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On the great revolution of the humble teacher of Halle

Great discoveries are rare within social sciences and humanities: more often, we here encounter new interpretations of old authors or unknown works by the known authors. In bioethics, however, one discovery had recently occurred that changed the history, and even more the future of that discipline: by the end of the 20th century, Rolf Löther discovered, and Eve-Marie Engels, José-Roberto Goldim, and Hans-Martin Sass in particular have promoted the work of Fritz Jahr – the author of the name and concept of bioethics, the teacher and theologian who had founded a new worldview, not any more anthropocentrically narrowed, but broad, full of understanding, tolerance, hope, and love toward all living members of nature. Unlike Van Rensselaer Potter (1911-2001), the American onco-biochemist who by some is still believed to have first used the term „bioethics“ (1970), Fritz Jahr actually arrived to bioethics by being amazed by science – its experiments and discoveries of the analogy between the structure and functions of plants, animals, and humans. Our present „amazement“ (as well as Potter’s) has somehow been shrunk and replaced by realistic caution, sometimes even skepticism.

For „his“ bioethics (considering the taking over of moral duties toward everything alive), Jahr correctly claims not to be an invention of his time, but a long and rich legacy of Schleiermacher, Herder, Krause, Andersen, Wagner, Hartmann, even of St. Paul, St. Francis, and others – practically, of the entire European cultural corpse. In that way, Jahr’s teaching has become the heritage of the entire Continent – the „European Bioethics.“ In his paper from 1926, in which he first names the new discipline (Potter will first call it „science,“ but will later change his opinion and start

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to view it as a „religion“), Jahr also formulates the famous „Bioethical Imperative“ (like he had forged „bioethics“ according to Eisler’s „bio-psychics“, he forged his bioethical imperative according to Kant’s Categorical Imperative). While, in the later two papers, he will deal more with animal ethics (following mostly the Bible, the Pietists of the 17th century, and Bregenzer), in the article from 1926, Jahr prevalently explains (and supports by examples) the „plant ethics“, which certainly was less „self-understandable“ in Jahr’s time (but even in our-time thinking). According to Jahr, ethical duties toward animals and plants, however, are diminished with respect to the duties toward (other) men for the sake of the fight for survival and smaller „needs“ of those beings. Besides, a living being in itself contains „determination“ (its „purpose“) which is to be remembered when defining one’s own obligations. Hereby Jahr essentially relativises his „revolution“, but, most probably, in this way actually strengthens it and brings it closer to reality. Fritz Jahr thus does not problematise animal experiments or human consummation of animal meat, but stands up against torturing animals without reason and, taking Hartmann for his model, gives up aesthetics as a sufficient motive for destroying plants. Moreover, Jahr condemns the „concern“ for rare plants from the anthropocentric perspective (in his paper from 1927, only 15 days younger than the paper from 1926, but published in the far more widely read *Kosmos*) and stresses the rightfulness of the Far-Eastern doctrines viewing the biocentric purpose in plants. Jahr’s amazement toward life and nature is a kind of Pantheism which, once again, brings him closer to Potter and Potter’s models – Teilhard de Chardin, Emerson, Muir, and Leopold – who, again, all were fascinated by the Transcendentalism with its forerunners in the Pietists Kant and Schleiermacher, and in the religions of India. By this closed circle, the saying has been confirmed once again, that good ideas travel through time allowing to be articulated by exceptional individuals.