not entirely fair to blame politics for this current predicament: in a time of globalization the radius of action for politicians is severely limited. Furthermore, a certain fear of substantive socio-political experiments is justified. Prudence is desirable when it comes to encompassing radical transformations of society. This 'heuristics of fear', however, should not preclude a practice of political responsibility. It was Hans Jonas who bound together in his theoretical work the concepts of 'responsibility' and 'heuristics of fear' (JONAS, 1979). He therefore separated responsibility from utopianism. The question we want to explore in this paper is how responsibility and utopianism can be intrinsically connected. The paper argues that our time demands for a *strong* practice of political responsibility based on what has been called 'real utopianism'. Both, I argue, can be intrinsically connected through a new religiously neutral, but inclusive humanist worldview that develops a new attitude towards nature, in which, as I will show, morality, asceticism and spirituality become intertwined. Whereas Hans Jonas conceived responsibility as a concept that needs to be separated from social and political utopianism, I will argue that his concept of responsibility in fact already implies the courage to overcome some kinds of heuristics of fear. To open society to new utopian approaches of the institutional framework is a matter of responsibility. By way of a so-called 'immanent critique', I will try to show that Jonas's concept of responsibility opens a path to eco-utopia, although it justly reacts against the ideological utopianism of communism. I shall therefore consider Jonas's critique as an allegation against a specific type of utopian thought, modern humanist utopianism, which does not apply to late modern heterotopia or real utopianism (1). This interpretation will allow me to revaluate utopian thought as being in line with the principle of responsibility: there can be no responsible action that ignores utopian energies (2). Following this revaluation, I will shortly turn to the structures of society that such utopian thought needs to discuss (3). I will also exemplify the necessity of a new ascetic morality for the present and future (4). A new attitude towards nature has important consequences for our understanding of humanism that, although it need not commit to religion, goes alongside a revaluation of spiritual and religious perspectives on life (5).

9

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[2] For a detailed time analysis of Western politics, see Hartmut Rosa (2005, p. 416). The climate agreement that was reached in Paris seems to be a shift from reactive to proactive politics, but no legally binding goals have been met concerning accountability on exceeding emission limits. Obvious measures, such as a global tax on the burning of fossil fuels, have not been taken.

2 HANS JONAS AND THE CRITICISM OF UTOPIA AND HUMANISM

In *The Imperative of Responsibility* [*Das Prinzip Verantwortung*] Hans Jonas (1979) couples the concept of 'responsibility' to an extended notion of community. In democratic states, by definition, the political agenda is determined by the current generations. The narrow meaning of political responsibility, here, is understood as a duty of care towards existing generations. Future generations, however, are dependent on the goodwill of current generations. According to Jonas, political responsibility should be an imaginary inner dialog between current generations and a still inexistent future humanity. One is, as it were, to step into the shoes of those who do not yet exist. Politicians are especially required to engage in this dialog. Jonas (1989, p. 391), also expands the concept of political responsibility in such a way that he is able to bring to the foreground what he calls 'the other Being', by which he means non-human life. The current and future states of nature, especially of non-human life, are part of a concept of duty that is related to the domain of responsibility (JONAS, 1989, p. 245).[3] In light of Jonas' articulation of political responsibility as a 'duty of care' that is focused on the future, one might expect him to develop a socio-political vision for the future throughout the book, but this is not the case. Readers may be disappointed to notice that in chapter five our philosopher of responsibility outspokenly shies away from any form of utopian thought. In my view, however, Jonas' notion of responsibility already involves as a matter of urgency the development of a vision for the future that can function as a beacon for political action. But Jonas (1989, p. 392) instead of developing this vision evokes the 'heuristics of fear' and one-sidedly calls for caution. This begs the question: what are Jonas' reasons for turning away from utopian thought?

The first reason he puts forward had a great effect on anti-utopian sentiment, and is about a presupposed correlation of utopian thought and the most shadowy side of totalitarianism.[4] The main reason for this equation of totalitarianism and utopian thought has to do with the fact that Jonas' work is a reaction to *The Principle of Hope* [*Das Prinzip Hoffnung*] by Ernst Bloch (1959)), who follows a Marxist line of thought. It is sufficient to say here that a mere glance at the German title of Jonas' work brings one to the conclusion that he is referring to Bloch's magnum opus. In chapter four of *The Principle of Hope,* Bloch depicts a history of utopian thought from Plato to Karl Marx. To Bloch, Marxism is the apotheosis of humanist and utopian thought. It is not surprising that his last chapter is called

10

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[3] Bruno Latour's notion of political ecology is based on the same principle (1999). Similarly, Alain Caillé's concept of 'convivialism' (2011).

[4] This reason has been invoked by several anti-utopian authors (see ACHTERHUIS, 1998).

'Karl Marx and Humanity: the Matter of Hope' (BLOCH, 1985). Here, Marxism is presented as the highest expression of humanity and a guarantee of a better future. Bloch's essay appeared in 1959 when the atrocities of Stalinism and the totalitarian tendencies of Marxism had been well-known for some time. It is my suspicion that Bloch's positive evaluation of Marxist utopian thought has amplified Jonas' conviction that utopian thought and totalitarianism inherently coincide. Jonas continues to make a strong connection between utopian thought and totalitarianism in chapters five and six, where he develops his critique on utopian thought. What sets secular utopian thought apart from messianic thought is that the latter awaits redemption by divine intervention, whereas the former praises the ability of humans to bring about social change by their own means. According to Jonas (1989, p. 313), this has often led to revolutions in which violence is not shunned. Utopian thought presupposes an image of humans and society that cannot be achieved without violence.

The second, and for Jonas the more important reason to spurn utopian thought, concerns the humanist idea of the 'malleability of society' and the role technology plays in this process. In early modern utopian thought, during the renaissance and especially in Francis Bacon's *Nova Atlantis* (1626), technology plays a major part.[5] However, the development of this type of technological thinking has brought us to the ecological crisis of our time. The proposition that capitalist economy and the exploitation of earth resources are heavily intertwined with our technological thought was expressed in the works of Martin Heidegger, Jonas' mentor, after the Second World War. Heidegger argues that humans should distance themselves from the rule of technological thought. However this does not mean we should abandon the use of technology altogether. In his lecture *The Turn* [*Die Kehre*] Heidegger (1949) claims that even if we distance ourselves from the dominance of technological thought, technology is still possible. This second reason that Jonas denounces concerns the oppression of the earth by industrial-technological means. Ultimately, this oppression follows from humanist utopianism that is tied from the outset of modernity to the desire to replace scarcity with abundance. According to Jonas, Marxism and modern capitalism share the same humanist utopianism. Jonas couples this belief in technological progress to the use of violence not only against people, but also against nature. The humanistic ideal that constitutes the basis of modernity is accompanied by the idea that nature itself is boundless and that it can be wholly submitted to our desire by making use of technology (JONAS, 1989, p. 324). Jonas' critique on utopian thought was heavily motivated by this kind of ecological considerations.

11

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5 In relation to malleability of society see also Bacon's Novum Organum Scientarium (1620).

He emphasizes that the earth does indeed have physical limitations which are being exceeded by modern civilization.

Eventually the unlimited production and consumption of goods – Jonas writes in the seventies – will bring about a thermic problem (1989, p. 336). Here he is not specifically referring to the warming of our planet through the emission of greenhouse gasses; every technological production process creates extra heat and this goes for every type of technology. Even a sustainable economy would eventually bring about similar thermic effects. According to Jonas it is paramount to produce and consume less; basically, to live more modestly. He states that the humanist utopianism that has founded modernity is not modest since it strives to replace scarcity with abundance by putting a claim on the world as a whole. Marxism shares this humanistic ideal, which can also be found in Bloch's representation of a 'transformation of nature' (JONAS, 1989, p. 331). Both capitalism and communism strive to provide abundance by indefinite growth. In both lines of thought there is also the idea that humans, in the end, can be liberated from labour (p. 348). In Marxist thought this is called the 'humanization of nature'[6] which means subduing the whole of nature to the imperatives of humans. According to Jonas, utopian thought follows from a false image of nature and humanity. Moreover, our modern humanistic thought starts from the assumption that social structures and human culture are the main objects that need to be transformed. Modern humanism, according to Jonas, emphasizes our social essence, not the inner moral constitution of individuals. In this way modern humanism assumes that morality is essentially realized as soon as optimal social circumstances have been created. Human beings will automatically coincide with their 'true' being when the social and natural environment is adapted to them. Modern humans need not work at their moral constitution; they can come to their ultimate core through changes in the social environment.

In short, modern utopian humanism, which has held people in its grip since the beginning of the industrialization of society, has placed an emphasis on the social aspects of human beings. A moral regeneration is not on the agenda. Jonas instead emphasizes the importance of developing this personal moral constitution – humans according to him are to morally transform themselves, from a caterpillar to a butterfly. This last remark clearly shows that Jonas is not to be read as an anti-humanistic thinker: he merely criticizes the reduction of humanism to 'social humanism' as it has been expressed, according to him, in modern forms

12

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[6] Marx talks about a 'humanistic continuation of nature': "So the companionship is the entirety of humanity with nature, the true resurrection of nature, the continued naturalism of humans and the continued humanism of nature". (MeW, 40, 538).

of utopianism. His view of the importance of moral development (from caterpillar to butterfly) shows that his notion of humanism is ethical in nature, and not social or utopian. His plea for moral regeneration in fact aligns with a humanistic tradition that is concerned with *Bildung* (moral self-formation). According to Jonas, a false image of humankind on one side – one that is dominated by notions of its social constitution – and a false image of nature as an unlimited domain of exploitation on the other, control modern social humanism that has laid the foundations for societal structures in both east and west. With this he also criticizes the *anthropocentric quality* of social humanism that became dominant in the nineteenth century. Conversely, he turns to the 'principle of responsibility' that sets limits and boundaries to the immodest goals of humans. This responsibility expresses care for and takes into consideration 'the other Being'. It implies what Jonas calls a 'heuristics of fear', which contains a form of sensitivity or sensibility for everything that may go wrong. A 'heuristics of fear' places us in a situation where dangers or unwanted consequences of our behavior are anticipated and avoided altogether.

The heuristics of fear which Jonas contrasts with utopian thought can in my view have a debilitating function. In our current political condition it is the main obstacle to the development of a form of politics that is both visionary and responsible. The heuristics of fear is about to become a neutralizing factor for every utopian desire. In my view, Jonas has from the outset underestimated the 'responsibility principle' that is deeply present in utopian expectations. The fact that Jonas connects responsibility with the care for 'the other Being' implies that he does not want to reduce this otherness to an anthropocentric point of view: he explicitly speaks of a 'solidarity with the organic world' (1989, p. 245). He even entertains the thought that communism is in a better position to specifically implement this solidarity because Marxism more readily lends itself to controlling the irrationality of the desire to maximize profit. Also, communism automatically carries with it an element that is indispensable for a sustainable society, namely the acculturation of a certain degree of asceticism and modesty in life (1998, p. 263; 1994, p. 28). On top of this, communism has the 'advantage' of being a totalitarian power that can swiftly implement unpopular legislation. But despite these 'advantages' communism, according to Jonas, offers no real solution to the dead end for humanity because it puts an even stronger emphasis on an anthropocentric humanism than capitalism does and eventually leaves no room for 'the other Being'.

To give a clear description why Jonas denounces utopian thought it is important to briefly go into the definition of it given by Ernst Bloch. Bloch's essay was written from a historical-materialist perspective. Utopian thought is traced back to a natural desire that

13

expresses the wish to solve the problem of scarcity (1985, p. 1549). According to Bloch we already find the first forms of utopian thought in the desire for food (p. 1551). This desire develops later on into the longing for a just society. Furthermore he puts an emphasis on the utopian dimension of messianic expectations that are present in all religions, but being a historical-materialist he views this as an inflation of more earthly desires. The question remains whether or not Bloch's reduction of utopian thought to biological scarcity is an adequate explanation for utopian desire. When one emphasizes in a naturalistic way the biological foundation of this desire, one must automatically reduce the 'messianic part' – and with that a core element of religion – to an illusion. Bloch's reasoning is analogous to the train of thought in which Sigmund Freud (1913) traces back all human desires to libido because sexuality is of crucial importance to all biological creatures. The naturalist explanations given in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries place a strong emphasis on the fact that human behaviour is fuelled by biological desire, not reason. Again, utopian thought can, according to this line of reasoning, be nothing more than the desire to overcome a state of scarcity.

When we accentuate Bloch's argument, we could say that the biological desire to overcome a state of scarcity must be inspired by the idea or image of a utopian state that is already (transcendentally) present within us and perchance characterizes a 'truly human' desire. This is an interpretation that surpasses Bloch's and possibly offers a connexion with regard to Jonas' notion of responsibility. This image of a utopian ideal being *a priori* or transcendental only becomes actively conscious and present in humans and not in animals. Due to this 'inner idea' humans can translate feelings of hunger and scarcity to a more general representation of a specific situation in which the dissolution of hunger, scarcity, need and disease can appear as reality. What makes us human and not animal is that this inner image becomes operational within our mind. This image however cannot be reduced to a biological need. That is, our inner world cannot be traced back purely to our biology. Humankind may be a biological creature but it is also an entity that transcends its biological need. In short, according to this reasoning, our inner world is more than an amalgamation of biological desires because deep within us we carry a utopian idea, a 'star of desire' or, as expressed by the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig (1921), 'a star of salvation'. The existence of such a transcendental idea or image present in the mind of humans would explain why a 'messianic' element is in nearly all religions – albeit more in some than in others. In Judaism – this seems to be the point Rosenzweig wants to make clear – this messianic image is placed centre stage. The Promised Land is to be found here on earth – it is a place on this planet. In

14

Christianity this image becomes spiritualized: Israel's Promised Land is now seen as something that will come in the hereafter. At the same time the Old Testament remains part of the Holy Book, so that Christianity, when taken in its entirety, actually represents both positions – the spiritual and the earthly Israel. The fact that most religions have developed an account of Elysium or afterlife, points towards the idea that utopian thought and desire is anthropologically given. I would even go so far as to propose that what makes us human is exactly the representation of this primal image of our desires. Because this idea seeps into our desire, we have deep within us an evaluative criterion to measure political developments. *True* politics perhaps, could not be defined otherwise than by referring to this deep notion of a better world.

In religions, this transcendental image that we have now hypothetically identified as being the core of our will and desire is expressed in the notion of bliss. In this notion the aspect of a utopian expectation goes further than merely remedying scarcity, it is in fact an idea that refers to a spiritual Israel: it is possible to create *conditions* for bliss on earth, but actually *reaching* a state of bliss is not guaranteed by this. So this utopian idea or image, deeply engrained in our inner world, always maintains a transcendent quality and validates the proposition that religion cannot be extinguished. Because bliss belongs to this inner idea of utopian expectation, it is clear that we cannot reduce utopian desire to merely solving the scarcity problem. It is possible to imagine a society in which humans are alleviated from scarcity, hunger and disease, but in which there is no equality and in which slavery is present – since who wants hungry and sick slaves? The utopian desire engrained within us, that which makes human striving *human*, also encompasses a notion of justice and righteousness. Primatologist Frans de Waal (2009) has clearly shown that there is a desire for justice in animals. It is inevitable that this sensitivity for justice (with its stratification in freedom, equality and solidarity) nestles itself in our utopian desire. As such it is placed on top of the idea of abolishing scarcity and thus in a way forms a second layer of utopian desire. The third layer would be comprised by the aforementioned notion of bliss.

In short, following Bloch, I have proposed that deep inside humans carry with them a utopian desire, but that this desire comprises many levels of which abolishing scarcity is the basic but not the only one since there is also a longing for justice and bliss. Jonas' critique on utopian thought can be summarized by saying that this thought is anthropocentric from the outset. Jonas' critique on this vision of utopian desire is then primarily concerned with the fact that it expresses a human desire that has the defect of taking only humans into account.

15

3 PATHS IN UTOPIA

The Jewish-German philosopher and theologian Martin Buber wrote his *Paths in Utopia* in 1946, and in 1949 the English version appeared.[7] Bloch's essay appeared ten years later in 1959. Buber's work can be seen as a defence of utopian thought against a form of Marxism that saw itself purely as a scientific analysis of society, and which by this tried to distance itself from early-socialist utopianism. Marx (1846) wanted to distance himself from thinkers such as Charles Fourier, Claude Henri de Saint-Simon and Robert Owen. In his book Buber emphasizes the fact that the concept of utopia in Marx's work is used to characterize dreamy and scientifically unfounded socialism (1996, p. 2). In this way Marx was able to both honour and turn away from early socialist thinkers. But also Marx's contemporary competitors, such as Pierre-Josef Proudhon, were seen by him as 'utopians'. All forms of non-Marxist socialism were grouped together and reduced to this common denominator. Buber however turns against this one-sided notion of utopia. We have seen how Jonas, in line with Bloch, considers Marxism to be representative of utopian thought. For Bloch, Marxism was the apotheosis of utopia. For Marx himself however, historical-materialism was a scientific theory that had surpassed the level of mere philosophical reflection. Marx was a child of his time and he was heavily influenced by positivist science and atheistic humanism. He was aiming for a scientific ideal and his claim to scientific validity was undermined by the more dogmatic characteristics that were developed later by his followers. Buber's aim on the contrary is to revive the spirit of early socialism that was deemed utopian by Marx. This form of socialism came from the idea that individuals can engage in free association, not from a centralized top-down, but from a cooperative model of the economy – a model of *communal* living that was not truly communist in the strict sense.

In this communal model, both production and consumption of goods are regulated by cooperative organisations and the economy is also guided by consumer organizations. Buber denounces the idea of a free market economy as being naturally given. In his model decentralization and free association take centre stage (as it takes shape in the Kibbutz). At the same time the notion of what it means to be social is seen by Buber as an expression of spirituality, as he argues in his work *I and Thou* [*Ich un Du*] in 1926. To this idea of communality the principles of equality, freedom and solidarity are central. Labour is coordinated on the basis of free association by individuals. These utopian images painted by Buber are in stark contrast to the ultraliberal utopia developed by Ayn Rand a few years later

16

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[7] The Hebrew version is from 1946.

(1957). In this 'utopia of the free market' it is the individual that strives for maximization of personal wealth who takes centre stage – struggle and competition are worthy means of realizing this ideal. This specific utopia mainly satisfies the first layer of our utopian desire, to be relieved of material scarcity. However, the utopianism of Rand does not in the least fulfil the second layer of utopian desire we have discerned, which is characterized by the notion of justice or righteousness (meaning here the unity of equality, freedom and solidarity). It should be noted that this is a shortcoming of many pictures of 'elitist' utopia, as can be found in the work of Marquis de Sade. In his *Philosophy in the Bedroom* [*Philosophie dans le boudoir*] (1795) this author dreams of a society in which people are open to constantly engage in sexual intercourse and in which a minority group of 'enlightened individuals' can do as they please when it comes to making their subjects perform sexual acts on them. Such excessive fantasies are but a mere response to the lower layers of the utopian desire that is aimed at overcoming a scarcity that is biological in nature. These kinds of images then fed the idea that utopian desires have an origin that is only based in the natural world.

Utopia as it is presented by Buber and Bloch surpasses that of de Sade and Rand because it meets the demands of the second layer of our utopian desire that is concerned with the notion of justice (Bloch) and even of the third layer that is concerned with bliss (Buber). Nonetheless Jonas' critique of Bloch, and indirectly of Buber, is not invalidated because both authors' notions of utopia adhere to a perspective of anthropocentric thought. Jonas' *general* denunciation of utopian thought however is misplaced, because such an anthropocentric perspective, as we will show, is not a necessary component of utopianism. And Buber's utopianism that seeks connection with early socialist and romantic idealist conceptions shows that the objection of totalitarianism cuts no ice. It is safe to say that totalitarianism is present whenever ideas are imposed top-down. The model that Buber subscribes to however, is based on the idea that societal structures should arise bottom-up. It is based on the idea that a gradual shift can take place in the mentality of a given society. Here we can see a problem with this approach: as soon as a majority-rule determines the actions of a state a minority can become estranged when government forcibly wants to bring about change through top-down legislation. The state therefore has an obligation not only to rule by means of legality but also by means of *legitimacy*, which presupposes a situation in which people are enabled to independently ponder and judge for themselves whether the proposed transition is reasonable. These means of legitimacy are mainly educational. The abolition of free thought can never be the goal of an ideal utopian society. A top down approach would repress positions that are against the proposed political transformation and would bring about revolutionary violence. A

17

bottom-up approach always relies on the power of arguments and in the most optimal situation operates on the basis of rational conviction.

Jonas correctly points to the dominance of anthropocentric humanism in utopian descriptions in modernity. It is problematic however, that he – after describing both capitalism and communism as dead ends for humanity – does not offer a third way that can perhaps bring solace. The principle of responsibility only seems to be able to model the *morality* of the individual. Responsibility in this way does not rise beyond the individual to become a political principle that can and should have a direct impact on societal structures. Politicians should embody the idea of responsibility, but this principle remains moral in nature and is focused on the individual and its decisions. If Jonas had thought through the principle of responsibility in all its implications he could also have worked out a socio-political dimension that would contribute to shaping alternative structures in ways of living together. Even though the value of Jonas' work cannot be found in political solutions, in a way this work unwittingly makes clear that there is a need to find an alternative type of society and that Jonas' anti-utopian attitude stands in the way of constructing this. On the other hand his picture showing that both capitalism and communism will bring about ecological problems in their desire to create a state of abundance is plausible. This is even more the case for capitalism because capitalism puts an emphasis on profit maximization. Those who want to stay true to Jonas' sociological analysis will have a hard time consenting to his one-sided emphasis on the moral dimension of responsibility and will stay clear of his denunciation of utopian thought altogether. In a way in Jonas' work we find a conceptual mingling of utopia and dystopia. Dystopia, as we have come to know it from novels by George Orwell and Aldous Huxley, is an image of societies that have fallen prey to totalitarian dangers.[8] Although it seems nonsensical to deny dangers that have been brought about by utopian thought in history, it is necessary to separate this from the deeply rooted *utopian appeal* that has been instilled in the human mind. The first layer of this appeal that manifests itself in our inner world is the desire to relieve ourselves from scarcity. The second and third layers seek to satisfy a desire for justice and bliss. Within dystopian thought the second and third layer cannot be met in advance and this means that dystopian thought will never succeed in meeting our utopian needs. Dystopian thought can be recognized as such because we have a notion of what utopia might look like. Creating a totalitarian society will never fill this void because it rejects

18

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8 With his Island Huxley also wrote a more Buberian Utopia.

outright the human desire for justice and the promise of bliss. In the end the only thing that can protect us from totalitarian tendencies is utopian desire itself.

Although humans have called upon and justified violent revolution in order to create a more ideal society, using violence is not in line with utopian thought. Only a silent revolution, one based on and brought about by inner conviction and not by repression, would adhere to the true demands that follow from the utopian appeal. A silent revolution is based on conviction as the only means by which a restructuring of society is possible, that can at the same time coincide with the utopian desire.

4 THE ARRANGEMENT OF ECOTOPIA

Jonas' book stems from 1979 and forms the highpoint of an anti-utopian trend in twentieth century thinking. I have attempted to make plausible the idea that Jonas' work, albeit somewhat obscure, is pointing us towards the necessity of reinventing new forms of utopian thought that do justice to the different layers present in utopian desire. It may have escaped Jonas' attention that Ernest Callenbach had already published his philosophical novel *Ecotopia* in 1975. In the period after the Second World War, despite strong influences from dystopian works, we can discern two innovative literary-philosophical perspectives on utopia. We have already mentioned one, that of Ayn Rand, the neoliberal one. It has shown us the ideals and the political impulse of the twentieth century that would, from the eighties onwards, have a strong influence on western politics. The neo- or ultra-liberal utopian picture that Rand paints however, does not meet the demands made by the second layer of utopian desire. In her ideal society much emphasis is placed on the principle of freedom but in the end she underestimates the principles of justice, equality and solidarity.

The second literary-philosophical utopia is depicted in the novels by Callenbach, who writes from an ecological perspective. The real ideological battle nowadays seems to be one between neoliberalism and ecologism (GROBER, 2012; ROTMANS, 2012). What is being fought over is influence on society. In the twenty-first century ecologism has seeped through all layers of the political spectrum – even parties of the extreme right have adopted aspects of thought brought forth by it. Most political parties in the Western world offer a mixture of liberal and 'green' ideas. While concern over the environment was limited to one party on the political left during the twentieth century it has gradually become part of a broader political-economic spectrum. Nowadays companies fight for their customer base by advertising on the sustainability of their products and production processes. That humanity has a serious

19

problem with regard to global warming is something that is only being denied by a dwindling minority. The silent revolution and the power of conviction are doing their work.

In his utopian novel Callenbach depicts an ecological state in the northwest of the United States of America. By peaceful means a silent revolution has taken place there, which in turn has brought about independency for those who live in it. In Ecotopia, humans live a basic life: big industry has been replaced by craftsmanship, wasteful transport has disappeared, weapons are prohibited, the entire society is focused on recycling materials. In short, life is less pretentious and less stressful, it is simple and mainly concerned with the community. Much like Buber, Callenbach (2004) builds on the fact that production has become decentralized: there are more but smaller production units that are being run by individuals that have set up cooperatives by free association. People stay away from building large scale centralized industrial complexes. As a result of decentralized production there is no advertising anywhere. Employees are fellow-owners of their enterprise and business partners. Also, agriculture is organized in a decentralized fashion. There is no form of large-scale intensive agriculture, which means that they reap lower yield from their land compared to the rest of the US. The quality of their production on the other hand is much better. The civilians of Ecotopia have adapted their eating habits and have a low consumption rate. The organizational model of the economy is entirely based on the stable-state system. It is a circular economy that does not take from nature what it cannot give back and is based on recycling products while limiting consumption.

This society is also characterized by the space it leaves for nature to develop. Not only have large areas outside the city been transformed by reforestation, but nature is also allowed into the cities themselves. This political attitude towards nature is called the 'Reversion Process' (CALLENBACH, 2004, p. 28). Parks have become forests and the streets are, as much as possible, green. Wild animals roam freely. Small scale agricultural processes are taking place within city limits. The influence of the hippy-movement from the seventies on Callenbach's utopia is obvious. People walk around in colourful clothes they have manufactured themselves. The economy is, as we have said before, aimed at fulfilling the basic needs of society (CALLENBACH, 2004, p. 44). Life may be sober but this does not stand in the way of people being content with their lives. Because aspiring to luxury and abundance is commonplace in the neighbouring state, the United States, and because the people in Ecotopia do not want to leave regulation to the force of the law, much attention is paid in the educational system to explaining the reasons why living in sober conditions is preferable. With the help of informal meetings, study and discussion groups, the support for

20

this modest lifestyle is strengthened. Moral persuasion creates a system based on internal motivation. Political decision making is democratic and organized in a bottom-up fashion. At the same time this civilization is technological. The technology they use is of a different nature than being used by the rest of America. Technology is not placed in opposition to nature and it adapts to natural cycles. All transport, which is communally and not privately owned, is electrical. Nothing uses fossil fuels: all energy is produced by making use of solar, wind and bio-power. As many goods as possible are created locally so that transportation costs are as low as possible. All technological development is aimed at mimicking natural processes and qualities. Their relationship to technology, however, never takes precedence over the poetic attitude towards reality that characterizes the Ecotopians.

The citizens of Ecotopia are not only organized along the lines of production-cooperatives but also into consumer-cooperatives (2004, p. 19). From here, committees have been formed that check the sustainability and the price-quality ratio of products. Production and consumption cooperatives set prices together, so that the only competition possible is over the quality of the products. Costs cannot be externalized and prices are mainly there to express the *real* human and ecological costs of the product. Products with a production process that is not durable or sustainable cost more. The goal of internal competition is not to eliminate or out-compete the other party but to enhance quality standards that in this way also benefit others. Although the emphasis in *Ecotopia* is placed on the concept of 'community', it is by no means a communist society. The means of production are not in the hands of the state but in the hands of independent cooperatives (CALLENBACH, 2004, p. 91). In short, the stable-state system of the economy is not based on strong competition but on cooperation, which stabilizes the economy. Also it is the cooperatives that pay taxes and not the individuals – labour is not taxed. It does not come as a surprise that in this model differences in income are modest (CALLENBACH, 2004, p. 92). Their enterprises are also not striving towards growth in the sense of economic expansion of hegemony. The economy is based on the motto 'Small is beautiful' (p. 93). For that reason the state is federally organized. Administrative work is done as much as possible at a regional and local level. The interactions with and amongst officials is rather informal. Though Ecotopia is an egalitarian society, the meaning of equality is not the same as uniformity. Core family life is embedded in larger family structures and small communities. Care for children and the sick is organized as much as possible within these communities (p. 144). They also take care of population growth regulation (p. 62). The cooperatives and communities are expected to be as self-sufficient as possible which leads to a stabilized population. 'Community' is a concept that is

21

extended towards nature itself. This explains why in Ecotopia there is a religious appreciation towards nature that is characterized by *respect* and *admiration* for a deeper dimension of nature (p. 144). Nature deserves deeper and more objective values and these are expressed by recognizing its beauty and rights.

5 ECOTOPIA AS 'REAL UTOPIA'

When we compare Callenbach's utopia (dating from 1975) with the vision of a transitional thinker like Jan Rotmans (2012), we find many similarities. Rotmans' work, however, is by no means meant to be utopian. It merely pretends to give us a glimpse into the future in order to show us what the world will look like in a few years – around 2050 – assuming current trends persist. He shows us the most important existing developments in the context of sustainability and the impact these may have on our future. The idea of a stable-state system has taken hold and is growing in the minds of individuals and organizations. In the chapter 'Onward to the Past' Rotmans develops his vision for the future (2012, p. 202). Also Callenbach presented some key elements of progress as a return to older models of society. The circular model for example can be seen as a return to the ways traditional societies viewed their existence (ROTMANS, 2012, p. 209). This also goes for the fortification of so-called 'participation society', which is nothing more than an interpretation of Buber's and Callenbach's notion of a *communal society* that is characteristic for traditional societies. According to Rotmans (2012), this is the only way social security and welfare can be maintained in the future (p. 214). The technology of the future, which he depicts with great vivacity, is entirely focused on bringing about a circular economy. The idea of cooperative structures as a blueprint for industry is less developed in Rotmans than in Callenbach, but they both emphasize the importance of decentralized structures within certain sectors of the economy, such as energy and agriculture.

The picture that Rotmans paints is certainly not the image of a hippy-state, but he does subscribe to the idea that a simple lifestyle includes a consumption pattern that is characterized by slow-living. The asceticism Callenbach brings to the fore is much more lively however because his book is fiction without futurological pretensions. Whereas Rotmans gives us a plausible path towards the future, Callenbach shows us a truly new worldview. After reading Callenbach we have a notion of what it would mean to live in an ecological state. Unlike Callenbach, Rotmans places an emphasis on scaling up politics: according to him the formation of supranational unions is absolutely necessary in a globalized world (2012, p. 232). Callenbach does not entirely shy away from the idea of expanding the

22

model of Ecotopia, but he does consider the real possibility of a global development in which certain regions will go through these changes faster and will play a bigger part than others. Perhaps the biggest difference between the two authors is that Rotmans does not give us the impression that we have to distance ourselves from modern capitalism. He will hint at the necessity of a circular economy, but in his view this does not exclude competitive capitalism altogether. Rotmans' plea goes along the lines of current 'Green Economy'. Callenbach, however, declares that society 'going green' will have a major impact on our current economy. In *Ecotopia* there is an economic model that can be called 'cooperative corporatism'. What dominates here is not the idea of competition based on green market expansion, but the aspiration for an economy for the common good.[9] The idea of an economy for the common good leans heavily on two developments at the starting point of the industrial revolution. One of them is a form of proto-socialism (Fourier, Saint-Simon, Owen); the other is the corporatism of romantic and idealistic thinkers such as Fichte, Hegel and Adam Müller.

As soon as we recognize that Rotmans extrapolates current developments and tendencies into the future, ideas that are largely similar to the ones Callenbach presents, we find ourselves confronted with the insight that Ecotopia is in a certain way already present in reality; it is in a certain way a 'real utopia'. What makes a utopia 'real' is its embeddedness in the present: a 'real utopia' is a possible and at the same time ethically necessary development of current social and political movements. The structural changes that our world will have to undergo, changes that are necessary and inescapable, resemble a way of living or society that does not differ much from what is utopian in Callenbach's work. We could connect this utopia with the work of Buber, the main difference being that this utopia escapes the objections of Jonas' critique because Callenbach overcomes the constructions of anthropocentric humanism. He very much emphasizes the fact that his ecotopian society is developed in a bottom-up fashion and that this democratic base leaves no room for totalitarianism. His utopia is neither totalitarian nor anthropocentric. In short, in 1975 Callenbach designed a utopian society that answers the central demands made by Jonas' critical anti-utopianism.

An important element of this society is that it creates public support for its programs through education and information. Moral persuasion through deliberative democratic meetings, Callenbach argues, is the only legitimate way a state can secure its institutions for the future. It is not unlimited economic growth and abundance that constitutes this society: it

23

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[9] The idea of Callenbach is much in line with Christian Felber's modern idea of an economy for the common good (2015).

is based on the notion of *en-closing*, of a circular economy aiming to find a balance between humans and nature. Also, the society exists as a part of a much broader community that extends beyond the human collective. Although technology plays a major part in Ecotopia, it is a fundamental attitude towards nature that drives this society, an attitude that is primarily po-ethical – that is, poetic and ethical – not technological. The principle of responsibility that gave meaning to Jonas' anti-utopian thinking demands a restructure that he could not propose himself. Callenbach's restructure is consistent in nature with Jonas. Partly inspired by his knowledge of philosophy of Antiquity Jonas connected the principle of responsibility to the moral demand for ascetic existence. These ascetic ideals are not just important for those who want to live an ethical life. We have seen with both Callenbach and Rotmans that these ideals can have a structuring effect on the entire society. Consumerism, the need for abundance and the narrow focus on human wellbeing can only be altered if humans learn how to be *modest* again – if we are to accept and appreciate a simpler lifestyle. Expressions such as 'slow living' (Rotmans, who takes the term from Parkins & Craig, 2006) and 'simple life' (Callenbach) point us in the direction of humble asceticism emphasized by Jonas. Asceticism, he says, is a practice of 'withdrawing oneself'; it shows a willingness to give up things, to withhold oneself. If society is to restore balance to nature this will have to be an effort of both individual and collective responsibility. On the societal level this indicates that we need to create space for nature to develop. Global warming will not be solved in a day, even if we would switch to sustainable energy. Greenhouse gasses will remain in our atmosphere for hundreds of years and oceans will become more acidic whatever we do. Reducing the effects of global warming is only possible if we make an active contribution in the form of reforestation, but this is only possible if we withdraw from the land. If one day the problem of global warming is looked back at, we will have learned that large portions of nature need to remain unspoiled if the earth is to have a stable climate that can support life. By then many will have learned that other species, plants and animals, have 'rights'. The call for ascetic ideals goes hand in hand with the idea that humanism needs to transform itself.

6 TOWARDS A NEW HUMANISM: ECO-HUMANISM

We cannot denounce Jonas' remarks altogether when he says that all influential utopian thought until his time was anthropocentric in nature – the only exception being the fables produced by Jonathan Swift (1726). When he published his book in 1979 however, he could have known that Callenbach's version of utopianism, dating from 1975, was different. He could have identified here a type of utopianism that is in line with the 'principle of

responsibility', a type that we today prefer to call 'real utopianism'. Important elements of Jonas' thinking were inspired by his mentor Martin Heidegger. In *Letter on Humanism* (1946) Heidegger makes an appeal for us to distance ourselves from classical humanism and to develop a different type of humanism. What is called 'ascetics' by Jonas is called 'Gelassenheit' (meditative thinking) in the context of Heidegger's work – an attitude that leaves nature to its own devices. Both Heidegger's and Jonas' work turn out to be not anti-humanistic at all, but a critique on a strong type of anthropocentrism that has dominated humanism for a long time. In modern social humanism – especially the version that was heavily inspired by atheism and agnosticism – it is the human being that is placed centre stage, and there is no higher authority that can or should determine the fate of humanity. Here the world is fully in the service of humans. Humanistic thinkers such as Ludwig Feuerbach, Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, etc., were both anthropological and sociological thinkers. The society they envisioned was exclusively a community of and for people. Thus social humanism was fully dedicated to meeting the demands for a betterment of social conditions for humans.

This modern humanism has a legitimate claim, since it develops the second layer of the utopian desire. But redefining humanism, as is now done by several philosophers (NIDA-RÜMELIN, 2016; ROSA, 2016; FERRY, 2013, DIERKSMEIER, 2011), takes away the exclusive *centrality* of humans in it. This means that the world is no longer merely in service to us, but rather the opposite: humans are in service to the world. With that, the position of humans on earth also changes, and the relation we have with the domain of the normative. As the most *responsible* creature on earth humans have the *duty* to take care of what Jonas calls 'the other Being'. What it is that earth demands from humans resonates, as Rosa (2016) says, in its soul. This broader *eco-humanism* has respect for all that lives, for nature and all her creative forces. Both the new anti-totalitarian and ecological utopianism, as first described by Callenbach, and this redefinition of humanism, are in line with Jonas' principle of responsibility and are in fact exemplifications of it. Callenbach characterizes the new attitude of humans towards nature as essentially being poetic and religious. This attitude also makes it clear why eco-humanism – that does not give up its anthropocentrism altogether but transcends it – is 'ecocentric' and even 'deontocentric'. It presupposes a sensibility for religion and spirituality and openness to 'the creative miracle' that is nature. Humans are still of crucial importance, not only as creatures endowed with certain rights, but because humans also carry with them a knowledgeability concerning their duty. Being rational creatures, humans have access to the 'deontosphere' – the domain of duty (deon = duty).

25

This is a major point made by Jonas: this awareness of being the only creatures on earth having access to the 'deontosphere' makes us the only creature with true responsibility. Our duties are even more plentiful because this domain of duty also encompasses animals, plants and all natural phenomena. Such a moral and spiritual worldview can only become a leading principle when the modern functionalistic and instrumental attitude towards nature is corrected. This is in fact Jonas' critique of modern humanism as it took first shape in the work of Francis Bacon. This critique is in line with Heidegger's essays on technology, in which he argues that our mathematical outlook on the world has reduced nature to an abstract concept, to an interplay of geometric points and lines. This is how nature became a scientific object to us and was separated from the spiritual dimension that was so heavily valued by pre-modern cultures. In the same way it was decoupled from morals and the normative domain. Science became 'free of value' and thus nature became a neutral domain on which one could experiment freely. This attitude, according to Heidegger, was the result of the early Enlightenment that had started with René Descartes and his mechanization of the world. Although Descartes' worldview was mechanistic, it still featured a creator that deserved truth. In a way his creator remained concerned with what he had created and, being true, was connected to the world. For this reason nature had not become a neutral domain altogether. Nevertheless this mechanization of our worldview from the eighteenth century onward, with the rise of agnostic-atheistic thinking, led many to view the world in a functional and instrumental way. Romanticism and German Idealism are seen as a reaction to the consequences of the Enlightenment, but they did not turn the tide. We have seen that within an ecological society much use can be made of smart technologies without our view of nature becoming mechanistic or technological. Nature itself can be seen as something poetic, as an expression of values that cannot be reduced to a material dimension. In this way an ecological society can reclaim and nurture this inherent value that nature holds – a value long understood and subscribed to by religious consciousness.

We are uniquely able to use rationality to become sensitive to the value dimension that nature reveals to us, whether this happens through aesthetic or ethical experiences. In a humanism that places *responsibility* at the centre of what it means to be human, moral laws cannot be a human invention because they speak to us through nature itself. Eco-humanism for this reason will have to be sensitive to the spiritual dimension of nature.

26

7 CONCLUSION

We have seen that it is not necessary to bind together the concept of responsibility and a heuristics of fear as Hans Jonas does. There is then no need to separate responsibility from utopianism. On the contrary, Jonas' concept of responsibility opens a path to 'real utopianism'. Jonas' direct predecessors, Buber and Bloch, show that a full conceptualized utopianism includes at least three dimensions: subsistence, justice and spirituality. Utopian expressions that do not adhere to the three dimensions of utopian desire – avoiding scarcity, justice and bliss – cannot solve utopian expectations. To align these dimensions with Jonas' concept of responsibility for the planet, we need to consider a new humanist worldview that is both religiously neutral and inclusive. Such eco-humanism, which already functions at the backstage of Jonas' own philosophy, develops a new attitude towards nature, in which morality, asceticism and spirituality become intertwined. The utopian content of the 'principle of responsibility' will enable us to find the courage needed to overcome our current deadlock based on a heuristics of fear that risks to be wrongly understood.

27

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31