

Some General Intercultural Reflections on Climate Change

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The author of the article analyses the problem of climate change by comparing the philosophical ideas of the leading figure of Chinese Daoism Laozi and the German philosopher Norbert Bolz. The article highlights the complexity, relevance and interdisciplinarity of the problem. It is assumed that the focus on the problem of climate change is closely linked to changes in the social structure of the Western society and the controversial technological progress that has already made it possible to capture the signs of global warming in nature. At the same time, the problem of climate change is seen as a conflict of different interpretations. For this reason, emphasis is placed on the need for a dialogue between specialists in natural and social sciences as well as humanities in addressing issues arising from the latter problem.

Keywords: climate change, nature, Laozi, Norbert Bolz, intercultural philosophy, cross-cultural comparison

INTRODUCTION

In addition to the series of economic and social problems caused by the global pandemic and the global migrant crisis, climate change is one of the biggest challenges faced by nations of all continents of the world and their living environment. This problem can be described as changing climate patterns that are not specific to a particular region of the planet. The world's media has been reporting on massive whirlwinds devastating entire cities, floods destroying all possible urban infrastructure, unbearable heat decimating farmers' crops and damaging human health – all of which are consequences of climate change affecting the stability of natural ecosystems and human survival on the Planet Earth. The philosophical discourse of the article is based on the intercultural philosophy. Karlsruhe University Professor Gregor Paul states that 'intercultural philosophy is a philosophy, the objects of which are not only cultures and cultural worlds, i.e. the forms and features of lifestyles created by humans, but also philosophies of different cultures. This is the reason why intercultural philosophy is the philosophy of philosophies, defined by its metaphilosophical character. This is the reason why a number of studies treat intercultural philosophy as an exceptional attempt to read the works of philosophers of certain cultures firstly seeking to achieve original thinking' (Paul 2008: 16). The plan for this article and the body of its basic ideas began to form gradually while the author was delving into the problems of cultural, philosophical and artistic interaction

between the perspectives of the East and West. A comparative view of the climate change issue is determined by the twofold structure of the article and the two relatively independent lines of research: Eastern and Western. In addition, the author devoted most of his attention to the problems of intercultural studies, ecology and philosophy. The article is connected by comparative methodology and focus on the interdisciplinary problem of climate change.

Not so many philosophers have written on climate change because many people think that climate change is an environmental problem that the world is currently facing and perceives the nature of this topic as purely ecological and political. The notable exceptions include the works of Oxford philosopher John Broome (born 1947), who wrote an important work about sociocultural consequences of global warming 'Counting the Cost of Global Warming: A Report to the Economic and Social Research Council on Research by John Broome and David Ulph' (1992). Also, we can mention Dale Jamieson's (born 1947), who is a Professor of Environmental Studies and of Philosophy at New York University, articles about the process of climate change. For example, the treatise 'Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle to Stop Climate Change Failed and What it Means for the Future' (2014) opposes our traditional models of individual morality and global justice and criticises the Promethean utopy which he considers a paradigm of anthropocentrism. Other relevant book by Dale Jamieson and Bonnie Nadzam titled 'Love in the Anthropocene: Stories on Human Love in a World Without Nature' (2015) considers the distoia scenario: the existence of the Earth without nature. Meanwhile, Henry Greyson Shue, Professor Emeritus of Politics and of International Relations at Merton College of Oxford University (born 1940), in his book 'Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection' (2015) discusses the necessity to reduce carbon emissions on the planet. The main idea is mutual understanding that we are all bound together on the Earth.

In Germany, the topical aspects of climate change have recently been actively discussed by Norbert Bolz (born 1953), Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the Technical University of Berlin. At the heart of his argument lies the assessment of the Green Movement in consumer societies. The author of the article is considering whether the scientist's critical arguments in relation to the ideas popularised by the Green Movement and climate change itself are substantiated, based on a research conducted by Bolz. The Chinese Daoist philosopher Laozi (4th century BC) calls for an understanding of the spontaneity of nature, the spontaneity of changes in the unity of opposites occurring in nature and human nature, and the interrelationship between man and nature. Thus, by asserting the sacredness of nature, Chinese Daoism represents a different reflection on climate change than the Western one. By comparing the positions of the latter two different civilisational paradigms, the author of the article tries to highlight the critical aspects of the way climate change is addressed.

THE GENESIS OF THE PROBLEM OF CLIMATE CHANGE

In the West, the problem of climate change became the focus of attention in the 2nd half of the 20th century, when markets began to recover from the turmoil caused by World War II, and geopolitical tensions between the superstates – the USA and the Soviet Union – turned into local conflicts taking place in various regions. After the population typhoon that followed the hard times (the biggest so-called baby boom during the reigns of Presidents Harry Truman and David Dwight Eisenhower), the culture of consumption began to grow rapidly. In order to meet consumption needs, the volume of anthropogenic activities increased, which had long-term negative side effects on the quality and environment of production. Although

the volume of anthropogenic activities in relation to ecosystems and human direct consumption was increasing exponentially since the Industrial Revolution, with the significant growth in the production of steel, textiles and other industries, the temperature measurement in various cities around the world that started at a similar time was not directly linked to the excess of consumer culture and production or technical capacity, but rather served the daily needs of the townspeople and the statistics of scientists in general. Monitoring the temperature, the culture of consumption and types of production took a controlling role when geologists began to record the melting of global glaciers from the 1960s onwards. Since then, these links, as well as the increased scientific evidence over the years, have been described by the world's media as threatening, and climate change, which has largely taken place for millions of years, is becoming a global problem, known as global warming.

REDUNDANT KNOWLEDGE AND THE VOICE OF NATURE

The German philosopher N. Bolz, whose main fields of scientific research include the discussion of discourses of communication theories and the relationship of media philosophy to the dissemination of general media trends, analyses the problem of climate change in the light of the divide between facts and opinions. For example, the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant accident and the associated environmental disaster or hurricanes in various parts of the planet are facts for him, whereas approaches to general issues, such as climate change, are viewed as interpretations based on a variety of data, despite the cumulative scientific evidence. Finally, a very important statement emerges from this: 'The more knowledge we have about the future, the less we actually know about it. There is no evidence in considering complex issues as there are only selected facts used to substantiate certain arguments. As a result, there is a counterargument to each response' (Bolz 2020: 64). Bolz has a very clear position: not every common problem is obvious – its solution requires discussions, learning to listen to the arguments of both parties, rather than just trying to impose one's own understanding. This perception becomes particularly relevant when using statistics and the theory of probabilities, which serve as the basis of modern empirical sciences. They are far from being neutral in the climate change debate, as all scientists represent either Pro or Contra sides. Bolz's own position in this debate is skeptical – the thinker tends to focus his investigation on the components of a particular situation.

Another important truth revealed by Bolz is the threat of the proliferation of one-sided information. For example, the use of less manure, which contributes to CO₂ emissions in food chains, is encouraged, but it is rarely thought about how to reduce large amounts of nitrogen emitted into the atmosphere, which contribute to accelerating the greenhouse effect through the use of certified agricultural fertilisers. Not to mention the consequences that the violation of the law of restricted yield has on human health. Thus, when there is a lot of negative information about climate change in the media, and all the material is measured by the same measure, it naturally becomes difficult to listen to a different opinion and to see flaws in current attitudes to climate change. When the train of thought of anthropogenic climate change scientists covers the islands of different information, a kind of vacuum of rational critical thinking may emerge.

Although China surpasses many Western countries in the pace of consumption and environmental pollution, there are still passages of rationally perceived hope in the country's traditional Daoist philosophy, from which modern Chinese people themselves could

undoubtedly learn. The reference is here made to the Daoist values such as *wuwei*, *se* and *jian*, which teach a healthy ecological approach to interpersonal relationships and the preservation of the environment. In this case, the interpretative aspect of the information about climate change can be observed in fragment 19 of Laozi's *Doadejing*: 'Cut off sageliness, get rid of wisdom, the people are better off a hundred times. Cut off benevolence, get rid of justice, the people return to filial piety and fraternal affection' (Laozi 2008: 41). Bolz's call for reflection on certain knowledge relates more to the selection of information and the consequent ability of the subject to critically compare different views on the same issue. It is basically about the cleaning of cognitive glasses when an overly thick layer of overlapping knowledge settles on them. Laozi's thinking is more radical. Unlike the Western civilisational paradigm, in which *oikos* (home) symbolises the medium of household and society, Laozi's core of ecological thinking is a living thoughtful man (unlike a rational returnee from the eternal frost of New Age rationalism and empiricism) who feels the pulse of nature, cares about the environment and others, and receives in return care and support from people and from nature. The latter result requires a suspension of all knowledge and learned upbringing or behavioural rules in order to reach *xin* (heart) level, which means '... not attaching to anything or its properties, but rather enjoying the fullness and diversity of all of them (the world)' (Poškaitė 2004: 128). The look saturated with *xin* leaves no room for unnecessary knowledge by giving priority to the perception flowing from *aisthesis* that allows reality to be accepted as it is, instead of being turned into mine to meet human needs.

PETER PAN SYNDROME AND THE DAOIST IMAGE OF A BABY

Addressing climate change presupposes measures mobilising international initiatives to tackle this issue: special funding and expert evaluation of national programs in various countries around the world. It is also possible to talk about civil demonstrations reflecting the radical form of public reaction. Bolz attributes exaggerated idealism to the approaches to solving the aforementioned problem and identifies it with the systemic characteristics of the Western social structure expressed in the metaphor of Peter Pan syndrome. Unlike the postmodern Western civilisational paradigm, in which infantilism is a sign of immaturity, the Eastern Daoist perspective uses the image of a baby to express a responsible adult behaviour that abandons prejudices and involves positive changes in interpersonal relationships and nature.

Bolz applies the metaphor of Peter Pan syndrome defined by psychologist Dan Kiley, which describes an individual's unwillingness to grow up, to the entire space of Western civilization realm, which tends to overemphasise the views of each individual, often with little regard for a person's professional competencies or mature mental capabilities to discuss a particular issue. The protests organised by a Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg (born 2003) and thousands of like-minded people in Europe and North America in support of a drastic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere received enormous support from the world leaders, such as Pope Francis and Barack Obama. In their speeches, Greta Thunberg and her followers emphasise the uncertainty and inadequacy of the desire to destroy '... the colonial, racist, and patriarchal systems of oppression [that] have created and fueled it' (Thunberg 2019: on the site). The stated objectives are poorly justified because they do not provide a clear implementation program for replacing all this with forms of cross-border decision-making, and the protesters, like children led by assertive Peter Pan, i.e. Greta Thunberg, oppose Captains Hooks – large corporations, and short-sighted parents – state governments, which do not satisfy their interests. In this way, '... the paternalism of state care

is not really perceived as being imposed by force; on the contrary, most want it because it protects them from the burden of freedom' (Bolz 2020: 45). This probably explains the great interest in these forms of childish protest. The revolts organised in this way are more likely to express emotional leadership, in which such ideas have a declarative rather than regulatory character.

In contrast to Bolz's thinking, which emphasises the dangers of infantilism in solving global problems, in the Daoist thinking, the metaphor of a baby signifies a different attitude of an adult: 'Concentrating *qi* to its weakest, can you be a baby boy?' (Laozi 2008: 43). According to Laozi, in order to change the world, adults must learn to concentrate so that they could recognise their imperfections in the mirror of the soul. In this way, by being able to focus on the outside and by avoiding imposing the character dominance and the aggressiveness of the personality on the environment, it is possible to think calmly about the points of the climate change protest programs and implement them consistently. Since 2016, primary school teacher programs in China have been promoting the concept of an ecological attitude through existence 共在 (being with): '... to help children overcome individualistic thinking styles and in this way, to enable interaction with the world in interpersonal relationships' (Zhao, Caiping 2016: 1197). The declared attitude echoes the above-mentioned Laozi's concern to develop a mature but, at the same time, idealistic (metaphorically, infantile) thinking that humans are one of the many life forms living on Earth. Accordingly, by transferring this ontological notion to school practice, it can be predicted that the Chinese determination to develop a citizen ethically responsible for his/her interpersonal relationships is a realistic task. Especially given that such education is supported by the government: more recently, Chinese President Xi Jinping has pledged that his country, being responsible for future generations, will reduce the development of the coal industry in other countries in order to reach an international agreement to make China a climate neutral country by 2060.

THE FEAR OF TECHNOLOGY AND THE NATURALNESS OF THE COEXISTENCE OF OPPOSITES

People of the Stone Age feared the world and natural phenomena expressed their inner bogeymen through the symbolism of demons and animal totems. In the Middle Ages, individuals of all classes, without exception, feared the omnipotence of God and fought fierce wars of the Holy Inquisition against various Christian sects in order to protect themselves from the scourges of the Lord's Providence. On the other hand, modern people are experiencing a strong fear for their future, as they are divided between the desires for knowledge driven by technological progress and the uncertainty of the consequences. The latter trend can be called the unusual relation of Western civilization to creative power. Unlike the Western perspective of reasoning, the Daoist perspective of thinking teaches us to trust in nature and in the cyclicity of natural processes, and to perceive the opposites existing in the world as spontaneous gifts.

Compared to previous times, many Western and East Asian states are experiencing abundance in various areas of life. Welfare on a social and economic basis is shaped by the harmonious functioning of state systems, effective economic development and scientific progress. Despite these success factors of social progress, there are contradictions conflicting with technological solutions that must ensure the security of humanity. Although epidemiological services have been operating globally, the World Health Organization has been providing health prevention recommendations, and various social groups have been vaccinated, humanity is still struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic. US President Joe Biden has allocated billions

to move the developing nations of the world to the Green Deal, but the Antarctic glaciers are still melting, polar bears are disappearing in the North, and koalas and certain species of kangaroos are becoming extinct in Australia as the result of the increasing greenhouse effect. Humanity is facing the paradox of technical progress: 'The more scientific and technical our world becomes, the more difficult it is to experience it in a meaningful way' (Bolz 2020: 147–148). In modern times, the increasing fragmentation into separate areas of technical activity with their own competencies is beginning to crack in the face of anomalies beyond the control of technical thinking, and the broad masses are being affected by nervous tension, which erupts into anti-vaccine protests and impudent statements made by the pseudo-science groups on the Green Deal policy, revealing the fear of technology experienced by those social groups. Hypothetically, this fear will diminish when the problem that has caused it is gone. In modern times, given the urgency of climate change and other global issues, positive changes in this direction are unlikely to happen soon.

As a response to the Europeans' fear of the instruments of technological progress, Chinese Daoism provides an alternative of a different behaviour which derives from the logic of the unity of opposites of the latter stream of thought: 'Being and beingless generate each other; difficult and the easy form each other; the long and the short shape each other; the high and low complete each other; a note and a voice match each other; front and back follow each other. (All is perennial.) For this reason, the Sage abides with the practice of not acting and undertaking teaching without words. The myriad things act, yet he does not initiate them; they generate, yet he does not possess them; they act, yet he does not rely on them; tasks come to fruition, yet he does not dwell on them' (Laozi 2008: 7). Understanding of the laws of the logic of the unity of opposites – recognition of the existence of opposition elements at all levels of being; understanding their complementarity in a particular life situation or discourse; human involvement in natural and other processes to the necessary extent – can provide a good starting point for the natural self-regulation system to stabilise many indicators of air, humidity and soil quality. In this context, the above-mentioned example of China's pledge to become a climate-neutral country, i.e. not interfering in the nonhuman realm – in the reign of the Dao, who ruled the evolution of life for millions of years before the emergence of man – is commendable. Conversely, the Daoist lesson of the unity of opposites acts as a warning to the Western civilization, that seeks to tackle climate change by offering its own Green Deal model in regions of the world with their own alternatives to solving this problem.

CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, the issue of climate change is urgent and complex. Its importance has been solidified by global discussions in various media. On the other hand, the recent active scientific debate on this issue has been overshadowed by the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic and the search for alternatives to its solution. The involvement of biologists and climatologists alone is not enough to address climate change. In that case, this issue would be reduced to the level of global warming; however, climate change is closely linked to consumption, changes in people's social relations and the peripeteia of geopolitical space. Thus, in addition to the implicit spectrum of futuristic forecasts for biodiversity and meteorology alone, the problem of climate change is fuelling the work of specialists in other scientific fields such as philosophers, sociologists, political scientists and communication experts. Climate change becoming a problem and related conflicts of interpretation with the flag of human progress flying in different barricades lead to obscurity in philosophical discourse.

Secondly, intercultural philosophy, following the methodological provisions of civilizational comparative studies and comparative culturology, highlights the approaches of different cultural paradigms to global issues, such as climate change addressed in the article. The Western civilisation tends to address climate change through the models of abstinence and sublimation of consumption volume called the Green New Deal of US. With the expansion of Westernization, more and more regions of the world are supporting the latter initiatives. Discussing the influence of Chinese Daoism, the author of the article points out that non-European regions of the world themselves have ideas in their history that can accelerate the solution to climate change in their living environment, rather than just looking at European ecological strategies or technologies. For example, the ecological guidelines in Chinese primary curricula and the application of these provisions in Chinese public life suggest that the East Asian superstate in question incorporates the philosophical ideas of the region into a wide range of social and international contexts.

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ŽILVINAS VAREIKIS

Keli bendri tarpkultūriniai apmąstymai apie klimato kaitą

Santrauka

Lygindamas kinų daoizmo korifėjaus Laozi ir vokiečių filosofo Norberto Bolzo filosofines idėjas teksto autorius analizuoja klimato kaitos problemą. Straipsnyje pabrėžiamas minėtos problemos kompleksiskumas, aktualumas ir tarpdiscipliniškumas. Tekste daroma prielaida, kad klimato kaitos problemos iškėlimas glaudžiai susijęs su Vakarų visuomeninės sanklodos pokyčiais ir prieštaringai vertinama technologine pažanga, leidžiančia jau dabar fiksuoti visuotinio atšilimo ženklus gamtoje. Kartu į klimato kaitos problemą žvelgiama kaip į skirtingų interpretacijų konfliktą. Todėl akcentuojama dialogo būtinybė tarp gamtos, socialinių ir humanitarinių mokslų specialistų, svarstant iš pastarosios problematikos kylančius klausimus.

Raktažodžiai: klimato kaita, gamta, Laozi, Norbertas Bolzas, tarpkultūrinė filosofija, tarpkultūrinis lyginimas