

Anthropocene and the Values in the Contemporary Lithuanian Philosophy

ŽILVINAS VAREIKIS

Department of Comparative Culture Studies, Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, 58 Saltoniškių Street, 08105 Vilnius, Lithuania
Email: zilutemicroлт@gmail.com

In modern times, philosophy finds itself in a contradictory position. On the one hand, it has long been a theoretical abstract knowledge of the phenomena of reality and the ideas that express it. On the other hand, it is, at its core, a science that reflects on changes in fundamental human values. Values are embedded in the structure of each society, in the variety of issues that it has to deal with. Therefore, to be in touch with changing reality, philosophy naturally responds to societal issues that have a lasting impact on human beings and their environment. Being aware of the multi-layered nature of the Anthropocene, the author of the article explores the values that emerge in Lithuanian philosophy in the context of research on the Anthropocene. For this purpose, the insights of Lithuanian philosophers Naglis Kardelis, Gintautas Mažeikis, Arvydas Šliogeris, Mintautas Gutauskas and Danutė Bacevičiūtė into the most significant changes in nature caused by the Anthropocene are discussed.

Keywords: anthropocene, values, climate change, philosophy, changes in nature

INTRODUCTION

The Anthropocene is nowadays a popular topic in Lithuanian philosophical discourses due to the pollution, consequences of climate change and the extermination of biodiversity on our planet. Lithuanian scientists L. Duoblienė and J. Garbauskaitė-Jakimovska speak about new goals of education, namely – ‘overcoming challenges for the future’ (Duoblienė, Garbauskaitė-Jakimovska 2022: 13). The professor at Vytautas Magnus University A. Žukauskaitė reflects the topics of biophilosophy and of biopolitics. Delving into different visual aspects of Anthropocene, she suggests ‘the replacement of anthropocentric aesthetics with a different kind of aesthetics, which includes a non-human or not-quite-human gaze’ (Žukauskaitė 2020: 27). To this end, the philosopher considers upon Anthropocene in arts, e.g. when analysing the context of opera – performance by Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, Vaiva Grainytė and Lina Lapelytė – and connecting it with the ideas of postmodern philosophy. Pointedly ‘the projection from the spectator’s own experience’ (Pardo, Gauna 2020: 161), the other authors investigate the context of Anthropocene through the above-mentioned opera performance.

The Anthropocene, which refers to changes in natural ecosystems accelerated by the negative effects of human economic activity, has been of interest to ecologists, religious scholars, economists, sociologists and philosophers. Given the complexity of the issue under

consideration and the variety of research strategies used, it would be impossible to cover all the arguments of all sides in a single article. Even if only one research approach is adopted, there is a risk of forgetting certain important facts or unheard-of truths that have been proclaimed. For the reasons mentioned above, as a Lithuanian philosopher, I would like to take a somewhat narrower view of the Anthropocene. To attain this object, I use hermeneutics method to depict the dynamics of discussing scientific papers and to reflect ideas of certain Lithuanian philosophers, i.e. the reception of the thematic contexts related to the issues of the Anthropocene developed in the works of scholars N. Kardelis, M. Gutauskas, D. Bacevičiūtė, G. Mažeikis and A. Šliogeris. I seek to understand what values are discussed by these philosophers in the context of the above-mentioned issues. Finally, I am trying to figure out whether the Anthropocene problems revealed in the works of the aforementioned scholars are more likely to highlight one thematic context more than the others or whether these contexts are seen as parts of a coherent set of dynamic processes.

THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING THE TERM 'ANTHROPOCENE' AND ITS IDEALISTIC INTERPRETATION

Unlike foreign philosophical scientific discourse, where the concept of the Anthropocene is either associated with climate change or separated from it, in Lithuanian philosophy both thematic aspects are referred to under the common name of the Anthropocene. This choice is often due to the fact that researchers (e.g. D. Bacevičiūtė, M. Gutauskas and V. Daraškevičiūtė) have been reflecting on new aspects of the apocalyptic scenario of the planet. It could be argued that it is precisely because of the pessimistic nature of the consideration of the problem that the semantic meaning of the term 'Anthropocene' – a new human being – remains suspended in the periphery of the dimensions between the past and the future. Quite recently, a return to the essence of the concept of the Anthropocene in Lithuanian philosophy, instead of jumping to the consequences, was prompted by a revision of the discussion of the term initiated by the cultural studies scholar and philosopher N. Kardelis, who points to the vagueness of the term Anthropocene. The term 'a new human being' can refer equally to the negative impact of anthropogenic activities on the earth and to the successful resolution of gradually evolving environmental issues. Kardelis suggests that this meaning, revealed in the nature of the Anthropocene, should be interpreted with a hopeful approach. He invites us

'to reflect on the Anthropocene from an ethical perspective and to link the meaning of the term not to the power of man-made technologies, but to the ethical development in human beings, meaning not so much individual human beings, but humanity as a whole as the personification of a new human being in an ethical sense' (Kardelis 2019: 11).

The approach taken is close to a Christian stance, which believes in the possibility of ethical human development and in common sense that distinguishes the natural scientific discourse from the humanistic one. The value position represented by Kardelis' interpretation of the term 'Anthropocene' is one that corresponds to the various strains of Christian thought in different eras. But it is Immanuel Kant who has spoken most of all about ethical development in relation to the whole human family.

For Kant culture, therefore, primarily expresses 'the social worth of man' (Kant 1784: 388), i.e. the urban standard of received education and decent moral behaviour. It can be assumed that, like Kant, Kardelis is inspired by the belief of the Enlightenment tradition in

the possibility of endless human ethical development. It follows that in the process of ethical development, humanity should, as in St. Paul's teaching, put off the 'old self' in order to change the ecological face of the earth and, at the same time, to change the future of all of us on the planet in a positive direction. But alongside this idealism dictated by the Enlightenment, there is a dark side of the debate. Constant technological progress is encouraging people to consume new goods and try out different services, the supply or maintenance of which is contributing to the greenhouse effect. However, it is important to bear in mind that not every nature is inclined to be educated. For these two reasons, despite the threat to life on earth, Kardelis' hopeful belief in 'a new human being' in his interpretation of the Anthropocene reflects a small part of an idealistically minded humanity, rather than humanity as a whole.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THEODICY AND ANTHROPODICY IN MAŽEIKIS' THOUGHT

In contrast to the cultural studies scholar Kardelis, who adheres to an idealistic worldview of the change of world order, the philosopher Mažeikis looks at the earth affected by climate change without any illusions that the ongoing technogenic changes of the planet will turn for the better. The disposition he discusses is a critical-realistic one, i.e. the one that recognises the irreversible processes of sociocultural and natural reality. Unlike Kardelis, who is developing the traditional concept of the Anthropocene in the Lithuanian academic space, Mažeikis bases the impact of anthropogenic activities on the climate and the entire biological diversity of the planet on the dialectical opposition of two terms – theodicy and anthropodicy.

The concept of theodicy, underpinning Mažeikis' concept of the Anthropocene, is seen as 'the justification of the Lord's activity in observing the various manifestations of evil occurring on earth' (Mažeikis 2022: on the site). The latter concept postulates the existence of God and also speaks of the coexistence of evil, subject to the will of the Christian Demiurge. The intellectual content of the debate between good and evil has been characterised by a normative polemical character. It is not just a matter of understanding God, but of understanding the almighty Creator who has created the whole world, which is essentially good. At the same time, however, the paradoxical existence of evil is acknowledged, which is fundamentally at odds with the divine structure of the universe. Medieval theologians and philosophers such as John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham and Thomas Aquinas tried to attribute wars, plagues, and other scourges that befell humanity to divine providence. In other words, God understands better than individuals what is best in the finite passage of earthly time. However, in this aspect of religious thought, *providentia* gives a kind of autonomy to the anti-moral stance by virtue of the provision of free will. The question arises if Mažeikis is following the classical concept of theodicy. Rather, he follows a modern transformation of this concept. According to the thinker: 'the Anthropocene has already happened, so seeing transcendent nature is almost impossible' (Mažeikis 2022: on the site). This proposition postulates the opposition between transcendent and human-influenced nature. It is argued that in modern times, virtually all nature has already been changed by man. For this reason, there is no basis for speaking of an ideal monadic functioning guided by a divine demiurge. The changes in the hitherto prevailing conception require a different concept, referred to by Mažeikis as 'anthropodicy'.

For Mažeikis, anthropodicy is 'the justification of human activity in pursuit of more beautiful and noble goals' (Mažeikis 2022: on the site). It refers to the various forms of humanism that change the world in the name of humanity rather than in the name of God. Examples of such forms include communism, national socialism and different forms of authoritarianism.

In pursuit of the comforts of progress and the resulting global prosperity, mankind has come to rely freely on technology. These noble aspirations and the ideal of creating a better life based on them are the anthropocentric tendency that Mažeikis reflects upon. In turn, it leads to the Anthropocene: the retreat of untouched (what Mažeikis calls transcendent) nature from the historic plane. Transcendent nature is gradually being replaced by a completely human-controlled environment.

Looking at the opposition between theodicy and anthropodicy, it is evident that Mažeikis' interpretation of the concept of the Anthropocene is characterised by a critical epistemic reflection. The thinker points out that the concept of theodicy is outdated and proposes a new concept of anthropodicy. He sees the biggest problems in man's over-reliance on technology and scientific methods, the exaltation of which is linked to the advances in science and ideologies of the new age. The changes in nature resulting from these problems are as difficult to stop as the processes in human history, such as globalisation and migration, but they can be mitigated. According to Mažeikis, the regulation of the transformations of nature should be a natural, spontaneous process, based on

'the cultivation of the opposites of nature and man, their balance, characteristic of Eastern Taoism, which does not require a Hegelian synthesis of opposites in any way' (Mažeikis 2022: on the site).

It is argued that the Hegelian drama of the power fields of man as the master and nature as the slave would only deepen the ecological crises that have befallen the world. On the other hand, it is not clear how it would be possible to apply Mažeikis' version of the balance of opposites on a global scale. After all, the population of the Earth is constantly growing and nature is being exploited in different countries of the world. There is also the inherent lack of restraint and greed in human nature, which is why many of the world's superpowers are in no hurry to upgrade their agricultural infrastructure to give the land a rest, or their car fleets to reduce pollution. For the anthropogenic factors and related reasons outlined above, Mažeikis' alternative of fostering opposites seems to be an idealistic construct from Eastern philosophy, just like Kardelis' Christian confidence in the gradually emerging awareness of the 'new man'.

THE CONTOURS OF THE ANTHROPOCENE AND THE ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF ARVYDAS ŠLIOGERIS' PHILOTOPIA

The thoughts expressed by A. Šliogeris, who is considered to be the most original contemporary Lithuanian philosopher, reflect the classical thematic contexts of philosophy, namely those of art, metaphysics and ethics. These contexts are complemented by contemporary philosophical themes related to media, reflection on technogenic reality and ecology. The ecological discourse outlines the thinker's distinctive view of the Anthropocene. Šliogeris himself does not use this term, which is alien to the ontological nature of his philosophy, even though he does reflect on the drastic changes in the relationship between nature and human beings in modern times.

The ecological thematic core in Šliogeris' philosophy stems from one of his most distinctive ideas: philotopia. According to the scholar, it is

'the attachment of a mortal being, limited by a sensory horizon, such as a human being, to a place, to a unique and only place. In other words, we can call it a *homeland*' (Šliogeris 2013: 40).

Šliogeris' interpretation of the term 'philotopia' reflects the microcosmic relationship of the *oikos* (home) with the surrounding environment, which is close to the theoretical perspective of the soul. Undoubtedly, it needs to be cherished. In today's world, this should be reflected in a more environmentally friendly approach on the part of the individual consumer: thinking about the responsible collection and recycling of waste, and the sustainable reuse of things. At this level of perception of reality, the unique self of the thinker is complemented by reflection on aspects of classical ethics.

In addition to this loving and caring attitude, Šliogeris' philotopia additionally generates a macrocosmic vision of the surrounding reality. Šliogeris synthesises philosophical quest into a single whole and, in a way, continues the discussion of the following question: what is the absolute place? For Šliogeris, technically designed mass-produced things are of the lowest quality. Things of the highest value originate from the concrete materiality of nature. It is the universality of nature that for him is the personification of the absolute place. In this respect, Šliogeris' worldview is close to Aristotle's attempt to discern traces of the metaphysical absolute in the study of natural bodies. But unlike Aristotle, who looked for traces of the demiurge in nature, and Plato, who turned his dialogues towards the verbal contemplation of the invisible otherworld of ideas, for Šliogeris the spiritual realm seems to have nothing to do with the transcendence of nature. In the philosopher's view, all attempts to attribute spiritual contents to nature contradict its material character and, in linguistic and economic terms, even make it the prey of blind human pragmatism. For this reason, for the being of

'a thing of nature *such as this* to appear means to see that thing insubstantially, non-instrumentally, non-symbolically, non-pragmatically, disinterestedly, and therefore to see that thing "inhumanly", "unnaturally"' (Šliogeris 2010: 19).

Looking at the scale of the destruction of nature on the planet, it is obvious that not every individual possesses Šliogeris' vision. This is why climate and other global ecological crises cannot be solved with the help of the otherworld: they require the individual's inner determination and its purposeful realisation in the dynamism of reality. Ultimately, this value disposition requires a gradual increase in human awareness, a quiet and contemplative attitude towards the environment, and a caring look, which is a kind of catalyst for environmental action. These constructs of understanding should lead a thinking man to a reflective and responsible value attitude towards nature.

The philosopher's insight is pessimistic, predicting the scenario of the destruction of humanity. Although humanity is aware that climate change and the destruction of nature are real threats to their own security and that of future generations, as well as to the existence of biodiversity, i.e. that it is important to act with moderation, most people tend not to change their consumption habits that harm nature and even try to justify them. Consumer societies hope that various ecological catastrophes will not befall them, despite the fact that they are still occurring in the form of natural cataclysms in various parts of the globe, and that science, the instrument of human manipulation of reality, will find new ways for mankind to survive and to continue to go beyond the bounds of human restraint and to waste the natural world.

THE INTERSECTION OF MODERNITY AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

The recent international monograph by Mintautas Gutauskas, Vaiva Daraškevičiūtė, Gianluca Cuzzo and Danutė Bacevičiūtė 'Transformations of Nature: Modernity and the Anthropocene'

explores the relationship between modernity and the Anthropocene. Unlike the previous conceptions of the Anthropocene offered by Lithuanian philosophers, which are mainly based on insights from philosophical discourse, the monograph looks at the phenomenon from the perspectives of ethics, sociology and ecology. This means that the study of changes in nature is based on interdisciplinary knowledge and reflection of this knowledge.

Modernity is usually associated with the expansion of urbanisation and the rise of urban lifestyles. In turn, all that is natural must be managed to the extent that it meets human needs. Control measures include a range of technologies and environmental management strategies as well as their effectiveness. Accordingly, the Anthropocene is seen as the opposite of the processes of control over nature. It

‘implies the perception of the impossibility of global control. People begin to identify themselves not in terms of their power but in terms of their inability to deal with the consequences of their actions’ (Gutauskas 2021: 96).

At first sight, the view presented by Gutauskas does not differ much from that of Mažeikis, who argues for the powerlessness of human beings in the face of the deepening natural crisis. In this respect, Gutauskas is equally aware of the futility of Hegel’s master-slave dialectics in the face of impending ecological catastrophe. A soberly realistic view of the supposed achievements of modernity, testifying to the triumph of the human will over nature, and of drastic changes in nature that are inevitable in this fever of technological progress and consumption is offered. However, there is a slight difference in the interpretation of the terms used by the two thinkers. Mažeikis believes that nature is losing out to man, who is finally taking control of its mystical sphere. This is evident in Mažeikis’ interpretation as he recognises the irrelevance of the concept of theodicy and offers the primacy of the concept of anthropodicy. Gutauskas understands the final transformation of nature somewhat differently. Its mysterious power does not disappear in the course of life. This potential of nature is evidenced by the cataclysms that are occurring in various parts of the earth, which are beyond the control of humans, as nature is escaping from human control and becoming unpredictable. Apart from these differences, the interpretation of the Anthropocene by Mažeikis and Gutauskas is similar. In discussing the Anthropocene, both scholars take a critical stance towards modern man’s excessive consumption. The tone expressed is not moralising at all, but rather stating the realities of real life, and therefore the criticism is primarily directed at a human being who is trying with all his/her might to prove his/her superiority over nature.

Philosopher Bacevičiūtė, discussing the discrepancy between classical and postmodern ethics in relation to the debated question of the Anthropocene, tends to talk about the futility of combining different ethical systems. On the one hand, this is because the ethical systems of previous epochs were designed to deal with the crises of the time, such as wars and conflicts, whereas now we are faced with the occurrence of natural change. It cannot be reversed so easily, and the negative chain of cause and effect cannot be broken by signing an equivalent peace treaty as if in the finale of a local military clash. Solving the global problem of the Anthropocene requires the awareness and real actions of the people of the entire planet that will change the dynamics of consumption and pollution of the planet. This means that in today’s world simply talking about how to reduce the overall temperature of the planet, without taking effective action, is insufficient from either side. On the other hand, the discussion of the Anthropocene itself presents a very intricate set of complex phenomena. According to Bacevičiūtė, the ethics that addresses this issue

‘is unsystematic, non-normative... Its broad spectrum consists of a variety of practices, formulated both in terms of resistance to power and in terms of love. The minimal ethics of the Anthropocene is based on a centering of the human position that nevertheless allows for a movement towards personal change, self-responsibility, and self-healing’ (Bacevičiūtė 2021: 305).

The scholar’s point raises doubts about whether it is possible to make any changes at all in the mix of ethical theories that has emerged in modern times, so that climate change could be slowed down to some extent, and so that large industrialists and individual consumers would think about the consequences of their environmentally damaging activities. For this reason, it is becoming increasingly difficult to respond to each ethical theory individually and to change our behaviour on the basis of it. This is especially true since many of the ethical theories mentioned by the philosopher, which are being developed in modern times, refer only to the needs of the individual rather than to the relationship between man and nature. It is clear that the desire to satisfy them is what has brought about the problematic changes in nature in question.

CONCLUSIONS

‘Anthropocene’ used in the Lithuanian philosophical space is paradoxical in its essence. It is a term used to discuss the multifaceted changes in nature: changes in the crust of the earth, climate change, problems caused by littering as well as hydrological and meteorological contexts. The problematic aspects of the complexity of the term used have been analysed by the philosopher and cultural studies scholar Kardelis. In foreign literature, the specific issue of natural change under discussion is identified, and this issue is analysed holistically. However, in Lithuania, the debate is somewhat different. The term ‘Anthropocene’ serves a holistic spectrum of understanding and a universal discussion of diverse problems.

In a general sense, every change in nature on a global scale drastically alters existential being all across the planet. For example, increasing climate change is having an equally negative impact on the hydrography, geopolitics, and biodiversity of the planet. To continue living successfully on earth, humans are trying to stop the drastic transformation of nature. Philosophical discourse mainly observes and interprets these processes in the context of shifts in human values. Mažeikis, Gutauskas, Bacevičiūtė and Šliogeris note the fading of the sacred Christian worldview, which emphasised the dominance of man over nature.

Received 12 December 2023

Accepted 12 February 2024

References

1. Bacevičiūtė, D. 2021. „Etikos sferos ribų išsiplėtimas: atsakomybė už gamtą [Expanding the Boundaries of the Ethical Sphere: Responsibility for Nature]“, in *Gamtos transformacijos: modernybė ir antropocenas* [Transformations of Nature: Modernity and the Anthropocene], ed. M. Gutauskas. Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla [Vilnius University Press], 235–306.
2. Duoblienė, L.; Garbauskaitė-Jakimovska, J. 2022. ‘Anthropocene in Education and Education in Anthropocene: Public and Academic Discourses About the Future’, *Filosofija. Sociologija* 33(1): 4–13.
3. Gutauskas, M. 2021. „Modernybės gamtos pabaiga ir antropocenas [The End of Nature in Modernity and the Anthropocene]“, in *Gamtos transformacijos: modernybė ir antropocenas* [Transformations of Nature: Modernity and the Anthropocene], ed. M. Gutauskas. Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla [Vilnius University Press], 19–104.
4. Kardelis, N. 2019. „Kada iš tiesų prasidės antropocenas? Apie dar vieną galimą antropoceno termino reikšmę [When Will the Anthropocene Really Begin? On a Yet Another Possible New Meaning of the Term ‘Anthropocene’]“, *Athena: filosofijos studijos: Filosofijos klimato kaita antropoceno epochoje* [Athena: Philosophical Studies: The Changing Climate of Philosophy in the Anthropocene Epoch] 14(1): 10–24.

5. Mažeikis, G. 2023. *Teodicėja ir antropodicėja: blogio (antropoceno) pateisinimo būdai* [Theodicy and Anthropodicy: Ways of Justifying Evil (Anthropocene)]. Scientific Presentation at the Conference of the Lithuanian Cultural Research Institute: *Antropoceno iššūkiai: žmogaus ir gamtos santykių problemos Rytų ir Vakarų mąstytojų akiratyje* [Challenges of the Anthropocene: The Problems of the Human-Nature Relationship as Seen by Eastern and Western Thinkers]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bx3piKZiock> (accessed 31.03.2023).
6. Pardo, B. C.; Gauna, C. E. I. 2021. 'Apuntes Sobre un Espacio Sonoro: Sun & Marina. Just Singing on the Beach', *AusArt Journal for Research in Art* 9(1): 161–173.
7. Šliogeris, A. 2010. *Bulvės metafizika* [The Metaphysics of the Potato]. Vilnius: Apostrofa.
8. Šliogeris, A.; Gustas, V. 2013. *Pokalbiai apie esmes* [Conversations Concerning Essences]. Vilnius: Tyto alba.
9. Žukauskaitė, A. 2020. 'Producing Bare Life in the Anthro-Scene', *Nordic Theatre Studies* 32(1): 27–43.

ŽILVINAS VAREIKIS

Antropocenas ir vertybės šiuolaikinėje Lietuvos filosofijoje

Santrauka

Šiais laikais filosofija vertinama prieštaringai. Viena vertus, nuo seno ji yra teorinis abstraktus tikrovės reiškinių ir ją išreiškiančių idėjų pažinimas. Antra vertus, savo esme ji yra mokslas, apmąstantis pamatinių žmogiškų vertybių pokyčius. Vertybės mezgasi kiekvienos visuomenės sąrauge, jai išskylančių aktualių klausimų įvairovėje. Dėl to savaime suprantama filosofija, siekdama sąlyčio su kintančia tikrove, reaguoja į visuomenėje aktualias problemas, turinčias ilgalaikį poveikį žmogui ir jį supančiai aplinkai. Suvokdamas antropoceno problematikos daugiasluksniškumą, straipsnio autorius tyrinėja, kokios vertybės nagrinėjant antropoceno problematiką išryškėja Lietuvos filosofijoje. Šiuo tikslu diskutuojami lietuvių filosofų – Naglio Kardelio, Gintauto Mažeikio, Arvydo Šliogerio, Mintauto Gutausko, Danutės Bacevičiūtės – samprotavimai, labiausiai atspindintys antropoceno sukeltus gamtos pokyčius.

Raktažodžiai: antropocenas, vertybės, klimato kaita, filosofija, gamtos pokyčiai