

## Postscriptum for Jahr – About the Father of Bioethics and the Bioethical Imperative –

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**ABSTRACT.** Fritz Jahr (1895-1953) is widely recognized as the Father of Bioethics. In 1926, he introduced the term “bio-ethics” in an article published in *Das Mittelschulwesen*. Influenced by Wilhelm Wundt’s comparative studies on physiology and psychology in humans, animals, and plants, as well as the philosophical musings on the possible soul-life of plants by Fr. Th. Fechner and others in the late 19th century, Jahr sought to redefine ethical considerations. He expanded Kant’s Categorical Imperative into what he called the Bioethical Imperative: “Respect every living being in principle as an end in itself and treat it, if possible, as such.” While Kant’s imperative was grounded in the “Sanctity of the Moral Law,” Jahr’s Bioethical Imperative is based on the “Sanctity of Life,” emphasizing compassion for all living beings and coexistence.

**Keywords:** Jahr, Bioethics, Bioethical Imperative, Living Being, Bios

### Introduction

During the last 40 years, the term “bioethics” was often used, and somewhere still is, synonymously with the term “medical ethics”. Most contemporary medical ethics focus on respect for patient autonomy and social justice, based on the US Belmont Report (1979) with its emphasis on the three principles of “respect for persons, beneficence, justice”, as well as the teachings of the Kennedy Institute of Ethics, did not differentiate between “bioethics” and “medical ethics”. As stated by Amir Muzur and Iva Rincic, “very early on, bioethics turned, primarily, to medical topics and, captured by the logic and

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priorities of American culture, tried to pragmatically decide on things that were not (yet) legally defined, reducing themselves to inevitably fragile packages of principles and often dispersing responsibility from individuals to various commissions”<sup>1</sup>.

No matter how it was understood<sup>2</sup>, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, bioethics profiled itself as a commendable movement that, “like a Roman slave on a chariot of triumph, would steadily and persistently whisper in the ear of scientists and politicians that every human invention does not necessarily have to be unquestionably useful to those same people”<sup>3</sup>. So, it was Eve-Marie Engels who, in an article “Bioethik” in Metzler’s *Lexikon Theologie*, 1999, outlined the various branches of bioethics about Fritz Jahr. So, in this way, she brought to our attention the name and works, also the meaning and importance of Fritz Jahr<sup>4</sup>. After that, Hans-Martin Sass published a brochure on “Fritz Jahr’s Bioethischer Imperativ” in 2007 with the Bochum Zentrum für Medizinische Ethik and an article in the “Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal” the same year. Furthermore, international Conferences in Rijeka (Croatia) in 2011 and Sao Paulo (Brazil) and Halle an der Saale (2012) made Jahr’s integrative and integrating vision of the “ethics of bios” a prime topic in the development of the foundations of future

<sup>1</sup> Iva Rinčić & Amir Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike* (Pergamena, Zagreb, 2012), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Although the »spirit of bioethics« can be found in various thought, religious and cultural traditions from antiquity to modern times, the term “bioethics” itself appears only in the twentieth century, and is related to the works of German theologian and protestant pastor Fritz Jahr (1895–1953). Compare Iva Rinčić, Amir Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike* (Pergamena, Zagreb, 2012); Amir Muzur, Hans-Martin Sass (eds.), *Fritz Jahr and the Foundations of Global Bioethics. Future of Integrative Bioethics* (LIT Verlag, Berlin – Münster – Wien – Zürich – London, 2013), also American naturalist and physician Van Rensselaer Potter (1911–2001). Compare Van Rensselaer Potter, “Bioethics: The Science of Survival,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 14 (1970), p. 127–153; Van Rensselaer Potter, “Biocybernetics and Survival,” *Zygon – Journal of Religion & Science*, 5 (1970), p. 229–246; Van Rensselaer Potter, *Bioetika – most prema budućnosti*, Medicinski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci et al., Rijeka, 2007; Van Rensselaer Potter, *Global Bioethics. Building on the Leopold Legacy*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 1988.)

<sup>3</sup> Iva Rinčić & Amir Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike*, Pergamena, Zagreb, 2012, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Rolf Löther in his article “Evolution der Biosphäre und Ethik” (in: Eve-Marie Engels, Thomas Junker, Michael Weingarten /ed./, *Ethik der Biowissenschaften. Geschichte und Theorie. Beiträge zur 6. Jahrestagung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Theorie der Biologie in Tübingen 1997*, Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, Berlin, 1998., p. 61–68) mentioned the European root of the word “bioethics”, pointing to Jahr’s article entitled “Bio-Ethik” from 1927. Although, after the mention of the older, European, term and concept of bioethics, Jahr’s “discovery” was followed by several authors in his articles, reactions came only after a few years, thanks to Hans-Martin Sass and his publications *Fritz Jahrs bioethischer Imperativ. 80 Jahre Bioethik in Deutschland von 1927 bis 2007* (Zentrum für medizinische Ethik, Bochum 2007.) and “Fritz Jahr’s 1927 Concept of Bioethics” (*Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 17 /2007/, pp. 279–295).

global bioethics. Not to forget: Brazilian translations of most of Jahr's publications have been published in "Revista BioEthiKos" 2011, 5(3):242-268; 242-268; Croatian translations by Rinčić, I. and Muzur, A. are in "Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike" Zagreb: Pergamena, 2012. Spanish translations are published in „Aesthetika“ 8(2), 2013, while other translations are underway<sup>5</sup>.

Nevertheless, who is Fritz Jahr? Whence such insistence on its importance in the emergence and development of bioethics, especially at the global level?

### **The fate of a Life – Biographical Notes**

Paul Fritz Max Jahr, child of Gustav Maximilian Jahr, an insurance agent, and his wife Auguste Maria Jahr, nee. Langrock was born on January 18, 1895, in Halle on the river Saale. After many years of moving, in 1913, the family moved for the last time to the famous house on Albert Schmidt Street, no. 8 in Halle, where Fritz lived for the rest of his life, never leaving his hometown, like his idol Kant.

He started attending elementary school in 1901 and higher classes from 1905 to 1914 within the Franckesche Stiftungen<sup>6</sup> in Halle, achieving below-average success of 2+ grades. However, for Easter in 1914, he passed the matriculation exam, and the following year, 1915, the additional exams in Latin and Ancient Greek languages. During 1914, he studied for a total of eight semesters, mainly philosophy, music, history and national economy, and from 1915 to 1919, and he studied theology. Finally, in November 1920, he passed his teaching exams in religion and history, and in March 1921, he was ordained as a Protestant pastor.

He worked as a teacher from 1917 until 1925 in 11 schools in Halle. In 1925, due to disagreements with the Education Council, he left the teaching profession<sup>7</sup> and was ordained, i.e. began a career in the Church, first as a priest, until 1930. In the same year, he was employed for the first time as a pastor in Kanena near Halle, but at the beginning of 1933, he had to retire due to poor health, a month after Hitler came to power. In the following years, especially the period from 1943 to 1945, but also after the Second World War, due to poor health and financial limitations, he returned to the teaching profession and held private cello lessons at the music school in the Center for Public Education, in order to somehow increased his meagre pension.

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<sup>5</sup> In the meanwhile Macedonian translation was made, by me.

<sup>6</sup> The foundation founded by August Hermann Francke based its charitable work and teaching on Pietism – a variant of Lutheran Protestantism that was initiated and brought to Halle by Francke and his role model Philipp Jakob Spener.

<sup>7</sup> although he worked in a private school until 1928, as well as briefly as a substitute in 1938.

In 1932 he married Berta Elise Neuholz, with whom he had no children. After a long and severe illness from spinal sclerosis, that is, with paralyzed legs and sitting in a wheelchair, in 1947, his wife died, and Fritz, due to a brain haemorrhage and high blood pressure, died on October 1, 1953, at the age of 59.

Jahr's life was uneventful, marked by poor health and the absence of professional and public recognition during the turbulent times of the Weimar Republic, Fascist Nazi Germany and the Stalinist rule in Eastern Germany<sup>8</sup>. However, the dedication we can read in his texts tells us that his calling was more than a job. It was the subject of long-term research to improve the education system, especially the teaching itself. It was a life that largely explicates his ideas, situating them in the context of his biography, society, and time as "the rain of a tormented crowd, waiting for its opportunity to appear before the simplifications of Georgetown bioethics"<sup>9</sup>, whose popularity is due to the undiminished influence of the book *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* by Tom Beauchamp and James Childress since its appearance in the 1970s, autonomy, justice, harmlessness and beneficence form the standard theoretical and practical starting point for supporters of Anglo-American values in the bioethical debate.

### **From the Theoretical Creation of Bioethics to the Practical Application of the Bioethical Imperative**

Fritz Jahr (1895-1953) should rightfully be considered the *Father of bioethics* and the first conceptualization of bioethics, which is particularly important today because it is rooted in the European spiritual tradition. He coined and defined the term "Bio-Ethik" in 1926 in an article in the journal *Das Mittelschulwesen*, specifically in his third published article of December 1926, entitled "The Life Sciences and the Teaching of Ethics"<sup>10</sup>, impressed by comparative studies of physiology and psychology in humans, animals and plants by Wilhelm Wundt<sup>11</sup>, as well as by philosophical reflections on the potential soul life of plants

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<sup>8</sup> Although only briefly presented, the information about Jahr's life does not show us his greatest contribution and achievement. Jahr himself rarely mentioned his publications and works, but in 1928, in a letter in which he hoped to find a new job, he mentioned the title of his dissertation at the University of Jena - *On the ethical relations of man towards animals and plants*. (Compare I. Rinčić, A. Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike*, Pergamena, Zagreb, 2012, str. 27.)

<sup>9</sup> Iva Rinčić & Amir Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike*, Pergamena, Zagreb, 2012, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> The importance of this article by Jahr is not only that he mentions the term "bioethics" for the first time, but also that in that article he also offers a theoretical framework in which he tries to base bioethics.

<sup>11</sup> In *Principles of Physiological Psychology*, Wundt shows similarities in nervous and physiological reactions in humans and animals that manifest through matches in goals and survival-oriented activities in animals, humans and plants. (Compare Hans-Martin Sass, "European Roots of

by F.T. Fechner (Gustav Theodor Fechner) and others in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, saying that: “from biopsychology to bioethics, there is only one step!”.

Then he coined the term “bioethics” from the ancient Greek words „bios“ and „ethics“ and began to develop the thesis about why people should accept moral duties not only concerning each other but also concerning animals and plants. To support his argument, he refers to examples from St. Francesco of Assisi, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Richard Wagner, Eduard von Hartmann and others, concluding his presentation with the formulation of the Bioethical imperative, which represents the transformation and expansion of Kant’s Categorical Imperative: “*Respect every living being as an end in itself, and treat it, if possible, as such!*”

In 1785 Kant only requested respect for “humanity, in your person as well as in any person, on principle as an end in itself, never only as a means to an end”. Furthermore, while the “Sanctity of the Moral Law” was the basis for Kant’s Categorical Imperative, for Jahr’s Bioethical Imperative, it is “Sanctity of Life”, i.e. compassion with all forms of life and living together. That is, according to the statement of one of the greatest connoisseurs of the work and meaning of Fritz Jar, Hans Martin Sass<sup>12</sup>, what should be emphasized here is, of course, “bringing Jahr’s bioethical imperative based on compassion, in opposition to Kant’s categorical imperative based on human dignity”. Moreover, while Kant’s model was formal and rigorous, Jahr recognizes the interplay between self-care and care for others and replaces the virtue of respect for the law with the virtue of compassion towards all “bios”, i.e. life and all forms of life.

For this purpose, Jahr makes a detailed explanation of the same in his fourth, according to the broader distribution, perhaps the most read article, which he published in the magazine *Cosmos* in 1927, stream around 15 days after the third article, under the title “Bioethics: Reviewing the ethical relations of humans towards animals and plants”. It discusses the most exciting idea presented a year before and generally repeated the theses for establishing the bioethical imperative, but this time expanded with yoga practitioners Buddha and Arthur Schopenhauer.

More precisely, “Jahr’s imperative finds its inspiration in the Fifth biblical commandment, “Thou shalt not kill!”, and it gets its final formulation by expanding Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative: “Respect every living being in principle as a purpose in itself and, if possible, treat it as such!”. “The bioethical imperative must perceive, or rather recognize, the segments of the struggle for

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Bioethics. Fritz Jahr’s 1927 Definition and Vision of Bioethics”, in: Ante Čović, Nada Gosić, Luka Tomašević (eds.), *Od nove medicinske etike do integrativne bioetike*, Pergamena – Hrvatsko bioetičko društvo, Zagreb, 2009., p. 21.)

<sup>12</sup> Hans-Martin Sass, “Bioetički imperativ Fritza Jahra: 80 godina bioetike u Njemačkoj od 1927 do 2007. godine”, *Bioetički svesci*, Rijeka, 61 (2008): 10 (1-44).

survival in cultural and natural conditions. In order to successfully regulate all these relationships, there is a need for different types of ethics. Jahr offers several examples: corporate ethics, ethics of institutions, sexuality, environment and others<sup>13</sup>. The bioethical imperative includes compassion, love, virtue and solidarity with all forms of life in the “golden rule” and/or “categorical imperative” because without them the “golden rule” can be interpreted as egoism – “Don’t do anything to me, and I will not do anything to you either”<sup>14</sup>. In the Christian spirit, Jahr’s ecumenical bioethical imperative is a supplement to the Fifth commandment (“Thou shalt not kill!”), that is an extension to the protection of every Other.

So, in this way, in conclusion, Jahr made his contribution in extending ethics to the whole living world, including not only Albert Schweitzer’s “awe of life” but also “ethics of nature”, “ethics of animals”, and “ecological ethics”, “ethics of the environment” and “bioethics”<sup>15</sup>.

### **Instead of Conclusion - For Bioethics in the 21st Century**

Fritz Jahr did not write voluminous monographs like other original thinkers such as Kant. He was not an exceptional student, but he showed a great interest in philosophy and theology - which will be manifested through dedicated work and twenty-two, so far, discovered articles, as short as possible, as a good sermon should be, until the end, prepared for practical application and further development from others.

Also surprising is the breadth and width of his topics ranging from criticism of Esperanto as a formal and static language to that of the hierarchies which he found in churches and elsewhere; from animal ethics and plant ethics to environmental protection and to the recognition that social interactions and communities are not much different from natural biotopes when individual life depends on give-and-take interaction with others and on good interacting and integrating complexes in struggling for life together. That is, starting from the first known article from 1924, which deals with universal languages and languages of the world, to the question of the ethical status of animals and plants and reflection on the moral and social implications of Catholic teachings,

<sup>13</sup> Marko Kos, “Od Fritz Jahra do integrativne bioetike”, *Filozofska istraživanja*, 133–134 God. 34 (2014) Sv. 1–2 (229–240), 231-232.

<sup>14</sup> Fritz Jahr, “Smrt i životinje: razmatranje Pete zapovijedi,” in: I. Rinčić, A. Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i radanje europske bioetike*, Pergamena, Zagreb, 2012, 207-211.

<sup>15</sup> Rolf Lothar, “Evolution der Biosphäre und Ethik”, in: *Ethik der Biowissenschaften: Geschichte und Theorie - Beiträge zur 6. Jahrestagung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Theorie der Biologie (DGGTB) in Tübingen 1997*, Eve-Marie Engels, Thomas Junker, Michael Weingarten (Hgs.), Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, Berlin, 1998, 61-68.

holidays and customs. Miller and Sass believe that Jahr's articles "go beyond the interests focused on the history of bioethics, because they also contribute to the bioethical debate in the present, and can serve as a guide for future global bioethics, that is, integrative bioethics"<sup>16</sup>.

The previous gives the right to claim that what sets his work apart is defined only in integrative bioethics, and that is the need to shape a new paradigm of knowledge, i.e. a shift from applied knowledge to orientational knowledge and a pluriperspectivist approach<sup>17</sup>. This is how the translation study of the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment, 1934, should be considered, where Jahr surprises the reader with three steps for implementing the 2500-year-old rule today:

- (a) The Golden Rule,
- (b) reasonable care of one's health and health of family and public health,
- (c) The bioethical imperative.

In summary, for the greatness and significance of Fritz Jahr's character and work, it should be emphasized that it is not surprising that he includes in his concept of integrative life the invisible worlds discussed in religious traditions - a vision that today can find support in quantum physics and multi-world models. Also, although Jahr's vision was without remarkable success in his time, the term "Bioethics" was re-invented almost 50 years later by Van Rensselaer Potter as "The Science of Survival" (1971). Nevertheless, Jahr had gone further than Potter by including human environments and human biotopes, such as communities and teams in factories and offices, in his concern for prosperous and harmonious decision-making. Of course, there are always informed and educated choices and responsible decisions to be made between self-care and care for others, as he outlined in 1929 on the interaction between egoism and altruism. However, still, as far as we are concerned, his most outstanding intellectual achievement is the bioethical imperative through which he returns man's attention to life in the broadest sense, turning it into what is called anti-speciesism, environmentalism, and numerous other *isms* that are offered to us as original and life-saving. If nothing else, "Jahr's awakening gave such a curious impetus to the new thinking of bioethics and bioethical topics that today we can freely talk about new bioethics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century or about the new phenomenon of European bioethics"<sup>18</sup>, but also about global bioethics.

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<sup>16</sup> Compare Irene M. Miller, Hans-Martin Sass, "Postscript," in: F. Jahr, *Essays in Bioethics 1924-1948*, LIT Verlag, Munster, 2013, 129.

<sup>17</sup> Detailed in Marko Kos, "Od Fritz Jahra do integrativne bioetike," *Filozofska istraživanja*, 133-134 God. 34 (2014) Sv. 1-2: 229-240.

<sup>18</sup> Iva Rinčić & Amir Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i radanje europske bioetike*, Pergamena, Zagreb, 2012, p. 15.

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