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Gaia Encouraging and Gaia Abused:

Searching for Unconditional Moral Responsibility Within the Gaia Universe.

The present mainstream form of environmental discourse, led by the world's leading political and economic organizations, is carried by the notion that the solution for ecological crisis lies in the reorganization of our technological performance and means of global control. But a sufficient resolution has not yet arisen and never will as long as the philosophical foundations of modern society remain unchallenged. Modern man is not capable of ensuring the survival of human beings while looking for causes of ecological degradation outside of his own mind. Therefore we need to fundamentally change our perceptions of our existence and roles within the history, present, and future of the Earth because "there is nothing wrong with the world. What's wrong is our way of looking at it"(Henry Miller in *Ages of Gaia* 152). We need new philosophical or religious frameworks, which will challenge and consequently subvert our present dogmas about the greatness, uniqueness, geniality, and powerfulness of humanity, which will provide us with a foundation for a new, balanced, decent, and fair interaction with the planet upon which we depend. The spiritual dimension of the Gaia theory is unquestionably one of the possible alternatives; an adaptation of which can establish a new dimension of unconditional moral responsibility for our further survival. However, in order to make Gaia our ecological and philosophical foundation, we need to ensure by permanently reminding ourselves of our task – which is the preservation of human beings on Gaia's surface for as long as possible – that it will

not develop the aftertaste of mere ideology.

To begin with, this essay will introduce the basics of the Gaia theory and explain the new perception of humankind's role within Gaia as a cybernetic self-regulative organism. Later, the fact that our beliefs and not scientific truths are the driving force of our actions will be provided as a reason why the Gaia theory is ecologically fit to contribute as a spiritual framework rather than scientific theory. Then, ecology will be presented as a "question of recognized necessity" in respect to the theory that terrestrial processes within Gaia are the results of necessity rather than of free decisions. Consequently, the rejection of free will, or the necessity of building a new unconditional morality within modern society, will be presented as the keystone of our future existence. Finally, this paper will deliberate on the potential slips of the ecologically fertile Gaia philosophy into mere manipulative ideology.

Although Gaia is known as a popular banner for environmental movements, the Gaia theory is not just a "speculative essay in ecological ethic" (Kohak 129). The Gaia theory is a scientific hypothesis examining and explaining the terrestrial process. It proposes that the Earth is a circulatory closed self-regulative super-organism, within which all processes are controlled by a cybernetic system ensuring the survival of Gaia, which is its primary goal.

Gaia is the Greek word for Mother Earth. James Lovelock introduced the Gaia hypothesis in 1979. Lovelock is a scientist, author, and researcher born on July 26, 1919 in the United Kingdom. He has a B.Sc. degree in chemistry from Manchester University, a Ph.D. in medicine from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, a D.Sc degree in biophysics from London University, and eight honorary degrees. He has worked in, or cooperated with, universities such as the Harvard University Medical School in Boston, Yale University, the Baylor University College of Medicine in Houston, the University of Houston, and the

University of Reading in the U.K. Lovelock is the author of around 200 scientific papers, more than 50 patents, and he has published four books: *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, *The ages of Gaia*, *Gaia: The practical science of planetary Medicine*, and most recently, an autobiography entitled *Homage to Gaia* (James Lovelock's website).

The Gaia theory claims that life on the Earth was not triggered by any external interaction, but it occurred through a process in which molecular components used their energy to perform an act of encounter in order to reproduce themselves. At that time there were numerous possible outcomes of such an action and "life was an almost utterly improbable event with almost infinite opportunities of happening"(Gaia 14). Since then, Gaia's main goal has been to ensure her own survival, and this determines all of her actions. An example how Gaia ensures the conditions favourable for life is the temperature of the atmosphere, which is actively controlled by a biological process (Margulis and Lovelock 129). Like any other being with the ability to adapt itself to the present environment in order to ensure its survival, Gaia adapts by changing the colour of its surface according to the amount of sun in order to keep the atmosphere warm.

Within Gaia, as a self-sufficient and self-regulating organism, all the elements interact purposely because "complex co-operative network[s] ... have properties and powers greater than the sum of its parts"(Gaia 27). This mutual co-operation functions on the principles of cybernetics. Cybernetics is a study "concerned with self-regulating systems of communication and control in living organisms and machines" (Gaia 48). "[T]he primary function of many cybernetic systems is to steer an optimum course through changing conditions towards a predetermined goal" (Gaia 48). These changes operate in a trial-error mode. The major difference between the traditional perception of terrestrial processes and the Gaia cybernetic system is the perception of time within the system. The perception to which we are accustomed

understands life as a linear mode, an “open loop fashion”(Gaia 61), in which a cause produces an effect, but the effect has no retroactive influence on its cause. On the other hand, the cybernetics system works on negative and positive feedbacks. Negative feedback helps the Gaia to recognize that the current direction is not leading toward the originally established goal; therefore the direction of the actual processes must be changed. This process of self-regulation prevents any machine or organism, including Gaia, to accomplish its self-destruction.

Every single step in the evolution of Gaia is a response to a previous action, which proved to be an error. Pollution, which we see as the result of the Industrial Revolution and human immoral greed, is according to Lovelock “an inevitable consequence of life at work” (Gaia 27). Pollution, chemical disability, or even radioactivity were already present in the atmosphere, but because Gaia proceeds toward balance as whole, these interruptions gave birth to new forms of adaptations.

When oxygen leaked into the air two eons ago, the biosphere was like the crew of a stricken submarine, needing all hands to rebuild the systems damaged and destroyed and at the same time threatened by increasing concentration of poisonous gases in the air. Ingenuity triumphed and the danger was overcome, not in the human way by restoring the old order, but in flexible Gaian way by adapting to change and converting a murderous intruder into a powerful friend (Gaia 31).

Even though ecology is the “study of the relationships between organisms and their environment” (Encyclopaedia Britannica), the general understanding of the ecological discourse is almost exclusively related to the relationship between humans and nature. We project ourselves to be outside of natural processes and sufficiently powerful to govern and destroy life on the planet. However significantly masterful or destroying we perceive ourselves to be according to traditional anthropocentric frameworks, we play a recognizably different role according to the Gaia theory.

Even though humans are the most powerful species ever to have walked upon the Earth, when the length of the history of human beings – especially the history of technology – is compared to the history of 3.6 eons of Gaia, we can see how insignificant we are to her evolution. We can trace two different human perceptions when it comes to our role within environmental change. We are either depicted as a planetary disease, or as healers who are needed to take care of the planet. But according to Gaia “we most certainly are not a cancer of the Earth, nor is the Earth some mechanical contraption needing the service of a mechanic” (*The Ages of Gaia* 181). Humans, and every single aspect of their life, including technology and pollution, are a natural and inseparable part of Gaia. All changes, including those triggered by human decisions, are unavoidable cybernetic responses within the feedback cycles of Gaia’s evolution.

The Gaia theory does not suggest that industry and pollution are acceptable. The Gaia theory claims that what is at stake is not the survival of Gaia, as we tend to insist upon when we try to take care of the Earth, but it is the survival of human beings. “Life on this planet is a very though, robust, and adaptable entity” (*Gaia* 40). Ecological catastrophe is not a new scenario for Gaia, and she will survive any upcoming disasters caused by humans just as she has overcome all those previous. Gaia herself is immune because there are organisms resistant to short-wave ultra-violet radiation or radioactivity, but humans are not “protected from [the] consequences of our collective folly” (*The Ages of Gaia* 178). We will not be exterminated because of the pollution we have produced; this would be just an accompanied effect. Gaia will erase us as soon as her cybernetic system of self-regulation identifies human beings as an error within the process of evolution. By creating pollution we prepare conditions for our successors, the species that will be introduced after we disappear as a response to the failure of the project called “Homo

Sapiens.”

The conclusion that we contrive from the Gaia perception of the universe is that we should not be trying to change the world in order to make it more ecologically acceptable, but that we need to change our inner beliefs in order to make human beings less self-destructive because “we have no influence on [the] cosmos, we can only affect our little lives within it”(Kohák 135). The spiritual dimension of the Gaia theory can serve as a philosophical framework for the demanded changes.

The Gaia hypothesis, originally presented as a scientific theory, has faced difficulties to be recognized among scientists as accepted science. There are two reasons why for ecology and our survival that it is of no importance whether the Gaia theory offers us an acceptable scientific theory about terrestrial life, or whether it is just the speculation of a few scientists. The first reason is that science itself is incapable of providing objective truth; the second is that human behaviour is not driven by “objective,” scientific, or other truths, but by subjective interpretations of these “truths.” The assumption that not only humans, but also the entire Gaia, are driven by the belief will be discussed later.

Even though to search for the truth about the cosmological process is the goal of modern science, it can never achieve it. If we look back, we find that the Earth used to be flat, then it rounded, and after that it moved. Not so long ago an atom was considered to be the smallest element in the world and consequently we have found otherwise. At every single stage of our knowledge, we have had our scientific “truths” about the world which later turned out to be false, so we can expect that in the future some present “truths” will be also rejected. Michel Serres, in his book, *The Natural Contract*, describes science as a subjective discipline, because science is based on defending and accepting “truths” between subjects. According to Serres, science is

deprived of the relationship between the “subject” (a researcher) and the “object” (the world), and legal “truth” is matter of scientific confrontation and of final agreement. An absence of our bond with the objective world prevents us from achieving an objective perspective. In addition, since no subject is competent to be judged out of his field, and all fields of our knowledge remain strongly self-referential, our subjectivism becomes more irreducible. The “apartheid that separates sciences” (The Ages of Gaia 168) makes science itself extremely ambiguous and polarized. Lovelock appends that just as “photographs, like biographies, often reveal more of the artist than of the subject” (The Ages of Gaia 203), the person of the scientist significantly influences scientific research and conclusions and “the idea that mere observation is neutral is itself an illusion”(The Ages of Gaia 217). Evidence of a scientist’s prior beliefs in the conclusion of his/her research are unavoidable. The truth is not achievable, but it is of no importance how accurate scientific research is, because its results disturb neither Gaia nor the rule human behaviour.

The second reason why the scientific accuracy of the Gaia theory is irrelevant is that human decision-making is not ruled by scientific “truths,” but by human beliefs. Science and research can provide numbers as a result of measurements and hypothetical predictions, which can in turn encourage people to take some action. But if they take an action it is not because scientific conclusions are accurate or predictions probable, but because they believe that it is so. Our beliefs have already built the structure into which we fit truths in a way that is comfortable for us.

Lovelock claims that “science can embrace the notion of the Earth as a superorganism and can still wonder about the meaning of the Universe” (The Ages of Gaia 208). Science cannot provide an explanation for the essence of life, but we build our lives upon the constant search for

this essence. Since a true essence is not accessible, we justify our actions upon what we believe the essence might be. Žižek explains how our actions are driven by our belief, rather than our knowledge, in his example of our reaction to a forthcoming catastrophe: “the prospect of a forthcoming catastrophe that, however probable we know it is, we do not believe will really happen” so for us the catastrophe is not real, and we act upon its impossibility in spite of the fact that according to our knowledge it is going to happen. “The gap that makes these paradoxes possible is the gap between knowledge and belief: we know the catastrophe is possible, even probable, yet we do not believe it will really happen”(The Puppet 161).

Gaia itself must be driven by belief. Gaia as a cybernetic system operates in a trial and error mode. After the outcome of an action becomes threatening to the survival of Gaia, and is thus perceived as an error, Gaia takes an action to eliminate this error. Thus what we have to doubt is the possible existence of a truly objective error and response within the cybernetics of Gaia. Survival is Gaia’s prescribed fundamental goal. Every decision determining her direction toward that goal is made upon an analysis of the past and present. But can Gaia achieve the truth about what is the best means to further her survival? For instance, when Gaia introduced oxygen to the atmosphere it might have seemed at that time to be the best response to some previous error. But to what extent was it really the best action? Facing difficulties with carbon dioxide, we can ask if there was no better solution? Gaia is not capable of recognizing the truth and therefore the only option left is to act upon belief in choosing the best track for evolution. Gaia cannot actually achieve a state of truth. She cannot achieve a state of one true final solution in which no further step would be required. Lovelock claims that if she achieves the final equilibrium between all elements, in which no further chemical or physical action would be required, it will basically accomplish her death. According to this, we can say that the fact that Gaia does not

know the truth is in fact her mechanism of protecting herself from self-destruction.

Lovelock claims: “There can be no prescription, no set of rules, for living within Gaia”(Gaia 140). Gaia does not work on the notion of freedom, but on the notion of necessity, where outcomes of necessary actions are unpredictable due to the “internal chaotic instabilities” upon which the “stability of large-scale ecosystems depends” (The Ages of Gaia 216). While Gaia as a cybernetic system initiates transformations due to the recognized necessity of change in order to ensure its survival, members of modern society believe that their actions are driven by free will. If we want to ensure our survival we need to admit that freedom is just “human provincialism”(Kohák 133). We are not capable of controlling Gaia’s internal interactions and the consequences of our decisions due to the complexity of terrestrial processes. For the sake of our survival we need to recognize that “ecology is question of recognized necessity,”(Kohák 132) and understand that although our belief is our driving force, we do not have the free will to decide what we believe in.

It is difficult for the modern mind to admit that humans operate in the same paradigm as Gaia, but there really are obstacles depriving us of free will. The first is the undeterminable condition of luck, and the second is the unpredictability of consequences. Žižek suggests that while we perceive the historical process as a linear time-line, we perceive our actions as acts of a free will. However, if we perceive time as a circular process we will realize that it is not free will, but necessity, which drives our actions –especially our ethical acts. Although we think that we have the freedom to act ethically, our morality is dependent on the “pathological” condition of luck. We cannot decide to be lucky enough to have the opportunity to act ethically; therefore luck is a fundamental necessity (The Puppet 156-7). Moreover, even if we are in a condition of luck to act ethically, we are not capable of insuring that the consequences of our assumed free

will remain ethical. Our ignorance of terrestrial processes irreducibly deprives us of the ability to predict the consequences of our actions and consequently our own future. There is always the “unforeseeable factor e’ [which] is precisely reminder of the Real that disturbs the perfect self-closure of the ‘time of the project’”(The Puppet 162). We do not have control over consequences, thus what we perceive as the result of free will turns out to be necessity in retrospective analysis; in turn we will realize that things could not go otherwise.

An understanding that causes and consequences are determined by necessity is crucial for humans in order to initiate environmentally responsible behaviour. Already introduced, Žižek’s explanation of the knowledge-belief paradox of humans approaching a catastrophe can provide an example in what way we need to employ the notion of necessity into our decision-making. The only way to become capable of taking action in order to avoid catastrophe, Zizek explains to Dupuy, is to perceive the historical process as a circular one, and to look at our present situation from the perspective of the future. In this perspective we have to understand a future catastrophe as our unavoidable destiny, and we need to project ourselves into that catastrophe. Once we come to see ourselves destroyed by an ecological catastrophe we will understand the necessity of preventing it.

“[Gaia] should not send us into new depths of disillusion or existential despair” (Sagan and Margulis 157) that we do not possess the option of deciding our future existence, and therefore our nihilism is acceptable and justified. On the contrary we need to understand that avoiding the unavoidable must become the moral justification of our actions. Morality within ecology is not a question of our good will, but of the recognition of necessity of required action, because even “we cannot be certain which way things would go. What is certain is that with Gaia intelligence network and intricate system of checks and balances totally destroyed, there would be no going

back”(Gaia 46).

For modern anthropocentric man accustomed to liberalism and the belief in omnipotence of human will, this concept that all terrestrial processes, including human performance, are driven by Gaia’s cybernetic self-regulation, is “the most striking philosophical conclusion” (Sagan and Margulis 147). Accepting the theory that humans are deprived of any control over their own destiny, leads to a fundamental questioning of the modern human understanding of our role and responsibilities within Gaia’s evolution. Modern man would ask how could he/she be morally responsible for his/her actions if deprived of the right of free will. Clearly if we insist upon preserving our modern understanding of morality, we would have to refuse responsibility within both Gaia’s system of self-regulation and the Žižekian world driven by pathological conditions and the unpredictability of consequences. Therefore we need to construct a new mode of moral justification based on the unconditional acceptance of our responsibilities. The severity of present ecological conditions does not require us to act morally in respect to environmental responsibility only when “we are blessed by grace [of luck and] when we are able to act autonomously as ethical agents” (The Puppet 159). But by accepting necessity to be the basic rule of our decision-making process, we have to accept our new moral conditions, which dictate that we do not act ethically because we can, but because we have no other option.

According to James Gouinlock’s book *Rediscovering the Moral Life*, the three most important human virtues enabling us to meet moral conditions are: rationality, courage, and respect for others.

Gouinlock claims that rationality within a moral justification cannot only employ the knowledge and beliefs that the subject possesses at the time of decision-making. Moreover, the process must be accompanied with a “sincere attempt to seek the truth” or rather “a sincere

attempt to get the facts”(Gouinlock 296), since the truth is unachievable. We have to be willing to accept newly discovered facts regardless of our prior knowledge and beliefs, and we need to evaluate them in order to predict the possible results of our decisions. Only by this can we, according to Gouilock, achieve a “persistent intellectual honesty” (Gouinlock 297). Then the question would be: how can we make rationality a part of ecological morality if we are not capable of possessing the truth about the world or predicting Gaia’s further evolution? The answer is that it is not the level of truthfulness or accuracy of the prediction that is essential for meeting moral conditions. It is the sincerity of the attempt to provide them. According to Guoinlock, it is not the complexity of life, “but ordinary stubbornness; a completely conventionalized mind; or an assortment of laziness, passivity fear, dogmatism, and intellectual complacency”(298), that makes achieving real morality so difficult. Rationality within ecological ethics is not relevant in respect to the amount of information we are able collect, or the accuracy of our predictions regarding Gaia’s future. But it is relevant in respect to the level of honesty we can achieve in searching for knowledge that will lead us out of the crisis threatening our survival, and in respect to the sincerity of our intentions influencing the scientific predictions of our common future.

The moral qualities of our response to the world do not depend exclusively on the quality of understanding of the nature of the situation we are facing, but also on our individuality. Rationality without the virtue of courage makes “moral judgment simply a cognitive act, rather than an evaluative response” (Gouinlock 301), with no ability to influence our actions. When Gouinlock talks about courage, he does not refer only to our courageous responses toward the external world. He demands courage also be the driving force behind our internal beliefs. He says: “Courage is organic not only to the reaction to an existential condition, but also to its

understanding”(302). He means that inner fear can result in an intentional resistance to uncomfortable facts, which do not correlate with our previously possessed or desired beliefs because “cowardice is a good source of wishful thinking”(Gouinlock 302). So courage must make us capable of challenging our preferred dogmas and, if needed, capable of admitting that the dogmas in which we are accustomed have failed.

The most dangerous dogma within the ecological discourse is that technology, rather than humans, is responsible for ecological degradation. Thus we “characteristically, arrogantly... blame technology rather than ourselves” (The Ages of Gaia 153). Before we can be ready to challenge the social frameworks to which we are accustomed, and which determine our ecological awareness (or rather ignorance), through committing the Žižekian “authentic ethical act” (Welcome 116), we need to summon up the courage to become authentically ethical to ourselves. We need to genuinely admit that the real cause of the environmental crisis is not technology (which is perceived as an entity external to humanity), but rather the meaninglessness at the very core of our existence within a consumerist society, which depends on technology as its inner part. Only after challenging and transforming our inner beliefs can our courage to break the rules of the present social contract become truly ecologically contributive.

Because courage allows us to do things involving some risk, but on the other hand human nature is fundamentally designed to avoid risks in order to “reduce uncertainty about survival”(Fossett 196), one could ask how the request for acts jeopardizing our existence can be an irreducible condition of our morality. Projecting the destiny of humans onto the approaching ecological catastrophe makes the answer rather simple. To remain passive and ignorant within our supervised world is not safe anymore. The safety of our mere existence can be accomplished only through deeds involving risks, which threaten our present social dogmas. Therefore, in

order to ensure our mere survival we need to subvert our present perception of what survival is. However, we need to keep in mind that courage is inseparable from rationality and respect for others; otherwise it could become harmful to ourselves.

The last virtue of moral judgment presented by Gouilock is the respect for persons. In the context of ecology we need to extend this respect to all life on the planet, and if we perceive Gaia as an inseparable organism, we have to apply this respect to its every single element. Gouinlock does not claim that we should treat all people, regardless of our personal relationships, in exactly the same manner. The reason for this attitude is that while nobody treats all people as relatives, nobody expects that other people will treat him/her as their relative. “Moral equality can be accorded to any individual in the sense that the person will be included in what is judged to be fair, whatever fairness turns out to be, so far as we may be successful in bringing it to life” (Gouinlock 312).

Within the enormous inner diversity of Gaia, equality between all elements is not possible. Therefore it is this fairness and mode of mutual expectations, which we need to apply to our relationships with other human beings, other species, and with Gaia herself. Fairness in a relationship cannot be achieved through an attempt to make other people equal with us by adapting them to our expectations (especially members of cultures significantly different from ours), but through acting according to the expectations they have for us. The same paradigm must be applied to our interaction with other species. We usually misleadingly apply the human concept of equality and human expectations on beings, which do not expect us to do so. For example, the concept of animal rights, which is alien to animals themselves, is proof of our mastering rather than of our genuine desire of balancing our relationship with animals. As Erazim Kohák suggests: “Perhaps we would help animals far more if we did not speak of ‘rights’

but of basic needs and respect for others”(48).

Because these three virtues are harmful in isolation, we have to employ all of them in order to set up new norms for morality. We need rationality to analyse and conclude that our present direction is leading toward an ecological catastrophe and is unacceptable; to summon up the courage to admit our individual failure in order to subvert the present economic, political, and social norms; and so that change will be done with respect for other people, following generations, and Gaia. The problem with all virtues is not “so much subscribing to [them] but practising [them]”(Gouinlock 313). In order to make our new morality work, we need to learn how to memorize and adopt newly discovered ethical principles based on the understanding that it is our irreducible duty to ensure the survival of human being within the Gaia universe as long as possible. Žižek suggests that in order to force our society toward positive changes we need to keep track of “authentic ethical acts” (Welcome 116). Only by exposing members of western society to the constant confrontation with the immorality of the philosophical framework of consumerist society will compel them to admit the failure of the dogmas ruling their lives. But we need to be conciliated with the fact that just as Gaia will never accomplish its equilibrium, neither can we assure the infinite survival of human beings, nor achieve a final flawless version of the moral law. Whoever assumes that perfect morality is possible “has not glimpsed the nature of the moral condition” (Gouinlock 295).

Accepting the fact that “ecology is a question of recognized necessity” (Kohák 133), and that we have the moral duty to ensure our survival through courageous acts, must not lead to an understanding that this necessity does not have to be accompanied by a constant questioning of our actions. As was mentioned, in order to meet the moral condition we need to have the courage to challenge our preferred dogmas, and this principle must also be applied to the belief that

ecology is a question of recognized necessity. Otherwise, any promising ecological intentions, including the Gaia philosophy, can slip into a dimension no different from any other ideology. The Gaia theory could be abused as an ideological instrument in at least three ways. First, it can become a language of politics, using ecology for political purposes; second, the Gaian process of eliminating previous errors could be interpreted as an external threat to humankind in order to justify humans' mastering of nature; third, environmental movements could misuse Gaian philosophy as their warrior cry in the battle for Mother Earth.

All political battles desperately need a language capable of attracting the public, ensuring the public's support, while masking the politicians' real interests of greed and desire for power. The language of politics (especially toward elections) is not based on an attempt to pass on a clear message expressing the speaker's standpoint, but on offering the listener the argument, which he/she wants to hear. These demagogues do not hesitate to speak in the name of humanity, world security, infinite justice, or even God. Once politicians realize that the public wants to see ecology as part of the political program, they will employ a fake ecological rhetoric into it. We witness how the true meaning of ecology has been lost within the sustainable development discourse for the sake of production, the export of "green" products, and control of fossil fuel resources. As long as the public does not request the true meaning of ecology to be part of the environmental discourse, and does not seek the hidden interests of politicians, the Gaia theory as an environmental philosophical framework can easily be transformed into an instrument of the governing ideological edifice.

The second means by which Gaian philosophy could be abused by the forces governing the "administrated world," is through the possibility that it will be presented as an external threat to humanity in order to keep the present ideological edifices running. In the book *Welcome to the*

Desert of the Real, Slavoj Žižek explains how the USA needs to construct an external threat of terrorism in order to justify the fundamental principles of its own ideology. After the Cold War as a threat to American democracy was over, America presented the third world with violent responses – the product of America’s own expansive policy – as an external threat to democracy, and its own victimization to cover its real expansive policy of greed. Without an external threat, an ideology has little chance to function because only by emphasizing that there are worse alternatives can the fundamentally rotten ideological edifice justify its existence.

One of the major questions within the environmental discourse is the role of humanity and technology within ecological management. Technological optimists perceive humankind to be planetary masters, while deep ecologists endorse the opinion that we need to decrease technological effects on the planet. It is obvious that for economic leaders it is better to adopt the first alternative. If Gaia as a cybernetic organism is an external threat to humankind, then why have economic leaders not justified human mastering of the planet as a kind of fight against Gaia who threatens our existence? Such an approach would require avoiding an acknowledgment that technology is an inseparable part of Gaia, and therefore its usage cannot be perceived in opposition to Gaia. However, it would not be the first time that an ideology has built its arguments upon selective knowledge.

The third possibility of the Gaia philosophy slipping into an ideology lies within the environmental movements. As Erazim Kohák observes, western society tends not to understand that ecology is a concern of us all, rather it is perceived as an “ideology of Greens”(148). On the one hand, labelling ecology as just an ideology of a group of people is foolish, but on the other hand, many of the environmental movements’ performances nurture an understanding that ecology is a flag representing the opinion of environmentalists’ groups rather than a term

describing an inescapable terrestrial existence. Lovelock developed the Gaia theory as “earthly factual not ideal abstract”(Sagan and Margulis 145), but its major contribution to ecology is in its potential to change the metaphysical interpretation of the spiritual essence of our lives. Lovelock expressed satisfaction with the fact that among non-scientist readers of his first book, Gaia was interpreted as a philosophical framework or religious belief rather than a scientific theory and he agreed that “Gaia can be both spiritual and scientific” (The Ages of Gaia 217). However, he does not endorse the ecological movements, which do not focus on “constructive thought” and use an ideology presented as ecological in order to excuse their “destructive action” (Gaia 123). It is worthless to explain how Gaia can easily become just a warrior cry for the people who have very little understanding of what the Gaia theory is about and whose true intentions are to damage McDonalds eateries during anti-globalization demonstrations.

However, Gaia can obtain the flavour of ideology also among people who do understand what Gaia is about; who understand that ecology is a recognized necessity. In this case, the edge between Gaian philosophy and Gaian ideology is harder to recognize. For Gaia’s slip into ideology is of no importance whether her followers demonstrate against globalization in the streets, tie themselves to the trees, or preserve fossil fuels by voluntarily insulating public buildings. The key point is that ensuring our survival within Gaia needs to remain the genuine intention and not just the justification of those actions. Erazim Kohák suggests that in order to avoid an unfortunate slip toward ideology, environmentalists have to be constantly aware of their original task, which is to solve the problem. Only by constantly asking, “What precisely does it mean? What is it based on? What follows from it?”(Kohak 14), can it be assured that environmentalists will act upon their own moral judgment and not upon ecological ideological dogmas. It is useless, if not dangerous, to act upon the notion “I am an environmentalist therefore

I have to..”, and environmentalists who do so are easy prey for demagogues. A level of genuineness and awareness within the ecology movement is essential and cannot be measured by the level of perfectionism in following the prescribed dogmas. The significance of our ecological contribution is dependent upon the level of our awareness of why we are doing what we are doing. We could call this state of permanent awareness of our primary goal and philosophical foundation by Gregory Bateson’s term “an ecology of mind,” which is crucial for the ecology of the world.

Within all three of the presented cases we can trace Žižekian’s “inherent antagonism”(Žižek Reader 89), the irreducible part of the ideological edifice, which is the smoking gun of ideology. According to the Gaia theory, Gaia is a closed interconnected system. There is no notion of opposition, because the whole system works as a cooperative group of cells and no one element of it can be positioned externally to that system. But once Gaia is applied as an ideology, or abused by some other ideology, the externalization of human beings is unavoidable. Regardless of the fact whether we interpret our performance upon the earth as caretakers or self-defendants, we automatically place ourselves outside the Gaia, and therefore the Gaia philosophy, which the ideology pretends to be founded on, loses its validity.

The Gaia hypothesis is unquestionably an impressive scientific theory that has strong ecological potentials as a philosophical framework. Whether it is accepted within the scientific discourse or not is irrelevant to the performance of Gaia as well as for its potential to build environmental responsibility within modern society because objective scientific truth does not exist, and because the belief, not the truth, is the vehicle of change within human society. If this belief in the existence of Gaia can convince us that ecology is a question of recognized necessity, we will have to re-evaluate our present norms for the moral justification, which counts on the

subject's free will, and build a new unconditional morality. However, we have to be careful about the way we accustom to the new perception of our existence in order to remain aware of our primary goal. There is no ecological "Junior Woodchuck Handbook"(Kohák 154) where the answer of how to do it can be found. But the answers are not crucial for our further existence within the Gaia universe; it is rather the conscious awareness of genuinely ecological intentions, steadily tested by questioning the rightness of our actions that will postpone the disappearance of Homo sapiens.

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