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**Review**

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## **The age of (omni)policy<sup>2</sup>**

The effects of human activity that concomitantly bring harm to nature, ecological balance and our very being, along with the extinction of particular animal and plant species, no longer can be ignored. The state of peril that today's society is in, with ensuing environmental challenges that scientists, analysts, politicians and humanity altogether have been faced with, is the thesis of the Jusuf Žiga's book.

From the start, the author makes sure to eschew "preaching" any sort of ideology based on any *isms*, something also implied by the book's very subtitle that foretells that the study which readers have in their hands shatters the well-established ideologies of environmentalism. The irresponsible human actions toward nature and its resources are presented as burning issues not solely in ecology but also in economy and politics.

Due to the currency of the challenges that stem from the dire environmental straits humanity has found itself in, the topic tackled in this book-with respect to the last three decades-has become quite important to social analysts. A German philosopher Hans Jonas was warning in the early nineteen-eighties that what is needed in contemporary science is responsibility, because it (science) opens some dimensions it is incapable of coping with from the standpoint of ethics, and, in so doing, overlooks the possible-future consequences of its agency. Concurrently, a German sociologist Ulrich Beck broached the issue of "invisible risks" in modern society, and today, as Žiga writes, we are bearing witness to all of that.

Good several decades have passed since the sounding of those clarion calls, yet nothing so far has been done to bring the destruction of the environment to an end, and those who argue for and excuse the destruction are still keeping the ball on the economy and material profit's side of the field.

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<sup>2</sup> Jusuf Žiga, *Vrijeme (sve)politike: Iluzije savremenog ekologizma*, (Sarajevo: BZK Preporod, 2012), p. 39.

The leading elite and the market top brass who, for material gain, overexploit natural resources try to persuade us every day that good reasons exist for further human dictatorship over nature and the environment, and that man should not be seen simply as part of nature, but as a unit more important and crucial than anything else. With that kind of world understanding, the fact gets easily overlooked that every exploitation must in the end be paid for in some currency. Somewhere deep under all the comforting, buried is left the fact that we do not have some other place to live, which we might keep in reserve and move to whenever upon this *world here* we bring total destruction.

The risk cannot be isolated: it presents omnipresence which all inhabitants of today's, but also of tomorrow's world must deal with; likewise, all parts of the world are affected by the consequences the same as various impoverished countries with no benefit from the exploitation of natural resources, so equally those parts of the world that reap all the profits.

Žiga's analysis, excepting introductory remarks and a concluding clarification, comprises three sections, which from different viewpoints examine attempts to solve the exigent environmental problems.

In the introductory part of the study, the underlying central theme is the idea that to request modification of human attitude toward nature does not mean to advocate the end of scientific research and progress, but rather to insist on these processes to take modified forms, such which will seek (more) responsibility, not exclusively to fellow human beings and their future offspring but also to Mother Nature. The problem par excellence of contemporary science is that chasing progress has become intertwined with chasing profit; that kind of application of science must be stopped, for the well-being of humanity. Science must not bow to the interest of capital nor to that of politics.

Žiga takes under scrutiny the irresponsible modern man—him who objects to nothing and is ready for anything if it brings him closer to material gain, which conduct, alas, bears consequences that cannot be remedied and undone. Admittedly, it is but a logically apparent actuality that every economy as its prime objective has profits, but that objective should/must not be accomplished by sacrificing nature and its balance. The economic relations of today maintain a supportive climate for the human actions effecting natural imbalance and overexploitation of natural resources—in an attempt to only fulfill what today is the dominant aspiration: maximization of profit. Unfortunately, such economy is not capable of helping people in solving true problems, and what it eventuates in is merely a heightened desire for yet more material gain.

All the formal and informal agreements, agendas, declarations, resolutions and obligations the world's leading countries have accepted in the past few decades notwithstanding, we still have sunk to a position of being witness to perhaps

irremediable consequences of human population's irresponsible actions. A cause for alarm undeniably exists, and it is high time we stopped deluding ourselves that environmental destruction can be justified by profit.

Following Beck's theory, the author of this study approaches the risks that jeopardize modern society in which modern man has acted, and continues to act, as though there were no danger, and as though any consequences could be confronted successfully despite the fact that the exploits humanity prides itself on are getting out of control. In the far-reaching case, however, that humanity fails to urgently address the issue, the epilogue Žiga anticipates is the one in which "*there will be no winners, for in the last act, all will be losers.*"<sup>3</sup>

Žiga maintains that the solution to this problem is not to be found in halfway, fragmentary attempts to mitigate the environmental risks, but that the problem must be faced squarely—something achievable only through a necessary change in perception of the situation.

At the end of the introduction, a point is raised that what environmentalism promotes—isn't the right answer, for those ideas, simply, are misconceptions that argue in favor of a partial solution. It is for that reason that in the book's title, Žiga addresses the environmentalism as exists in the age of (omni-) policy, in which age the policies of parliaments and governments have come to permeate the gray zones of corporatism, whence the strings crucial to continuation both of humanity and nature are being pulled.

In raising important and crucial questions that challenge modern man, Žiga advocates renunciation of two myths modern man dearly holds on to, which are: *the myth of nature's ever-inexhaustible riches* and *the myth of nature's limitless capacity to self-regenerate*.

After the introduction, in a chapter titled "Factography's fruitless forewarnings," Žiga writes that even though we are daily being served a plethora of information on the endangered ecosystems, the violated flora and fauna, the melting ice caps etc., it appears that all that factography actually amounts to naught. He analyzes the phenomenon of a so-called deceptiveness, better described as *the self-deception of the current environmentalism* that poses as though it procured rescuing solutions, whereas these, in fact, are but fractional ones. Accepting of the risk that his offered approach be misunderstood, Žiga not only advocates "*radical changes of and a departure with the modern man's tenets of life philosophy*"<sup>4</sup>, but he also conjoins that with the need that we change our understanding of ecology.

<sup>3</sup> Jusuf Žiga, *Vrijeme (sve)politike: Iluzije savremenog ekologizma*, (Sarajevo: BZK Preporod, 2012). p.39.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48.

We must start living beyond horizons of the past, for changes have come about that have considerably impacted human life. These changes have impinged on science, the human attitude toward nature, the ecosystem, the means of production and on life-style. The changes have been so rapid it sometimes seems as though it were impossible to stop and think about—let alone understand—the modern man's life and the risks standing before him.

The threat, however, is no longer hidden. The topic cannot be kept behind closed doors of chambers and hush-hushed between ourselves anymore, because the stakes have been raised dramatically. The wager that has been placed on progress and profit is *the very being of humanity*—that what the human quintessentially is. We have brought ourselves into a position at which we are holding in our hand the fragile secret of life: it was intrusted to us for safekeeping, nonetheless, not ever for possession.

Žiga goes to discuss seven points that urgently reveal to us the necessity of the change in life-style, for *tomorrow* it will be too late. Despite *forest resources* being on the brink of depletion, no one ponders their role (oxygen production and carbon dioxide absorption). *Drinking water* is not inexhaustible; it is a gift of nature, but not an everlasting one, and irrational management of this natural resource has been causing its scarcity. *Arable land* is irrecoverably being polluted by waste, toxic waters, urbanization, urban sprawl and pesticide use. Limitations on the availability of *energy resources* such as oil, hydropower and coal are being ignored, yet there is still no readiness to invest in the utilization of alternative energy. Energy consumption is enormous, and in the future, the industry will have a hard time keeping up with these trends. We exist on the threshold of a possibly radical *climate change* that was, for the first time, caused by humans. The ozone layer is being harmed, which, inter alia, leads to global warming and dangerous acid rains. We are struggling uphill with *serious imbalances* in the world due to overpopulation-caused discrepancies sporadically (the countryside is dying out, certain species of animals ecosystems depend on are vanishing, rich-poor gap is not being closed). *Unhealthy life-style* is pervasive, as the experience of modern man, who finds alienation from nature and fellow human beings normal, because chasing profit leaves him with no time to tend to his mental and physical health.

After analyzing the problems that ring alarm bells, Žiga underscores that the only alternative is to be found in harmony. The dramatic change can come into existence only if humanity starts living in harmony with itself, its environment and nature. Only if it turns its activity and behavior about and into an act of responsibility can humanity hope to preserve nature and itself. That ethic must be adopted by every person as well as by every community, being that without collective change there can be no real movement and turnaround.

The following chapter, “The (omni-) policy and environmentalism,” Žiga begins with an affirmation that politicization is so omnipresent that it influences all areas of life, to the extent of even resorting to manipulation and surveillance of citizens. Politics no longer is the realm of government offices and parliamentary chambers, but rather it takes part in the management of natural resources and wields influence on civil activism. The presence of multinational corporations and big capital makes that influence even stronger and more powerful. The author of this study agrees with the theories buttressing the position that for one part of humanity, neoliberalism has sanctioned the prospects of lavish life, while simultaneously spurring deep despair of the multitudes. It has created the possibility for the rich to become richer, but for the poor it has crushed any hopes of prosperity and better life, having taken all from them, even what little they had.

Globalization currents that have been shaping modern world are in the service of politics and capital, whose power yet serves to control all the human activity of today, from high-profile political measures, to small activist and humanitarian political actions, that it is hard to find any activities immune to this political power’s ubiquitous sway. Under such circumstances, it is plainly obvious the politics is at the top of the power pyramid. Žiga writes that we live in the age of a crisis of democracy, and that the lobby groups are almost omnipotent, for they possess the capacity to impose their will and to “*manufacture ‘consent’ of any sort, and even ‘convert the enemies into allies’ to fulfill their own goals, especially the capital-interests ones.*”<sup>5</sup>

Despite the fact that this maelstrom of power is without exit and that life on this planet will unavoidably someday end, Žiga holds there still is a path leading out of this predicament, the only question being whether that path will ever be recognized—discovered. That is, it remains to be seen if humans will complacently keep on the well-trodden way of life or, conversely, decide to do a total about-face, finally changing their life-style, which as a consequence, would beacon the way out of this noxious sink-pit of mingled politics and power that corrodes everything that is dear to nature and to mankind.

Keeping in creed with the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, the author of this book emphasizes that the desire for survival and subsistence on this planet necessitates halting the ecocide and other neo-barbarian processes coming into view, and that every future endeavor must be undertaken with a consideration for collective security and staying in harmony with nature. The central problem of the ecological crisis that “bedevils” humanity is the fact that it cannot be controlled: the only way out of such quagmire is the radical paradigm shift Žiga proposes.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

The radical shift entails the return to nature, which means a stance should be assumed toward nature that is protectoral, not occupational. In such a way, humanity will return to itself and bring to mind the forgotten old wisdom that admonished it about the need of cultivating peace, harmony and goodwill. This shift also outright entails a changed nature of politics at the global level and lessened profit-chasing, lessened power. That, precisely, is what is contrary to the ruling (omni-) political elites' values, for which reason every adjustment in the manner of operating and in life-style comes to be deliberately postponed.

Commenting on the delusions of contemporary environmentalism, Žiga examines the specious persuasions about the plausibility of the idea that humanity can liberate itself from its predicament notwithstanding it not cease operating "in the old way," a position at which, clearly, what comes to be at play is (self-) deception, because no one can prognosticate all possible consequences of a risk-laden behavior. The principal error of today's humanity lies in its "*focusing on 'treating the consequences,' inadequately to boot, instead of 'coming face to face with the causes' behind the contemporary ecological crisis and with their curtailing, i.e., with a continuous prevention.*"<sup>6</sup>

In the book's next chapter, titled "Is hope justified?", the author writes about the alternatives and prospects of humanity in the future. Living in a risk-taking society, the only things we can definitely expect are the consequences we cannot bear. These consequences pertain to science, politics, technology; therefore, we need to face the entire constitution of the world if we are to render our removal from this situation possible. The advocated change of life-style, furthermore, must employ ethical perspective, and one necessarily providing an aspect of the future. In the new categorical imperative, there must be subsumed a responsibility toward the generations to come.<sup>7</sup> Today's generations are responsible to/should/must preserve the habitat, nature and an uncompromised existence for unborn generations—only along these lines can we deliberate the continuous human existence.

Technology has come to rule our lives, but technology by itself is not so potent as to be able to rectify the damage done, restore the natural resources dissipated and make the life of humans profoundly better. Now, everything hinges on the modification of life-style, on humanity's new outlook on itself and nature, and last not least on the new ethical perspective. Žiga is not a theoretician who contemplates the fatalist end of life as we know it; he is characterized by being hopeful of a change/betterment, but on condition of a radical turnaround, as that is the only way to preserve nature and continuation of life. Finding

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>7</sup> On new categorical imperative, Hans Jonas wrote in the book *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*.

the way out of the situation humanity is in compels facing what is happening, in which process no weight should be attached to the science–technology myth that is accompanied by ontological “victims.”

Žiga is apprehensive that today’s humanity is not ready for the epochal (self-) facing that awaits it, because humanity finds the road already taken to be the more effortless and passable one. Although at this point it is still not too late for change, time is dwindling, and the alarm bells are ringing away. Humanity is holding in its hand herein examined ways of change, and now what only remains, is to hope they will be taken.

In the book’s conclusion, Žiga underscore that we have found ourselves in a situation best described as “our own undoing borne of our own doing,” and in which the future opens the gates of its self that is not given for granted, but that should/must be fought for. As one of the conclusions of this study, there springs forth the need that humanity return to itself, to nature and to its being as a whole. Humanity must do away with the anthropocentric, solipsistic worldview, for that sort of outlook on the “world of life” is the very thing that has brought humanity into its current position. Responsibility of humanity is contained in the need to keep up the natural order of things, not in doing something that tears it down. In order to succeed at this, Žiga holds, we must recover the balance and the harmony that makes it possible that humanity’s unification with nature be without indications of leeching and abusing. All of that—compels a changed set of values to live by and different ethics to follow.

Life is something that must remain untouched and undesecrated. To preserve/save life, it is necessary to reestablish ecological balance and not permit disruption of natural cycle. We must surrender the capital-interests ideas of an ever increased conquest and exploitation, which ideas are accompanied by a belief that nature and environment will, simply, renew themselves. That is an illusion proffered by the contemporary politics and the environmentalist ideology that follows in its steps.

Žiga examines in this study the risks standing before humanity. These risks are the consequence of human activity and of the exploitation of nature for profit, whereas the irresponsibility in the field of science has only opened the gates of areas too demanding for modern man’s own good. Through this study, the author reminds of the importance of life, of nature’s magnitude and vulnerability, and gives us the possibility of removing ourselves from our predicament. That removal entails a dramatic turnaround in life-style; responsibility before material gain; and shattering of the myths that modern man lives by—with the ultimate question remaining, whether modern man is ready for that turnaround.