

Contemporary Philosophy
Съвременна философия

THE NORWEGIAN PERSPECTIVE ON VON WRIGHT'S THEORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL HYSTERIA¹⁾

Silviya Serafimova

Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Abstract. This paper analyzes the theory of provocative pessimism, as displayed by the Finnish philosopher Georg Henrik von Wright, which concerns, among many other issues, the justification of what he defines as environmental hysteria. By exploring the genealogy of the 'tragic contradiction' between knowledge and acting in von Wright's sense, I outline how some of the problems regarding the negative consequences of sustainable development find their similar interpretation in the works of some of the most prominent Norwegian philosophers and environmental activists such as Hartvig Sætra, Arne Næss, Sigmund Kvaløy and Gunnar Skirbekk. Regarding the impact of sustainable development on environmental politics, some concerns about the need of improving quality of life, as represented by von Wright, Kvaløy and Skirbekk are explored. Last but not least, I investigate how von Wright, Sætra, Næss, Kvaløy and Skirbekk find the roots of (provocative) pessimism in the increasing challenges to our human condition

Keywords: von Wright, environmental hysteria, provocative pessimism, environmental politics, Norwegian environmental philosophies

Examining the genealogy of the problem of environmental hysteria, as represented by von Wright, requires analyzing his conception of the present time transformations of human condition. In a lecture called *Science, Human Being and Environment (Vetenskapen, människan och miljön)* delivered at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in Uppsala (1991), von Wright discussed some of the ideas displayed in the *Postscript* (1990) to his book *Science and Reason (Vetenskapen och förnuftet)* (1986). Furthermore, most of the ideas of this lecture were included in von Wright's well-known essay *A Provocative Pessimism: a Postscript on the Scientific Worldview and Global Order* which was published as a postscript to his book *The Myth of Progress (Myten om framsteget)* (1993).

This article examines why von Wright's lecture of 1991 became a turning point in understanding how the reflection on human condition, which is provided in *Science and Reason*, was gradually elaborated for the purposes of making a

relevant time diagnosis, as formulated in *The Myth of Progress*. Such an analysis would provide a broad overview of how von Wright's conception of the risks regarding the increasing technocratization, as well as the expanding free market economy are closely tied with the growing feeling of helplessness affecting environmental problems. By examining the writings mentioned above, I aim at revealing why environmental hysteria in von Wright's sense goes beyond the concerns about the ecological problems by turning into a concern about human condition. That is why one of my main objectives is to explore to what extent environmental hysteria is another brick in the wall of so-called by von Wright provocative pessimism.

On the other hand, I also analyze how the far-reaching implications regarding the origin of environmental hysteria and the negative consequences of sustainable development find a similar interpretation in the works of some prominent Norwegian philosophers and environmentalists such as Hartvig Sætra, Arne Næss, Sigmund Kvaløy and Gunnar Skirbekk who elaborate a commonly shared line of arguments looking for answers to some of the questions posed by von Wright.

1. Some Challenges to the New Human Condition

1.1. The Critical Reactions to von Wright's 'Attempt at Orientation'

Yet in the *Postscript to Science and Reason* von Wright emphasized that the reader should seriously take the book's subtitle "an attempt at orientation". Referring to von Wright's own reflection on the critical comments provoked by his book²⁾ would contribute to revealing the importance of this orientation regarding the challenges human condition faces in time, as well as finding an answer to the question How does the dynamics of time diagnosis change by changing people's environmental attitudes?

In his later writings such as *To Understand One's Own Time (Att förstå sin samtid)* (1994) von Wright elaborated these reflections on a meta-methodological level. Judging by his analysis, I argue that discussing the perspective on analyzing the genealogy of the 'attempted' orientation, which is defined as an eschatological rather than apocalyptic perspective³⁾ would contribute to explaining why von Wright introduces the idea of provocative pessimism.

The specification of time perspective could be determined as an attempt at going beyond the concrete embodiments of understanding scientific world-pictures⁴⁾ in so far as clarifying the idea of understandability as such (which was posed as a task in *Science and Reason*) requires the aspects of predictability, and the lack of full predictability in particular⁵⁾, to be outlined. However, we should keep in mind that the strive for accepting the lack of predictability is not merely a cognitive strive, but also an existential one, since understandability has the epistemological premises as a necessary but not sufficient condition. Otherwise, a given world-picture⁶⁾ would have coincided with human condition as such.

In *The Myth of Progress*, von Wright argues that he has not expected such strong reactions to his book saying that it is not easy to provoke painless debates (Von Wright, 1994: 7). The reactions were strongly emotional (one statement that was already emphasized in the *Postscript to Science and Reason*), which made them indefensible by adopting some rational arguments (Ibid: 7 – 8). According to von Wright's own evaluation, it is due to the fact that he has questioned some "deeply rooted, partly unconscious and that is why taboo opinions on progress and development" (Ibid: 8), as well as some other deeper reasons for this anxiety (oro) concerning future, which affects many of us (Ibid).

Von Wright also argues that *The Myth of Progress* was better accepted than *Science and Reason* because time has changed, which was also a result of a change in people's mentality (von Wright, 1994a) (Von Wright, 1987: 196 – 197). In this context, he defined time diagnosis as following the dynamics of history⁷⁾ by including the tendencies of development of so-called future gist of the picture (Ibid).

1.1.1. Aniara's Motto as a Time Diagnosis

For the purposes of understanding the normative validity of time diagnosis, history's dynamics, as displayed by von Wright, can be revealed by analyzing how the changing ideas of progress and development became prototype characteristics of what he defined as a myth of progress. It would mean to clarify how the attempt at existential orientation concerns the orientation in the process of intersection of the processes of technological and economic development, which function as two significant processes regarding human condition.

Von Wright argues that we should pay attention to the 'dictatorship of circumstances' (omständigheternas diktatur): a "straitjacket" (tvångströja), which society was dressed with due to the accelerated and relatively autonomous technological development and thereby due to the generated need of continuous economic growth and expansion (von Wright, 1994: 10). In the lecture of 1991, von Wright used as a motto some lines of Harry Martinson's poem *Aniara* (1956), which were also repeated in his essay *A Provocative Pessimism*. According to this motto, "We begin to realize that what we have lost is even deeper than we first thought" (von Wright, 1991: 1; von Wright, 2012: 115).

In this context, he defined the sense of time flying as a tragedy, which indicates that losing time means losing the need of comprehending the world and thus the one of better comprehending ourselves (von Wright, 1990: 25). That is why I argue that on the one hand, tragic is strengthened by the growing hubris, which is built on the uncontrollable strive for controllability on man's side, while on the other one, it is also grounded in the awareness of the ineradicability of the transformations of human condition, which accompany the challenges of the 'brave new world' one has created⁸⁾.

In turn, the choice of the machinery Mima in *Aniara*, as adopted in both von Wright's and Knut Tranøy's writings, can be described as symbolizing the transgression of La Mettrie's *Man a Machine* into the myth of the machine having a being in itself alone. According to Tranøy, Martinson's *Aniara* is a story about the impossibility knowledge to be used against our insight claiming that knowledge without insight is a dangerous one (Tranøy, 1991: 50). This is how so-called myth of final solution⁹ is built since human hubris provokes the strive for hunting for new knowledge, which pretends to give us omnipotent solutions. Some of the most illuminative implications of this hubris can be recognized as consisting in what Skirbekk defines as an optimistic belief in the technical fix (Skirbekk, 2007: 77). As for von Wright, the first doubts about the belief in question can be traced to the idea of the tree of knowledge¹⁰, which was later conceptualized in *Science and Reason* as a tragic contradiction between knowledge and action. Such a contradiction requires specifying who is responsible for overcoming the aforementioned tragic contradiction, i.e. who is the subject who should master a new type of competence in respect with the new knowledge.

1.2. Human Condition and the Pitfalls of Scientism

Before examining the specificities of the current human condition in von Wright's sense, as well as how they affect the understanding of environmental problems, I will explore the genealogy of the need of a new type of competence by describing the latter as a result of questioning the optimistic belief in technological fixation. In this context, I will clarify why Skirbekk and von Wright provide similar arguments due to which the new competence should be adopted for the purposes of reevaluating the future of human condition.

Analyzing the methodological similarities and differences, I argue that the myth of final solution is closely tied with the one of progress due to the fact that both of them represent two aspects of one and the same myth, namely, that there is a reality with a capital letter. As von Wright relevantly points out, it is obvious that there is no direct connection between progress, science and technology, and growing social (samhällelig) happiness (von Wright, 1994: 60 – 61). Justifying social happiness as technologically achievable is of crucial importance in so far as it is implicitly recognized as a panacea 'correcting' the discrepancy between need and desire. The idea of technological imperative, which corresponds to what Kvaløy calls a technological fixation was already introduced in *Science and Reason*. It was defined as the belief that everything, which is technologically possible, or is possible to be produced in general, should be realized (von Wright, 1987: 144 – 145).

According to von Wright, scientism¹¹ is a position, which can be called a form of fundamentalism, i.e. an uncritical and excessive belief that our instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität* in Weber's sense¹²) can solve all our problems (von Wright, 1991: 6). In this context, some questions, which do not fit the scope are

justified as being merely an object of speculation (“tyckande”) rather than an object of rational deliberation (Ibid). On the other hand, von Wright outlines that the changes caused by the development of science depend on the fact that the present time research is considered as the most important force of production in the industrial society (von Wright, 1990: 24). This transformation can be revealed in detail if we refer to what Skirbekk calls a difference between scientific and technological expertise¹³). The misconceptualization of a technological expertise as a scientific one could be defined as introduced for the sake of maximizing the production in question. This problem is described by von Wright as driven by a false evaluation of the situation, namely, as provoked by the tendency that the border between science and technology, between pure and applied science is about to blur (Ibid: 25).

Similarly to von Wright’s idea of competence for orientation, Kvaløy’s theory of competence has the understanding as its necessary condition revealing the need one to make moral and political commitments. Furthermore, what Kvaløy calls a super-amateur¹⁴) can be described as a super-generalist in Næss’s sense¹⁵) since one should aim not only at elaborating the ecological knowledge as crucial for grounding the political decision-making process, but also reflecting on how this knowledge can fully benefit experiencing all aspects of the situation we live in.

2. Definition of Ecological and Ethical Problems

Von Wright argues that technological development, which was made possible by science, also problematized the connection between man and nature (von Wright, 1991: 4). He points out that the problem has two aspects, namely, ecological and ethical aspects¹⁶) (Ibid: 4 – 5).

Von Wright specifies that ecological aspect is what one calls environmental questions (Ibid), as well as that typical environmental problems are what one could call technological problems, which are axiologically neutral ones (Ibid).

On the other hand, ethical problems are described as different ones because they concern both the goals and the means (Ibid). Von Wright clarifies that these ethical questions cannot be objectively determined from which, however, it does not follow that they are at the mercy of arbitrariness because having given arguments, people can reach an agreement about the answer (Ibid). In turn, this requires establishing what von Wright calls community values (värdegemenskap). On a macro methodological level, the ethical dimension is defined as concerning our connection with nature, which we and other living beings represent with our bodies (Ibid).

In contrast to von Wright, Kvaløy does not make an explicit distinction between ecological and ethical questions (Kvaløy, 2014: 58), albeit both he and Næss support von Wright’s thesis that environmental problems have been misinterpreted as technological ones due to the increasing role of technologies and free market.

In this context, I argue that the genealogy of the value conflicts can be revealed if we examine them on the level of vital and non-vital needs and vital and non-vital interests respectively. As an illuminative illustration in this respect, I point out von Wright's question "Do the landscapes have a moral value, which should be respected?¹⁷⁾" (Ibid). A similar question is posed by Skirbekk¹⁸ who analyzes whether the process of evaluation can be justified by extending the concept of vital need relying on the principle of analogy with non-humans and other living beings. Accepting such an approach, however, presumes to pay special attention to avoiding a certain form of moral naturalism, i.e. some needs to be recognized as more important than the rest.

3. Some Similarities in Environmental Politics

3.1. The Critical Reception of the Brundtland Report

Von Wright argues that sustainable development was introduced in the Brundtland report as a catchword (von Wright, 1991: 7). It was thoroughly discussed, but regardless of these discussions, it remained "blurred and elusive", at least for him (Ibid). According to von Wright, sustainable development has two aspects: the minimization of continuous exploitation of natural resources and environmental degradation, as well as the support of the development of industrial countries. In turn, the second aspect also presumes to avoid lowering the living standard if possible, as well as people to avoid being forced to refrain from the "thousand new toys" (de tusen nya leksaker), which high-tech industry spreads at increasing speed over the expanding market (Ibid). Examining the aforementioned contradicting tendencies, von Wright points out that they will soon start getting into fight with each other (Ibid), which in turn will affect the polarization of the globe in many other respects such as cultural and socio-political ones.

Similarly to von Wright, Kvaløy emphasizes that the Brundtland report mainly consists of recommendations for continuing the economic development by expanding the free markets: including a gross domestic product of 3 – 4% per year in the rich countries. However, it says nothing about the different types of economic growth "some of which are more acceptable than others" (Kvaløy, 2014: 50). Kvaløy goes even further saying that the report is one of the many writings relying on the "pre-historic, simple, socio-economic gospel that all economic growth is good because it gives grounds for welfare" (Ibid).

Judging by the aforementioned investigations, I draw the conclusion that one of the crossing points between von Wright's and Kvaløy's theories of sustainable development can be found in the commonly shared understanding that the crisis is a global one, which should be overcome by rehabilitating the normative validity of human condition.

3.2. The Impact of Zero Growth

Von Wright clearly states that zero growth is unacceptable growth, as well as that so-called acceptable growth entails a contradiction (von Wright, 1990: 26). The growth in the industrial world must continue, but on the other hand, “the biosphere simply cannot endure the growing stress and strain, which would be caused if this controlled program of growth is realized” (Ibid).

Referring to Sætra’s conception, I argue that such a picture of zero growth provokes a certain pessimism, which may lead us to aim at disenchanting the side effects of the new forms of capitalism. According to Sætra, as long as nobody has seriously tried it yet, we cannot know whether zero growth could be a good solution or not: at the same time, it is easy to be a pessimist, since many people will not accept such a growth, albeit they know that the other alternative is environmental catastrophe and mass death (Sætra, 1973: 60). Referring to Næss’s theory, he argues that there is a reason to be afraid that a program, which is focused on ecological realism, would guarantee one party an optimal support of 15% (Ibid). In this context, Sætra specifies that environmental catastrophe is not merely a problem of democracy because we might end up with the conclusion that democracy itself is the main problem (Ibid).

Judging by the aforementioned investigations, I draw the conclusion that Sætra emphasizes the politically-oriented implications of zero growth rather than the socio-economic and existential ones, as von Wright, Næss and Kvaløy do, albeit adopting socio-economic and existential perspectives also requires refracting environmental problems through the lens of the (un)successful democratization. On the other hand, similarly to von Wright, Næss and Kvaløy, Sætra points out the role of national economy and the challenges it faced on the global market.

What would be the relevant solution then? Von Wright claims that people in the industrial world have to learn to live a scantier life by giving up needs they have taken for granted: needs they undoubtedly could live without. However, we should keep in mind that this is a problem, which requires a certain moral sensitivity to be cultivated. Otherwise, we would keep remaining trapped in the mode *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* One issue, which is also clearly stated by the representatives of Norwegian environmental philosophy.

4. The Role of Environmental Hysteria

According to von Wright, during the years that have passed since *Science and Reason* was written, “one has become far more conscious about environmental issues” (von Wright, 1990: 26). In his lecture of 1991, he discussed the “newly awakened, ecological world’s conscience” (världssamvete), which manifested itself by environmental hysteria (von Wright, 1991: 6). In turn, the latter was strengthened by researchers “shouting in chorus that something must be done, and

even the most ignorant populists and politicians drape themselves at present in green” (von Wright, 1990: 26).

In this context, von Wright discusses not only the role of the researchers, but also the one of the politicians, which is another crossing point of Kvaløy’s and Skirbekk’s theories of politicians as generalists. It is populism that brings to light already examined dramatic tension between knowledge and action¹⁹). In other words, populism regarding environmental hysteria can be characterized as a disguise of the failure to do things with words in the field of politics and science, turning the ideal of a change into the one of a false optimistic belief, which is described by von Wright as a false optimism.

5. Why Provocative Pessimism?

In the lecture of 1991, von Wright argued that the thoughts about the deteriorating human condition, which took place due to the increasing role of technologies and free market economy, should be fully elaborated²⁰) (von Wright, 1991: 9). These thoughts led us to a “darkness, which we cannot see through” (Ibid). That is why it seems that “repairing the bridge” (brosлагningen) starts with the state as it is and goes to the one as it should have been, understood as a matter of political impossibility and not least, of folk psychology’s impossibility (Ibid).

In the essay *A Provocative Pessimism*, the aforementioned impossibility is evaluated as a utopia. Comparing von Wright’s conception with Sætra’s one of balanced society recognized as realizable in the distant future, we may clarify the origin of provocative pessimism. The latter is triggered not only by the desperate diagnosis of human condition, as it is, but also by the tension inflicted by the risks predictability brings with itself, since those risks require certain socio-political transformations to be made. On a micro methodological level, the aforementioned tension can be described as arising from predicting how utopia can be successfully disenchanting without turning into a dystopia, which to destroy human condition.

Last but not least, it is important to keep in mind that there are different types of utopian (dystopian) scenarios. Sætra outlines three of them: the catastrophic society, the survival one and the balanced society (Sætra, 1990: 151 – 153). Quoting some of the conclusions of the last two pages of his book *Ecopolitical Socialism (Den økopolitiske sosialismen)* (1973), he emphasizes that even 16 years since the book was published, “we are still far away from a balanced future” (Ibid: 153). The distance does not have to be understood merely as a time-distance, but rather as an existential one because it concerns the impossibility of making an optimistic time diagnosis.

However, adopting provocative pessimism in von Wright’s sense is not a matter of resignation, albeit, as he claims, “Under such circumstances, it would be tempting to leave the things as they are” (von Wright, 1991: 9). Furthermore,

von Wright suspects that before becoming apparently inevitable, the resignation has already taken place in most people's minds, especially if "the mouths keep supporting hope" (Ibid).

His definition of resignation can be characterized as strengthened by already examined myth of final solution, which is supported by the one of technological fixation having the hope for a final fixation as its prototype characteristic. In other words, the state of resignation in von Wright's sense can be determined as based on reviving the faith in the omnipotence of reason, which should provide panacea for all difficulties and misunderstandings.

In his analysis of Lunden's²¹⁾ and von Wright's writings, Sætra argues that we are in a period of "brutalization and privatization of human life not only in the poor countries" (Sætra, 1973: 90). Regarding von Wright's conception of internationalization and privatization²²⁾ (Ibid: 87), he emphasizes that instead of using the concept of multinational (international), von Wright chose the one of over-national for the purposes of revealing the paradoxes of democracy²³⁾. The result is that instead of a well-regulated, rich, prosperous society, we witness a privatization on side of one international capital. That is why institutions such as the EU, the World Bank and the Money Fund are "obedient" (lydige) to "tools" for such a development (Ibid), which gives Sætra grounds to formulate the diagnosis that "We are on a way to a new feudalism" (Ibid).

He argues that it is typical for the time (tidstypisk), for both Lunden and von Wright, to describe the contemporary society as a restoration of a feudal society (Ibid: 88 – 89). Sætra outlines that it is our civilization that made von Wright compare welfare state with feudalism, which was grounded in the privatization of societal functions (Ibid). Furthermore, von Wright was optimistic enough to believe that a closer integration of the socialist countries can moderate and change the technological system and "over-national capital" (Ibid). However, technocapitalism can "tame" (temje) socialism, but it cannot directly save nature (Ibid). That is why salvation could not directly come on side of the politicians unless the technological system is changed from within (Ibid).

In this context, I argue that Sætra's provocative pessimism regarding the utopian realization of a balanced society derives from the willingness of too easily unfolding the gaps of optimism. In contrast to von Wright's pessimism, Sætra's one is based on revealing the inconsistencies of political system and party system in particular. Sætra points out that it is easy to criticize von Wright's position because it is not the human as a collective subject but the minority that repeats the economic and military mantras (Ibid: 90). However, we should keep in mind that von Wright defines the collective subject as representing the ones who have political power, which does not lead to equating human beings with the category of political experts in general. Another comparison concerns the fact that albeit

Sætra misinterprets von Wright's idea of collective subject, they share a similar understanding of the cultural background, where the aforementioned changes take place. Sætra claims that similarly to the feudal who was succeeded by the enlightened autocrat, the techno-capitalist will be succeeded by the ecological one (Ibid). Judging by the aforementioned investigations, I reach the conclusion that this critical reflection on history (which von Wright approves as well) does not mean a direct reversal, but rather a conceptual revival that makes our pessimism predictable and provocative at once.

5.1. The Irresponsibility of False Optimism

Von Wright discusses the accusations that “the expression of pessimism in itself creates uneasiness and seems to paralyze and prevent action” (von Wright, 1990: 27). He argues that to a certain extent, it is probably true, but for him, more irresponsible and at the same time, more paralyzing, is to assert optimism which quietly allows “everything to proceed as usual in the conviction” that the problem will probably be solved by “the means of further research and new technologies”, as well as by reaching a balance between supply and demand of the free markets (Ibid). Von Wright defines this optimism as an “optimism of impotence or powerlessness” (Ibid), which is adopted by the governments for the sake of keeping the control over their people. According to him, one has to fight “false optimism to the best of one's ability” (Ibid), but it cannot be overcome if we have not experienced the desperation that to provoke “sober consideration of mankind's situation” (Ibid).

Extrapolating the aforementioned investigations, I argue that reviving the idea of human condition, and especially the one of its future, by reconsidering our stance on despair affects the need of rethinking the idea of collective responsibility. The latter can be personalized by outlining the role of both moral and political engagements due to which we can accomplish the transformation of one's mode of being into a mode of becoming (from a phenomenological perspective) that in turn gives us grounds to talk about human condition as such.

5.2. The Powerless Optimism as a Stimulus for Encouraging Provocative Pessimism

In the lecture of 1991, von Wright emphasized that the term provocative pessimism was borrowed from Sætra²⁴⁾ who has critically reflected on our situation (von Wright, 1991: 9), outlining that the thought of pessimism has been deeply rooted in the cultural and civilizational layers²⁵⁾ of human condition. Von Wright argues that in the poetry of many cultures and religious mythologies, it is stated that only through times of trial and suffering can one acquire the wisdom that can change one's way of living (von Wright, 1990: 27; von Wright, 1991: 9). Such tests can affect every single person in many different ways (von Wright, 1991:

9). Von Wright points out that it is not impossible we to stand on the threshold of an era, when the suffering, on a large scale, will pour over us (Ibid). It is uncertain whether this suffering will make us wiser in the long run (Ibid: 10), but judging by the events of the last months, one has the impression that humankind has learnt nothing from the suffering and devastation of the Second World War (Ibid). Extrapolating von Wright's theory regarding false optimism, I draw the conclusion that it may turn out human condition to remain a condition for the humans against their own will²⁶.

6. Conclusion

Analyzing the origin of environmental hysteria in von Wright's sense, I aim at clarifying that it is a result of some new challenges posed to the human condition. That is why I argue that von Wright's reception of environmental problems is closely tied with understanding some transformations of the condition in question such as economic, cultural and socio-political ones. It is these transformations that can be recognized as a crossing point with the Norwegian perspective on environmental hysteria, since they are driven by a similar type of provocative pessimism, which can be defined as a concern about the future of human condition. On a macro-methodological level, it would mean that von Wright and Norwegian environmental philosophers recognize the concern about environmental crisis as an existential concern, namely, as a concern about life, which is articulated by our 'attempt at orientation'.

One of the embodiments of von Wright's 'attempted orientation' can be seen in the tragedy regarding the diagnosis of contemporary time. In this context, I draw the conclusion that the tragedy of lost time, which both von Wright and Tranøy find in the symbol of *Aniara*, illustrates how losing time means losing the need of comprehending the world and ourselves. It provokes what von Wright calls a tension between knowledge and action, or so-called by Tranøy dangerous knowledge without insight. Furthermore, *Aniara*'s time diagnosis is of crucial importance for understanding the methodological similarities in revealing the genealogy of the new human condition as based on two corresponding myths, namely, on the myth of final solution (criticized by both Kvaløy and Skirbekk) and the myth of progress, which is supported by so-called technological imperative (as displayed by von Wright).

Regarding the need of justifying a new type of competence, which to question the optimist belief in the technological fixation and thus to fulfill the needs of rethinking the role of human condition, I draw the conclusion that von Wright formulates the problem of competence in a way that corresponds to the definitions provided by both Næss and Kvaløy, when the risk management is calculated by specialists rather than generalists, all existential dilemmas remain restricted to the field of technological solutions, which do not necessarily inflict a positive socio-political transformation.

The positive socio-political transformations, however, require the status of environmental problems and their evaluation to be taken into consideration. Despite the fact that Kvaløy does not make an explicit distinction between environmental and ethical questions, as von Wright does, both Kvaløy and Næss provide similar arguments while clarifying the misconceptualization of environmental problems as technological ones. A relevant argument in favor of this thesis can be found in the way von Wright, Kvaløy and Skirbekk justify the origin of value conflicts as closely tied with rethinking the role of (non)vital needs and (non)vital interests respectively. Examining the genealogy of the latter requires the impact of environmental hysteria within the challenges posed to the environmental politics on a global level to be analyzed. That is why I point out that the emphasis on the role of sustainable development in provoking environmental hysteria concerns outlining the important similarities between von Wright's conception and the theories of the Norwegian environmental philosophers.

Since von Wright, Sætra, Næss and Kvaløy do not support the idea of zero growth, I argue that exploring Sætra's theory of the connection between uncertainty the growth in question brings to light and increasing pessimism, we may draw not only some parallels²⁷⁾ between Sætra's and von Wright's conceptions of provocative pessimism, but also outline the differences between them. While von Wright's theory is methodologically 'closer' to the ones of Næss and Kvaløy, in so far as they all emphasize the socio-economic and existential perspectives on evaluating zero growth, Sætra's perspective is strictly political. It concerns the implications of the possibility of establishing ecological realism.

Furthermore, I argue that the origin of environmental hysteria can be revealed by exploring how sustainable development becomes a non-contradictory ideal of development. It would mean that environmental hysteria is so strong due to the difficulties in showing why sustainable development can no longer be considered as an ideal, nor can it be easily disenchanting as such. Some concerns derive from the fact that environmental hysteria cannot be overcome by developing a new ecological competence alone, because we should keep in mind the complexity of the environmental, economic and socio-political factors that have provoked the environmental crisis.

Another important question is how to evaluate environmental hysteria due to the need of justifying provocative pessimism for the purposes of diagnosing human condition without falling into the trap of ineradicable despair. In this context, I draw the conclusion that the similarities between Sætra's and von Wright's provocative pessimism can be found by revealing the origin of the tension brought by the time diagnosis as prognosis.

Defending von Wright against the accusations that pessimism creates uneasiness, I provide the argument that it is pseudo-optimism that is used to be paralyzing in the sense of preventing people from satisfying the need of

reframing human condition, and then from doing this within the framework of the things as they are.

Judging by the aforementioned investigations, I draw the conclusion that von Wright's provocative pessimism is triggered by the need of disenchanting the myth of progress as built on the one of final solution, which supports the unquestionable interpretation of the idea of sustainability as equivalent to the one provided by sustainable development. A hint in this respect can be found in Skirbekk's suggestion that we should talk about sustainability, which is irreducible to the one of sustainable development due to the principles of universalizable ethics. This is an important specification because thus we can outline the different levels of sustainability such as economic, socio-political, ecological ones, which are mutually connected.

Similarly to Næss, Kvaløy and Skirbekk, von Wright is aware of the different levels of sustainability. He points out that the discussions about environmental crisis take place at one table while there are negotiations at another table about wage increases and tax reduction, as well as about various measures for stimulating economy and strengthening companies' international competitiveness (von Wright, 1990: 27; von Wright, 1991: 9). As long as the growth thinking remains the dominant ideology (objective, which should not be compromised), what is decided at the second table would complicate or render impossible the wishes at the first table (Ibid).

Analyzing von Wright's theory, I draw the conclusion that the talks at the first table can be defined as discussions about environmental protection, which can be specified by referring to Næss's and Kvaløy's examinations of the role of bioeconomics. In turn, the talks at the second table can be described as talks about sustainable development, which pretends to be the growth with a capital letter. On a macro methodological level, the crossing points regarding the role of provocative pessimism can be determined as a result of the impossibility to find long-term solutions on moral, political, economic and environmental levels, as well as of the irreversible transformation of the debate about growth *and* environmental protection into the one of sustainable development *vs.* environmental protection.

NOTES

1. The article has been presented at a conference in honor of Georg Henrik von Wright's centennial anniversary in Helsinki (18 – 20.05.2016).
2. Many critical comments were also displayed on the pages of the Finnish daily Svenska Dagbladet attracting politicians such as the Moderate party's leader Carl Bildt and the representative of the leader of Liberal People's party Bengt Westerberg.

3. He describes the perspective in question as driven by some feelings (von Wright 1994: 10).
4. In the essay *A Provocative Pessimism*, von Wright discussed the role of the global challenges to human condition as provoked by the changes in the scientific world-picture (von Wright, 2012: 116).
5. According to von Wright, the idea of predictability is extended due to the purposes of predicting future pictures as a matter of a time diagnosis (von Wright, 1994a: 197).
6. Von Wright specifies that by scientific world-picture we should understand merely the one provided by natural sciences (von Wright, 1987: 11).
7. Historical dynamics is important since it has much to do with understanding ourselves. According to von Wright, he chose the historical method because it provides better understanding of our human condition (von Wright, 1994a: 12).
8. Martinson described this world as *aniaros* (sad, despairing). The poem *Aniara* displays the tragedy of a spaceship, which transports colonists from Earth to Mars because the Earth is devastated by environmental disasters and war. After an accident with the asteroid *Hondo*, it loses control and the poem reveals how the people react when they realize that there is no longer any salvation.
9. According to Skirbekk, one of the main problems accompanying the process of modernization concerns the overexposed role of the “technical fix” in the decision-making process, which is recognized as a certain kind of panacea against all the societal and economic problems (Skirbekk, 2007: 77).
10. According to Egidi, the first doubts about the optimistic belief in scientific and technological progress are represented in von Wright’s essay *The Tree of Knowledge* (Egidi, 2009: 4).
11. According to von Wright, it is important to pay attention to moral nihilism of our time if one wants to bring out a rational discussion about burning questions (von Wright, 1991: 6).
12. The idea of instrumental rationality was emphasized by von Wright yet in *Science and Reason*, where he clarified the distinction between “rational” and “value-oriented” giving arguments in favor of science, which is justified due to the value-oriented reason (von Wright, 1987: 23). The preference to the latter is of crucial importance for understanding the role of vital and non-vital needs, since according to von Wright, value-oriented rationality means one to live a rational life in which desires correspond to the needs (Ibid: 146). Furthermore, these needs are evaluated from the perspective of what good and bad are (Ibid). In the essay *A Provocative Pessimism*, von Wright went back to the role of the ones who are responsible for imposing such a scientism, as well as to the origin of their motivation (von Wright, 2012: 121).
13. One of the main consequences of the optimistic belief in the technical fix is that the scientific expertise does not necessarily coincide with the technological one, albeit the latter undoubtedly represents a certain kind of scientific expertise. Analyzing the implications of what is technologically acceptable in respect with

- the ecological expertise, Skirbekk outlines the role of scientific expertise as creating an “optimal basis for decision makers” (Skirbekk, 1992: 5).
14. According to Kvaløy, the super-amateur is the one who is a “specially oriented” and “articulated everyday philosopher” (Kvaløy, 1974: 66). In this context, one is defined as a “searching amateur” who is supposed to make relevant decisions against the background of the contradiction between city and countryside environment (Ibid).
 15. According to Næss, there are two types of generalists: those who have an orientation in all fields and those ones who have a good competence in two fields respectively (Næss, 1973: 210). In this context, the conception of one of the main Norwegian inspirators of von Wright, namely, Hartvig Sætra, saying that one is responsible for building balanced society in the future, implicitly conveys the idea of researchers as generalists in Næss’s sense. Sætra argues that such a mission needs a broad spectrum of researchers interested in the future (Sætra, 1990: 154).
 16. Von Wright points out that he makes a distinction between these two aspects, but we should keep in mind that they are intrinsically connected (*intimt sammanvävda*) (von Wright, 1991: 5).
 17. In the essay *A Provocative Pessimism*, the range of the paragraphs of landscape and future generations is changed and thus the one of future generations comes first (von Wright, 2012: 120). It illustrates how due to the objectives of *The Myth of Progress*, the focus is shifted from man’s role in nature to putting man’s history in a global perspective (von Wright, 1994: 9). Regarding intrinsic value of nature, however, we witness how in both writings the ethical dimension brings the role of value conflicts to light.
 18. Skirbekk points out that even if all human beings are dead, the landscape should be preserved if there is a possibility of having animals around, since it has “value for other beings, not only for us” (Skirbekk, 1994: 125, Note 60), as well as because those beings have a value in themselves.
 19. This is a point, which is missing in the Postscript.
 20. For von Wright’s environmental pessimism understood as a crucial factor for the diagnosis of our time, see Wallgren, 2007: 8; 20 (Note 30).
 21. Kåre Lunden (1930-2013) is a Norwegian historian.
 22. However, Sætra criticizes von Wright saying that as a professor emeritus, he can experience less consequences of making more radical statements (Sætra, 1973: 87).
 23. Sætra examines the way von Wright analyzes the role of over-nationalization, which is followed by the standardization of the choice of goods emphasizing that when the national identity is weakened, the pluralism, which is promoted by economical liberalism, cannot be found (Ibid). Thus over-national technological system and over-national capital lead to political conformism, as well as to questioning the ethical norms, since the objective

of over-national global system for global development is not to find justice and peace (Ibid: 87 – 88).

24. There is a note about Sætra, Næss and Kvaløy in von Wright's book *To Understand One's Own Time (Att förstå sin samtid)* (1994), (von Wright, 1994a: 14). See also Wallgren, 2007: 20, Note 31. Sætra's provocative pessimism is clarified by specifying the implications of the gap between must and can (von Wright, 1994a: 199 – 200).
25. In the book *To Understand One's Own Time*, von Wright argues that there are two factors affecting development, namely, one specific form of reason and cultural anxiety, which goes back through Christianity to the Jewish myth of creation (von Wright, 1994a: 198).
26. Von Wright does not provide a negative time diagnosis alone. He outlines that such a diagnosis also presumes reconsidering our attitudes regarding what human being needs, what constitutes a good life, as well as how to acquire a feeling of global solidarity (von Wright, 2012: 125), which is an issue emphasized by both Kvaløy and Skirbekk.
27. The similarities can be examined on the level of choosing approach, which to show how achieving a balanced society in time is not only a matter of a time distance, but also of an existential one.

REFERENCES

- Egidi, R. (2009). Von Wright's Philosophical Humanism, *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, I, 1, 1 – 8.
- Kvaløy, S. (1974). Økofilosofi som forståelsesnøkkel (s. 66 – 78). I: Hofseth P. & A. Vinje. *Økofilosofisk Lesebok I*. Universitetet i Oslo, Rådet for natur- og miljøfag.
- Kvaløy, S. (2014), *Elvetid*. Naturveiviser.
- Næss, A. (1973). *Økologi, samfunn og livsstil: utkast til en økosofi*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Skirbekk, G. (1992). *Eco-Philosophical Manuscripts*. Bergen: Ariadne.
- Skirbekk, G. (1994). Ethical Gradualism, beyond Anthropocentrism and Biocentrism? (pp. 79 – 126). In: G. Skirbekk, *The Notion of Sustainability and Its Normative Implications*. Scandinavian University Press.
- Skirbekk, G. (2007). Technological Expertise and Global Ethics in an Age of Scientization and Ecological Crisis. (pp. 77 – 100). In: G. Skirbekk, *Timely Thoughts. Modern Challenges and Philosophical Responses: Contributions to Inter-Cultural Dialogues*. Lanham: UPA Aquisitions Department.
- Sætra, H. (1973). *Den økopolitiske sosialismen*, Oslo: Pax.
- Sætra, H. (1990). *Jamvektssamfunnet er ikkje noko urtete-selskap*, Oslo: Norske samlaget.

- Tranøy, K. (1991). Miljøkrise, vitenskap og moral, (s. 45 – 65). I: Sv. Gjerdåker & Gule, L. og B. Hagtvatn, *Den Uoverstigelige grense: tanke og handling i miljøkampen*. Bergen: Cappelen.
- Von Wright, G. H. (1987). *Vetenskapen och förnuftet: ett försök till orientering*, Stockholm: Bonnier.
- Von Wright, G. H. (1990). *Postscript to Science and Reason*, http://gyanoprobha.typepad.com/gyanoprobha/2006/05/g_h_von_wrights.html
- Von Wright, G. H. (1991). *Vetenskapen, människan och miljön*, http://exergiakademin.se/Vetenskapen_manniskan_GvW.doc.
- Von Wright, G. H. (1994). *Myten om fremskrittet: tanker 1987-1992: med en intellektuell selvbiografi*, Oslo: Cappelen.
- Von Wright, G.H. (1994a). *Att förstå sin samtid: tanke och förkunnselse och andra försök 1945 – 1994*, Stockholm: Bonnier.
- Von Wright, G. H. (2012). A Provocative Pessimism: a Postscript on the Scientific Worldview and Global Order (pp. 115 – 126). In: R. Bhaskar & Høyer, K., P. Næss (eds.), *Ecophilosophy in a World of Crisis. Critical Realism and the Nordic Contributions*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Wallgren, Th. (2007). Georg Henrik von Wright som tidsdiagnostiker. <http://filosofia.fi/se/arkiv/text/3203>.

✉ **Dr. Silviya Serafimova, Assist. Prof.**
Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
13a, Moskovska St.
1000 Sofia, Bulgaria
E-mail: silvija_serafimova@yahoo.com