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# The Principle of Responsibility towards the Human Non-Presence or the Non-Human Presence

Loredana TEREC-VLAD<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The responsibility towards oneself and towards each other was analysed by philosophers such as Heidegger, Jonas, etc., and is based on care. If Heidegger brings forward the concept of caring for each other, Jonas believes that the prospective ethics based on responsibility should guide the behaviour of present individuals for the future generation. In the context of new technologies in genetic engineering, molecular biology and genetic editing, we consider it appropriate to bring into discussion that a new form of Kant's categorical imperative is needed to guide the behaviour of all, to ensure the welfare planet-wide, not only for the human generations to come, but also of the non-human generations.

**Keywords:** Transhumanism; human and non-human species; prospective ethics; the principle of responsibility to the lack of human presence and to non-human presence; the other.

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## 1. Towards a new ethics: the prospective ethics as ethics for future generations

Through time, the human species lived in small, very united communities, trying to constantly adapt to given living conditions. The strength of human action has increased over time due to inventions; as our action power increases, so does the scale of what we let happen by failing to use that power (Persson & Săvulescu, 2014). To have medical technology and other types of technology that enables the improvement of the moral and physical condition of the human being involves a number of aspects concerning how we use these technologies not to harm the other, the society or the human species as a whole. The research in various fields such as biology, medicine, etc. which aims to increase life expectancy or correct certain imperfections of the human individual and the predisposition to certain diseases (cancer, etc.), have provided power to the human individual

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(Sandu, 2015). The power that comes with knowledge must involve responsibility, especially when it comes to using new technologies to improve the quality of life, to increase the lifespan or to correct certain hereditary deficiencies.

The humanity is today dominated by uncertainty, since the development of new technologies will make room for technological singularity (Guliciuc, V., 2014, Popoveniuc, 2016). The scenarios created around the singularity leads us to believe that in the future, the society will consist mostly of non-human (AI) species that will coexist with the current and future humanoid species. The cohabitation of several species raises a number of ethical issues at least in theory, as we believe there is a power imbalance between the human species and the possible non-human species. In order to avoid possible conflicts that might arise, we believe that a prospective ethics based on responsibility is necessary.

## **2. From the categorical imperative to responsibility**

The Kantian categorical imperative marked the entire modern period, imposing the rational individual a certain type of behaviour. According to Kant, duty derives from moral law. The human – according to Königsberg – is not free, his action being determined. Moral law is imposed for our consciousness, and we are free in our will to fulfil (Bagdasar & Narly, 1995).

The Kantian categorical imperative has three formulations:

- Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. (Kant, 2007);
- Act as if the maxims of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature. (Kant, 2007);
- Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end. (Kant, 2007).

Kant tried to justify the fact that man, as rational being, can see himself in dual hypostasis: on the one hand, as a being endowed with intelligence, and secondly, as a rational being. As an intelligent being, the human being thinks by reason and belongs to a comprehensible world. The intelligible world is governed by rational non-empirical laws, rational will data; as a rational being, the human being thinks his will through (positive or negative) freedom (Matei, 2010).

If the modernity was placed under the umbrella of the categorical imperative, the post-modernity entails the twilight of the duty and highlights an ethics of responsibility.

In the context of the increasingly accelerated development of technique and technology and its social and ethical implications (Terec-Vlad, 2015), the use of resources or the overpopulation of the planet, the emphasis is on the collective responsibility. The idea of prospective ethics appears with Hans Jonas (Jonas, 1984) of challenging the myth of progress and the crises generated by the increasingly accelerated development of technique and technology. Jonas believes that the old ethics is no longer able to provide favourable responses to the current problems that the mankind faces, since the distinction between good and evil cannot be given by provisions recognized as binding.

As a follower of Hans Jonas, Karl-Otto Apel believes that we need a new model of responsibility to train individuals globally by using the term of co-responsibility of all (Apel, 1993).

The co-responsibility precedes, in transcendental terms, all social institutions and can identify with the necessary human responsibility in creating and changing social institutions. But when we talk about the danger that confronts the humanoid race because of the irresponsible use of resource, of human intervention over nature or the technological evolution, the co-responsibility Apel brings to the fore outlines a post-conventional morality within which, a new global order allowing equity in the distribution of resources and goods, could be expressed. The decisions that the human individual takes on the use of resource, the environmental protection or the implementation of new technologies, makes us responsible for the quality of life of future generations. Apel believes that the collective action implies responsibility, but at the same time, in case of negative causes, this determines the individual to feel powerless because the environmental problems (for example) have not emerged as a result of the intervention of a single individual, but as a result of collective activities. In his analysis on the risk the individual actors are subject to when acting on their own, Apel relates to the social contract and the manner in which the social actors demonstrate mutual aid or are not united, stressing that the effects of collective action involves an ethical issue, as the social contract theories deal with the strategic rationality of self-interest. The "unresolved" ethical issue of the social contract refers to the fact that a pre-contractual foundation of

moral responsibility is required, and the issue of respecting contracts is addressed later.

### **3. The distrust in meta-narratives – the myth of progress**

The myth of progress – as a founding myth of modernity – leads through the process of deconstruction to a standstill because progress is not linear, but it experiences gaps. According to Apel, the linear path of progress is interrupted by a qualitative leap; it generates an ethic of collective responsibility. The gaps do not require the interruption of progress, but only the highlight of the fact that the sustainable development must replace the public good, and therefore the social welfare.

The progress is analysed by Jonas in the context of the modern technique and the philosopher makes a series of findings including:

- Every step in the field of technique does not lead to a state of balance or saturation, on the contrary, in case of success it is a reason to open other possible directions, a point where goals dilute;
- Each innovation is spreading rapidly in the technological communities just as it happens with the theoretical discoveries in the sciences, the relationship between means and finality is not linear, but circular in a dialectical sense;
- The progress is not an ornament of the modern technology, it is not an option provided by it, but a momentum inserted in it, beyond our will; the progress is not a value concept, but a descriptive value (Jonas, 1997).

The prospective ethics is an ethics of future generations, an ethics that lies in the horizon of responsibility. Considering the ethical issues that arise in the field of techno-sciences (Cernica, Eși, Terec-Vlad, Lența & Ungureanu, 2013) we consider a principle of accountability is necessary as an ethical and axiological imperative, located at the limit of space-time to guide the actions of individuals. The responsibility towards others, towards nature, etc. implies responsibility and assuming both moral and legal binding consequences. In prospective terms, the responsibility can identify possible situations or dilemmas and may propose rules or remedy for that situation. Jonas believes that in the contemporary times, the moral characteristics no longer correspond to those of the modernity, as the technology has changed the way in which individuals act and relate to others, especially in terms of consequences. Values such as honesty, charity, justice – are overshadowed by an ethics of collective action, especially when it comes to protecting the

environment, the research in the field of genetic engineering and so on. Jonas believes that neither the utilitarian ethics, nor those that are based on individual responsibility, can still provide answers to the new frameworks of collective action as it is necessary to take into account the long-term consequences; in other words, the future ethics must provide future behaviours. As stated by Sorin Tudor Maxim, the prospective ethics does not deal only with the reflection of reality, but also tries to understand a world that does not exist yet, but could exist (Maxim, 2010), foreshadowing what would be.

#### **4. The responsibility in scientific research**

With the development of technique and technology, we consider it appropriate to bring into question the responsibility towards each other and towards the society. The new inventions raise a number of issues / ethical dilemma that cannot be answered without the help of experts in ethics. The ethical expertise – as outlined in the scientific literature and especially by Ana Frunză, is developed based on the clinical ethics in the context of the development of new fields such as genetics, reproductive medicine, nano-technology, etc (Frunză, 2016). Due to foreseeable risks, the ethical conscience has developed rapidly and generated the need for ethical decision allowing a non-ethicist to justify his choices to his own conscience, but also in the face of otherness (Frunză, 2016). We believe that the field of ethical expertise is of utmost importance, since in the field of medicine and of the intervention of new technologies in the private sphere of the individual, implies the necessity of the intervention of such a commission, because the risk of creating individuals genetically programmed with certain deficiencies, or cognitively or physically improved, exists. The risk we are subject to as a human race is particularly high due to the fact that certain information could fall into the hands of individuals without morality, that could create (hypothetically) individuals genetically programmed, of universal soldier type, or could create a new form of slavery such as the soft slavery.

Related to this aspect, we must emphasize that the issue of the prospective ethics is related to the issue of power techniques. Concerning the challenges that the new technologies entail, Hans Jonas does not conceive a normative ethics, but an ethics of the future that would complement previous ethics. The threat of the actual humanoid species calls for a prevention ethics to avoid extreme evil, hence the extinction of the *Homo sapiens* species. For Jonas, the easiest formula to sustain the

responsibility of ontological-metaphysical point of view is outlined as follows: the world is not worthless; there is at least a value in the world, the existence of responsibility, which is better than its absence (Jonas, 1993, apud Wagner, 2012). Jonas believes that the power of the new technologies is not enough whereas it is necessary to develop a sense of solidarity with the future generations. According to Jonas, it is more important to emphasize the recognition of the obligations of others than the recognition of rights, whereas it is necessary that the human individual acts so as not to prejudice in any way the future generations.

Jonas's theory of responsibility comes in the context of the development of technique and technology. We believe, however, that in trans-modernity and implicitly at social level, an ethics based on the principle of responsibility to the lack of human presence or the non-human presence and ethical decision instruments, is needed.

### **5. The responsibility towards the others**

The concept of duty is the result of the practical reason underlying the Kantian ethics. The duty accompanies the autonomous will, prefiguring the exit of consciousness over its own ego. The duty comes from the authenticity of the existence of the ego and it is the movement of the spirit towards the other in the form of responsibility (Levinas, 1999). Sartre places the responsibility on the border between ontology and moral. But from the perspective of Levinas, the ethics rises at the level of primary ontology; in other words, ethics precedes the existence. The responsibility towards the other creates the subjective nature of ethics; the care for the other substitutes the concern for one self (Sandu, 2016, Sandu & Terec-Vlad, 2016). The other is a non-subject that makes the Ego responsible and which, by denial, lowers the self into being, determining it as the One-who-is-responsible, so that we can call the relationship with the other a relationship of responsible knowledge or a relationship that provides care. The relationship with the other is a relationship of valuing and understanding, the understanding of a being is, at the same time, an appreciation, that is the apperception of the Other as a receptacle for responsibility as the object and purpose of nurturing (Sandu, 2016). Levinas believes that the substance of the ego is the reflexivity manifested by the appearance of consciousness in temporality.

In "Totality and infinity", there are two forms of otherness: The Other - as Infinite and the other as Ego (Levinas, 1999). Sorin-Tudor Maxim

believes that the responsibility is the native and the original structure of the moral consciousness, the moral awakening actually starts by assuming the responsibility towards the Other (Maxim, 2000). Levinas sees the responsibility as the essential structure of subjectivity. The responsibility as a structure of subjectivity is interpreted as paradoxical as "the subjectivity beyond any freedom or non-freedom is structurally bound to its neighbour; the identity of the subject is related to the impossibility of evading responsibility, the assignment to another. There is passivity of the subject to the intervention of responsibility, which reminds us of the manner in which Sartre spoke of the absolute responsibility of the subject to his actions, but also towards what is allowed to do" (Maxim, 2010). According to Levinas, the responsibility leaves the empire of theology, the act of beingness through and for the other being expressed by the responsibility (Maxim, 2004).

## **6. The principle of responsibility towards the human non-presence or the non-human presence**

Within the development of new technologies and the human improvement, there is a need for a principle to guide the action to assess the human individual's behaviour related to the non-human species. In non-presence, we mention the responsibility towards future generations, aliens (the colonization of space) and the forms of non-human consciousness or trans (post) non-human still not present.

The principle of responsibility towards the human non-presence or the non-human presence might have the following formulation: *act so that your actions do not harm the actual human species or the possible post-human species.*

The principle of responsibility towards the human non-presence or the non-human presence is a model that can be applied to several models of longevity consciousness, not only in conditions loaded in a virtual space, but also other (post) human species. The principle of responsibility to the lack of human presence or to non-human presence that we want to build is based on caring for each, no matter whether we are talking about the future generations, or about non-human species. The ethics of care's core value is the responsibility. Heidegger believes that care is authenticity. Emanuel Levinas brings forth a new model of ethics based on the responsibility of a passive subject; the responsibility built by Levinas goes beyond the idea of concrete responsibility for a given otherness, as it is established in relation to the Divinity and to other in the person of the Neighbour (Sandu, 2016). Levinas transposes the idea of responsibility towards the otherness



determined in the light of the consciousness which takes the responsibility as its own form of existence.

According to Antonio Sandu, the Otherness can be seen from two perspectives: a legal perspective and a phenomenological perspective. From the legal perspective, the otherness can be analysed as a responsibility for the freedom of the Other to fulfil his right (derived from modern chain), and the phenomenological perspective, responsibility is understood as care (Sandu, 2016). The responsibility to the non-presence and implicitly to other human or nonhuman species requires the understanding of the fact that our actions should not prejudice the future (generations) of the human or non-human species. This aspect involves that the scientific discoveries in terms of technique and technology must be consistent with the ethical framework and to building ethical decision tools on the artificial creation of post-human species. In this context, we refer to the need for an ethical evaluation of technologies.

Any post-human species are not currently covered by a legal framework, but once these species will appear, we are in charge of their future and how they will relate to the today's human species. Within the trans-humanism and the human improvement, there is a possibility for scientists to create new humanoid species with a high level of morality or physically and intellectually improved. From this point of view, the individual's actions must be reasonable and based on responsibility. When we are talking about the individual's responsibility we do not relate to actions taken by a single researcher in the field of biotechnology, bio IT and neurosciences, etc. but to the entire scientific community in a particular area. However, we should not exclude that once the information got into the "wrong hands", it could seriously harm the current human species.

We discussed the need for the ethics of the future to guide collective action. Since we do not know if the future generations will be human or non-human, legally recognized or not, such as consciousness downloaded into a virtual environment, artificial intelligence, etc., we believe that the principle of responsibility to the lack of human presence or to the non-human presence can guide both the behaviour of scientists and the social behaviours in relation to the other, be it human or non-human. As currently there is an ethics of the environment, animals, a feminist ethics, etc., we believe that we need a prospective ethics based on responsibility, with the help of which we can build an ethics for future generations.

## **7. The responsibility as a function (of power and action) and a consequence of knowledge**

In the context of future generations and the possibility of co-existence of species, we consider appropriate to analyse the responsibility as a function of power and action. The ethics of responsibility proposed by Jonas is an ethics of the future. The complexity of our world and the consequences of the wasteful use of the technique and technology, resources determines us to act cautiously and responsibly.

Jonas analyses the concept of responsibility in the context of technological development with an emphasis on responsibility. In the context of the technical development and scientific progress, Jonas believes that we are moving towards new forms of power and the technique is considered an exercise of power. Since the human power is a form of action, it is subject to a moral examination (Jonas, 1997). The augmentation of power that new technology provides us with, determines the augmentation of responsibility where the forecasts on the future involve actions undertaken with caution (Restrepo Tamayo, 2014). In the context of the current society where possible consequences cannot be foreseen, action is needed to foresee the unexpected. So from this point of view, the precaution and the ethics of responsibility cannot be reduced to "being responsible" because we have to become responsible for how our actions might affect future generations and therefore the future thereof.

In the study „Técnica medicina y ética – El Umbral del Futuro: Valores de Ayer y Valores de Mañana”, Jonas wonders what are the values that must be considered in prospective terms, taking into account the responsibility for the present (as an ethical and axiological imperative) to be applied in the future. With regard to the responsibility for the possible future, a series of projections are needed, which are hypothetically grounded, and to the extent possible, these projects must be overall projects. Jonas believes that the values are ideas on what is good, right and worthy to take into account and meet the instincts and desires with the claim to be recognized as links and the will be due as a claim or at least as a form of respect (Jonas, 1997) .

## **8. Conclusions**

Nowadays it is necessary that the actions of individuals be guided by an imperative based on responsibility. Within neurosciences, information technologies, medicine, etc., new situations arise every day alongside

discoveries that may save the lives of millions of people. However, we must bear in mind that the human individual has not always used the information or resources in a rational, as there are clear examples in the history of mankind of ecological disasters, weapons of mass destruction that have occurred. In the context of trans-humanism and the scientific discoveries, we consider it appropriate to develop a new imperative; we began with the research of Jonas and Apel regarding responsibility and we outlined a new imperative of responsibility: the responsibility to the lack of human presence or the non-human presence.

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