

Monothematic Block: The Anthropocene Epoch: Rethinking Environmental and Political Philosophy in the Global Environmental Crisis

Introduction

Environmental philosophy can be understood as a reflection on the problems generated by everyday practice, i.e. the widespread way of life and the uncritically accepted beliefs and worldviews, which by their consequences devastate the bio-chemical and geo-physical preconditions for the existence of contemporary complex societies. These are problems and risks described by the Earth System Sciences and the economic, political, and social sciences. Given the complexity, multilayered, robust, and long-term trends of the planetary system influenced by anthropogenic factors, these problems and risks can be interpreted as a shift of the planetary system to a new state, referred to as the Anthropocene (Zalasiewicz 2024). Regardless of the debate over the meaning of this term and the relevance of the Anthropocene concept in various scientific disciplines, it is evident that the state of the planetary system is changing with unprecedented dynamics (Ripple, et al. 2023, 2024). There is also growing evidence of the social, economic, political, and geopolitical implications of anthropogenic changes to the planetary system, which translates into environmental philosophy and the range of issues and risks it seeks to thematize and reflect upon.

This monothematic block contains studies, an essay, and book reviews focused on philosophical reflection on some of the many issues addressed by environmental philosophy. They are united by an approach that can be described as environmental-political, pointing to the contingency of many forms of environmental devastation on particular policies, political philosophies, or ideologies. All the texts included in this monothematic block thus correspond to the subject of the research of the Department of Environmental Philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, which is concentrated in the project VEGA no.

2/0110/24 "Tasks of Political Philosophy in the Context of The Anthropocene II." This project aims to investigate questions of methodology, cultural conditioning, critique, and metacritique of environmental political philosophy, as well as its possible influences on the field of normative practical philosophy in the Anthropocene epoch.

In his study, "Customary Morality and the Concept of Environmental Citizenship," Simon Charlesworth problematizes the concept of environmental citizenship. He points out that the processes of globalization and the concentration of capital, i.e. the concentration of unregulated and undemocratic economic power, have for decades been expanding the circle of those who do not have access to the resources that enable the realization of classically defined citizenship (leisure time and cultural capital). The concept of environmental citizenship extends the concept of citizenship, understood as equality of opportunity to participate in the political governance of society including both rights and responsibilities related to the environment. Charlesworth points out that the concept of environmental citizenship articulates moral obligations that most socially deprived populations are unable to grasp even cognitively. Thus, the concept of environmental citizenship, understood in this way, leads to a deepening of alienation and exclusion of the underprivileged, rather than a widening of awareness of responsibility for the environmental consequences of everyday decisions as one of the duties of citizenship.

Bianca Boteva-Richter's study, entitled "Migration and Environment or About the Human as Climatic Being: Tetsurō Watsuji's Dialectical Concept and How It Can Be Applied to the Issue of Migration," explores the connection between migration, and the protection and devastation of the environment. She points out that, according to a 2023 UNHCR report, 70% of all refugees had to leave their home country due to environmental pollution. Boteva-Richter explores the link between migration and environmental protection by taking a new and expanded approach to the topic. The subject, according to this perspective, is based on a new synthetic mixture of the Buddhist-Shinto-Confucian-European model. This study draws on the concept of *ningen*, "*man-in-between*," by the Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō and its application to migrants, as an outline for understanding the ontological situation of these people. This approach opens up a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the relationship between humans and nature, and leads to new perspectives in understanding humans as climatic beings.

The study “The Environmental Toll of Digital Technologies,” authored by João Ribeiro Mendes, explores the complex relationship between digital technologies and environmental sustainability in the face of the worsening climate crisis. Mendes highlights two contrasting narratives of digitalization: one praises digitalization for its improved efficiency and less waste, while the other cautions about the environmental impact of energy-consuming data centers and growing electronic waste. The positive expectations associated with digitalization, which can also be identified in official EU or UN documents, emphasize the immateriality of digital technologies, while overlooking the material and energy intensity of building and operating hardware as a necessary infrastructure for digitalization, as well as the growing amount of e-waste associated with digitalization. The overall material footprint of digital infrastructures and the ecoclimatic impact of digitalization, as well as the tendency to overlook or downplay these phenomena, raise critical questions about why the negative impacts of digitalization and AI on the climate emergency are not being adequately discussed. The paper underscores the importance of informed public discussion and working together to tackle the environmental challenges of digitalization, highlighting the significance of evaluating the ecological effects of digital technologies.

Güncel Önkal in his essay “Reconsidering the Paradigm Shift from Environmental Philosophy to Global Environmentalisms” points out how various forms of “Environmentalisms” with the basic idea of sustainability are used for legitimizing above all ideas for sustaining the capitalist global system not nature itself. He points out that just as various environmental issues are reduced to the phenomena of sustainability, their philosophical critique is reduced to environmental ethics. The latter, however, proves insufficient to grasp the complex economic-political and socio-environmental relations of the epoch of irreversible human impact on the global environment (the Anthropocene). Everyday life and policy-making discourse are shaped within the framework and hegemony of the capitalist growth culture. This means that environmental issues are based on anthropological and cultural issues and political outputs. According to Önkal, therefore, environmental ethical thought has no choice but to be a political philosophy.

The monothematic block also includes two book reviews. The author of the first one, which is dedicated to John Bellamy Foster’s latest book *The Dialectics of Ecology: Socialism and Nature* (Foster 2024) is Jakub Bokes. In the second review, Katarína Podušelová introduces the book *Antropocénnosti:*

průvodce světem antropocénu, edited by Eliška Fulínová and Anna Kvíčalová (Fulínová – Kvíčalová 2024). The book was published in Prague in the Czech language, and the review is written in Slovak language.

The environmental political philosophy that we are trying to develop in the research of the Environmental Philosophy Department of the Institute of Philosophy of the Slovak Academy of Sciences is related to critical social theory, as well as political and social ecology. The texts included in this monothematic block extend the philosophical reflection on the causes and consequences of the global environmental crisis based on this approach with several new aspects and perspectives. They thus contribute to the formulation of the presuppositions of a philosophical theory of the Anthropocene and to the understanding of the possibilities and limits of post-Holocene societies to formulate the economic-political principles of their organization respecting not only safe but also just Planetary Boundaries (Rockström et al. 2023). Indeed, it is increasingly evident that social and environmental inequalities and injustices are mutually reinforcing. Exploring the environmental-social reality therefore requires an empirical-normative approach, which is applied in all the following texts.

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Guest Editor

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