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Environmental Ethics as an Ascetic Practice in the Age of Technology[1]

ABSTRACT: *This paper deals with the asceticism as a strategy of environmental ethics in the late modernity. This strategy can be observed in various political and civic initiatives as measure for reducing excess consumption as well as in various spiritual ecological practises. The extraordinary increase in the power of technology extends our responsibility, limiting it at the same time to a negative kind of action, i.e. an action in which what should not be done is much more obvious than what should be done. The authors who examine the late modernity (Bruno Latour, Ulrich Beck) usually look for 'technological' or 'institutional' solutions to the ecological crisis, and the question of the responsible subject becomes only one of the variables in the risk management equation. This paper proposes to look for a solution to the crisis of responsibility by posing again a question on the genesis of the ethical subject through the lens of Michel Foucault's concept of asceticism as 'technology of the self'.*

KEYWORDS: *technology, responsibility, asceticism, self.*

1. Introduction

Environmental ethics extends the boundaries of traditional ethics, which is usually identified with immediate human activity in the interpersonal sphere. Traditionally, all dealings with the nonhuman world, that is, with the natural world and the entire realm of *techne*, were ethically neutral. However, facing the reality of the ecological problems caused by the increased power of technology, environmental ethics embraces the relationship between human activity and the environment: it refuses the sharp distinction between nature and human being, revises the extent of the responsibility of the individual and collective ethical agent, and reconsiders the nature of the ethical practice.

In the wide field of public discourse considering environmental ethics, we find a number of references to asceticism, restraint or self-limitation as the only possible ethical practice. It is not only philosophers who urge us to seek "a consensus to sharply reduce our habits of excessive consumption, to lower our celebrated 'Western' stan-

dard of living of recent times"[2]. This exhortation also reverberates in political rhetoric and international agreements, for example, in the Kyoto protocol (the commitment to reduce emissions) (1997), the Paris climate agreement (an action plan to limit global warming "well below" 2 degrees Celsius) (2015), etc. In turn, some environmentalists have doubts as to whether the ascetic strategy is appropriate for the modern world. For example, Ozzie Zehner states that the ascetic and self-sacrificing strategy is ineffective because it requires too much of us: "even though the long-term risks of climate change are widely acknowledged in public discourse, it's difficult for citizens to mobilize changes to their individual behaviour in response to such nebulous concerns. Concerned citizens may lionize sacrifices for being noble, even virtuous, but as a society we unsympathetically ignore them in practice"[3]. In essence, this apprehension is repeated by Naomi Klein, recalling Jimmy Carter's speech (1979)[4] as a failure of the ascetic policy: any politician who asks voters to make sacrifices to solve an environmental crisis is on a suicide mission[5]. Nevertheless, we can also see many ascetic initiatives that are spontaneously evolving, and subsequently more widespread: from *zero waste* movement[6] to various spiritual ecological practices[7].

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2 H. Jonas, *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1996, p. 109.

3 O. Zehner, *Green Illusions. The Dirty Secrets of Clean Energy and the Future of Environmentalism*, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 2012, p. 179.

4 "I ask Congress to give me authority for mandatory conservation and for standby gasoline rationing. To further conserve energy, I'm proposing tonight an extra ten billion dollars over the next decade to strengthen our public transportation systems. And I'm asking you for your good and for your nation's security to take no unnecessary trips, to use carpools or public transportation whenever you can, to park your car one extra day per week, to obey the speed limit, and to set your thermostats to save fuel. Every act of energy conservation like this is more than just common sense, I tell you it is an act of patriotism": J. Carter, *Energy and the National Goals – A Crisis of Confidence*, retrieved from https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jimmycarter-crisisofconfidence.htm (accessed May 8th, 2019).

5 N. Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, New Delhi, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2014, p. 102.

6 The term 'zero waste' was coined in the 1970s by the chemist Paul Palmer who engineered ways to reuse chemicals leftover from the electronic technology industry by mixing them into useful, sellable blends. Palmer promoted ways to redesign systems of production so that waste outputs from one process served as usable inputs for another (See P. Palmer, *Getting to Zero Waste*, Sebastopol (CA), Purple Sky Press, 2005). Since the 1970s, this term is evolving as it is coming more widely used in the fields of policy and behavioural change (see Global Alliance for Incineration Alternatives (GAIA), *On the Road to Zero Waste: Successes and Lessons from Around the World*, 2012, retrieved from http://www.no-burn.org/wp-content/uploads/On-the-Road-to-Zero-Waste.pdf, accessed May 8th, 2019; R. Peterson, *Trash Radicals: Sustainability's New Ascetic Ideal*, in "National Association of Scholars", 2014, February 27, retrieved from https://www.nas.org/articles/trash_radicals_sustainabilitys_new_ascetic_ideal, accessed May 8th, 2019). It is important to emphasize that zero waste movement or lifestyle is not about recycling and reusing of resources, it is about preventing waste and reducing consumption (See B. Johnson, *Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide to Simplifying Your Life by Reducing Your Waste*, New York, Scribner, 2013).

7 See K. T. Kramer, *Eco-Asceticism: Preparing for the Future through Discipline Today*, in "America: The Jesuit Review", 2007, November 5, retrieved from https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/632/faith-focus/eco-asceticism (accessed May 8th, 2019); Metropolitan John

However, not everyone agrees that this ascetic zeal looks like an expression of responsibility. Bruno Latour in his paper "It's development, stupid! or: How to Modernize Modernization" writes:

> if we look back at our own history with this [modernist] narrative, it appears to us as a monstrosity, as something so horrible, so contradictory that we seem to have no way out of it except by converting ourselves suddenly to asceticism and repentance. This is the time when Atlas is submitted to the Great Temptation: "I should not have taken the whole Earth on my back. I am going to withdraw".[8]

Latour's ironic remark on our desperate attempt to turn back time suggests that this French philosopher considers the turn to asceticism in late modernity as a temptation rather than a responsibility. In the age of technology, we cannot simply abandon our technological monsters and their unintended consequences.

Therefore, in my paper, I will try to examine what hides behind the asceticism in the age of technology. Do we face here the awareness of the extent of environmental problems and the responsibility that forces all society to change the direction of its development or, on the contrary, deal with powerlessness and fear of responsibility? In subsequent sections, I will argue that asceticism as well as its critique can reveal themselves as particular strategies of environmental ethics when the question of the ethical agent and its responsibility in the age of technology is concretized. However, this concretization is a daunting task. Can we answer who is responsible, where does the responsibility lie? Is it with those who generate ecological problems, those who benefit from them, those who are potentially affected by them, or with the public institutions? Or perhaps we should take into account the transformation of the notion of responsibility itself and avoid considering the ethical agent as simply a natural pre-given entity (in the sense of the legal entity as enshrined in human rights), but to look more closely at the issue of its constitution.

2. Asceticism and the Crisis of the Subject of Responsibility

Both the supporters of the ascetic strategy and its opponents agree that, to a certain extent, the announcement of asceticism is an expression of the crisis of responsibility. Hans Jonas, one of the most significant contributors to philosophical reflection on science, technology, and ethics, notes that in the age of technology the scale of responsibility expands because of the unprecedentedly increased and accumulated power of technology. We must take responsibility as far as the effects

(Zizioulas) of Pergamon *Ecological Asceticism: A Cultural Revolution*, in "Orthodox Outlet for Dogmatic Enquiries", 2009, retrieved from http://www.oodegr.com/english/koinwnia/perival-lon/Ecological_asceticism.htm (accessed May 8th, 2019).

8 B. Latour, *It's development, stupid! or: How to Modernize Modernization*, p. 10. Retrieved from http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/107-NORDHAUS&SHELLENBERGER.pdf (accessed May 8th, 2019).

of this power are concerned. However, on the other hand, the new level of technological power does not allow us to clearly define and control its effects. Nuclear power, the impact of biotechnology, the depletion of natural resources, rainforest deforestation have long-term and unpredictable consequences, and endanger the future of mankind and other species. These threats lead to the paralysis of action (renunciation of action or renunciation in action), where it is unclear how the responsible practice should take shape. In such a situation, it is much more obvious what should *not* be done than what *should* be done. A similar aspect is noted by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck. He takes note of the "spacio-temporal gap between actions and their impacts"[9]. Contemporary environmental hazards such as ozone depletion, damage to the reproductive and immune system of species or bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) have not arisen as symptoms until the years they began their impact as invisible effects of specific actions. Therefore, this cumulative effect of our actions does not allow us to clearly assess the scope of our responsibility and to decide which action would be more appropriate in the presence of ecological hazards. As Timothy Clark has observed, "the greater the number of people engaged in modern forms of consumption then the less the relative influence or responsibility of each but the worse the cumulative impact of their insignificance"[10].

The crisis of the agent of responsibility (personal or collective) leads towards the change of the notion of responsibility itself. The subjective autonomous actor's responsibility that focuses on his or her actions (responsibility as being accountable for one's deeds) finds itself in tension with another notion of responsibility, that is, with responsibility for the matter that has a claim on one's acting, i.e., the responsibility for the things entrusted to one's care, for something that is in the field of one's power and influence, that depends on him or her and that he or she can harm (the responsibility for particular objects that commits an agent to particular deeds concerning them).

Thus, here I mean the tension between formal (or legal) responsibility, which allows us to assign actions to the actor with reference to a causal connection, and a positive, purpose-oriented responsibility, defined by what is to be done[11]. In the first case, responsibility is based on the priority of the agent of responsibility: he or she is clearly defined, operates freely and independently. In the second case, on the contrary, due to the operation of the accumulated technology, it is not easy to indicate the consequences of the actions, unless we speak about the dangers they posed, and clearly identify the agent of the action. Hans

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9 U. Beck, *Risk Society Revisited: Theory, Politics and Research Programmes*, in *The Risk Society and Beyond. Critical Issues for Social Theory*, ed. by B. Adam, U. Beck and J. Loon, London- New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, 2000, p. 220.

10 T. Clark, *Derangements of Scale*, in *Telemorphosis. Theory in the Era of Climate Change*, vol. I, ed. by Th. Cohen, Open Humanities Press, 2012, pp. 148-166: 150.

11 H. Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search for an Ethics for the Technological Age* (1979), Engl. transl. by H. Jonas with the collaboration of D. Herr, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 90-93.

Jonas sees here the difference between formal and substantial responsibility, while Ulrich Beck announces the crisis of traditional notion of responsibility. He invokes the quite paradoxical concept of 'organized irresponsibility'. According to Beck, on the one hand, the institutions of late modern society must unavoidably acknowledge the reality of catastrophe, on the other hand, they simultaneously deny its existence, hide its origins, and preclude compensation or control[12]. Consequently, we are environed by an ambient hum of guilt, easily faded out, because no individual or institution seems to be held specifically accountable for anything. We have here a kind of 'negative socialization'[13] predicated essentially on dependence on hazards that elude judgement and decisions. In other words, faced with unintended and unknown side effects, late modern society becomes reflexive not so much in terms of responsibility as in terms of risk management.

Both Jonas and Beck are trying to solve the issue of the agent of responsibility by appealing to the sphere of public policy. According to Jonas, "knowledge, will and power are collective, and therefore control of them must also be collective: it can come only from the forces within the public sector"[14]. Of course, one can think of politicians' responsibility, raising public awareness, and preventive asceticism in order to avoid undesirable consequences at any cost (for example, Jonas' disapproval of genetic engineering by appealing to irreversible changes), but how to avoid a situation where no one is specifically responsible for anything? Beck, following Jonas' idea, proposes a set of tactical or procedural solutions. Beck mentions a few items: 1) consequences must be publicly debated before decisions that produce them are taken; 2) perpetrators must be compelled to prove that their production is non-hazardous; 3) strongest ally of the authoritarian technocracy must be mobilized and draw over to the side of life and future; 4) a division of power is required between research and applications, between diagnosis of hazards and therapeutic safety measures[15], and so on. As we can see, the solutions offered by Beck are at least partially 'managerial'[16], that is, all they are essentially directed towards searching for the proper functioning of the institutions, while the question of the ethical subject/actor is removed from the agenda. More specifically, for Beck, the process of individualisation in late modernity has the ironic-tragic dimension because it is the individual who is severed from the decision contexts but always is the recipient of the residual risk:

12 U. Beck, *Risk Society Revisited*, cit., p. 224.

13 Idem, *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk* (1988), Engl. transl. by A. Weisz, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995, p. 52.

14 H. Jonas, *Mortality and Morality*, cit., p. 109.

15 U. Beck, *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk*, cit., pp. 170-171: 178.

16 Here I use the term 'management' in its traditional sense: it refers to the activities involved in five general functions or elements – planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, controlling. See H. Fayol, *General and Industrial Management* (1916), Engl. transl. by C. Storrs, London, Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1948.

whatever propels risk and makes it incalculable, whatever provokes the institutional crisis at the level of the governing regime and markets, shifts the ultimate decision-making responsibility onto the individuals, who are ultimately left to their own devices with their partial and biased knowledge, with undecidability and multiple layers of uncertainty.[17]

According to Ino Rossi, Beck makes a distinction between *reflective* individual of the first modernity and *reflexive* individual of the risk society of the second or late modernity; the latter subject is rather a quasi-subject who at the same time is the producer and the outcome of its own boundaries: "[...] individual is forced to make many choices at great speed without existing models, he acts like a *reflex* or an interminable producer of indeterminate and immediate reflexes: deals, networks and alliances that are continuously constructed, combined and recombined"[18]. Moreover, the hazards of risk society (climate change and garbage crisis) are also considered by Beck as quasi-subjects, that is, as powerful, uncontrollable 'actors' that delegitimize and destabilize state institutions with responsibilities for pollution control[19]. Thus, taking into account the specifics of Beck's sociological analysis, we must state that responsibility is increasingly taken to be perceived as a risk management process and, consequently, the personal responsibility is replaced by global social risk management mechanisms[20]. However, we should remember here Jacques Derrida, who, in an interview with French historian and philosopher François Ewald, spoke about "singular responsibility without which there would be no morality, law or politics"[21].

So, I would like to pose the question about the responsible agent from a different angle: does the new notion of responsibility – responsibility for the matter that has a claim on my acting (or, in terms of Emmanuel Levinas and Paul Ricoeur, responsibility for the vulnerable other, potential victim of my action), responsibility for the future vulnerability of humanity and its environment – presupposes constitution of responsible agent? If so, how can we escape the false 'alibi' of 'organized irresponsibility' and the temptation of 'managerial' solution?

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17 U. Beck, *World at Risk* (2007), Engl. transl. by C. Cronin, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2009, p. 195.

18 I. Rossi, *Reflexive Modernization*, in *Ulrich Beck: Pioneer in Cosmopolitan Sociology and Risk Society*, ed. by U. Beck, New York City, Springer, 2014, p. 61.

19 U. Beck, *Risk Society Revisited*, cit., p. 225.

20 On the other hand, Beck calls for a paradigm shift within sociology: "every modelling of uncertainty remains under the spell of the tradition of risk analysis and risk management which has its roots in classical security research and is driven by the concern to achieve a socially acceptable and efficient 'managing' of uncertainty. [...] The primary focus for the present must be on the global social constitutive conditions of risk and not on coping with their consequences" (Idem, *World at Risk*, cit., p. 52).

21 R. Kearney, *Derrida's Ethical Re-turn*, in *Working through Derrida*, ed. by G. B. Madison, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1993, pp. 28-50: 28.

3. The Notion of Asceticism

To answer these questions, let's go back to the aforementioned ascetic strategy. Should we understand asceticism only as a negative kind of action that indicates the crisis of the subject of responsibility? Or maybe, on the contrary, the ascetic strategy could serve as a positive strategy in its constitution? Therefore, we should start with the very notion of asceticism. The authors mentioned above (especially the critics of asceticism) understand asceticism as a practice of self-denial and sacrifice. Meanwhile, I think we should go beyond this common usage of this term. In this paper I would like to emphasize asceticism more as a reflective practice that changes the way of life and creates what we can call subjectivity.

According to Geoffrey Galt Harpham, we can make a distinction between 'tight' and 'loose' senses of asceticism: "in the tight sense asceticism is a product of early Christian ethics and spirituality; in the loose sense it refers to any act of self-denial undertaken as a strategy of empowerment or gratification"[22]. In the context of modernity, we should mention Max Weber's concept of "rationally active asceticism" which means the striving to master the world and "to tame what is creatural and wicked through work in a worldly 'vocation'"[23]. That would be the 'inner-worldly asceticism'. In a sense, it is the asceticism from which the spirit of capitalism was born.

Seeing that asceticism in the loose sense includes the way in which societies operate hegemonically and with those who resist, I invoke a more neutral concept of asceticism that I found in the later philosophy of Michel Foucault. Foucault takes asceticism in a more general sense than that attributed to it by Weber, but along the same lines. He comprehends "asceticism in a very general sense – in other words, not in the sense of morality of renunciation but as an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being"[24]. So, asceticism is not primary and fundamentally renunciation, it involves, rather, acquiring something through 'exercises', through 'training'. Foucault emphasizes the generative function of asceticism which is production of subjectivity: "we must acquire something we do not have, rather than renounce this or that element of ourselves that we are or have. We must acquire something that, precisely, instead of leading us gradually to renounce ourselves, will allow us to protect the self and to reach it"[25].

22 G.G. Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. XIII.

23 M. Weber, *Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions* (1920), in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, translated, edited and with an introduction by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, London, Routledge, 1991, p. 325. Retrieved from https://archive.org/stream/frommaxweberessa00webe#page/324/mode/2up (accessed May 8th, 2019).

24 M. Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by P. Rabinow, Engl. transl. by R. Hurley and others, New York, The New York Press, 1997, p. 282.

25 M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*, Engl. transl. by G. Burchell, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 320.

In these discussions on the concept of asceticism we can see an effort to oppose the asceticism understood in a narrow sense (or, in Weber's terms, 'world-rejecting asceticism'). The narrow understanding of asceticism is limited to self-denial; to rejection of one or another element of our selves (it means withdrawal from possession of worldly goods, from political, economic, artistic activities and so forth). At the same time, it supposes pre-given and identical selfhood. Asceticism, as it is interpreted by Foucault, in late or reflective modernity, transforms itself from an active production of agent-subject to "a process of self overcoming that opens possibilities for movements of differing rather than the continued movement of purification that is insistence upon the identity of the same"[26].

It should be noted, however, that Foucault's concept of asceticism as 'technology of the self' does not escape the ambiguity that lies in the very concept of 'technology'. On the one hand, such practices in each civilization are offered to individuals in order to define their identity: to some extent, everyone is constituted as particular congeries of the 'effects' of the networks of power. Thus individuals connect themselves to the requirements of a socio-political system. But, on the other hand, these practices also acquire the character of emancipation from this system and create the new forms of the self: if we become aware of the history of what we have been, we thereby open the space for "the undefined work of freedom"[27].

4. Asceticism as the Process of Self-transformation and Reflective Critique

Therefore, I will move to the question of ethical subject/agent constitution as ascetical practice of self-transformation in Foucault's philosophy. Foucault's approach to the ethical subject is quite paradoxical. According to American philosopher Judith Butler, Foucault believes that we must avow an error as constitutive of who we are. In other words, the ethical subject/agent is constituted by the awareness of self-deficiency: "what conditions our doing is a constitutive limit, for which we cannot give a full account, and this condition is, paradoxically, the basis of our accountability"[28]. Thereby, Foucault constantly emphasizes that our power to reflect on ourselves has a price. It can be assumed that Foucault here means that each self-reflection, turning itself into an 'object of knowledge', at the same time, provides awareness of the loss or extinction of something that avoids the 'tentacles' of the cognitive means available in the current discourse. By realizing this, we acquire a responsibility rather than an 'alibi'. According to Butler,

> giving account of oneself comes at a price not only because the "I" that I present cannot present many of the conditions of its own formation but because the "I" that

26 L. McWhorter, *Asceticism/Askesis: Foucault's Thinking Historical Subjectivity*, in *Ethics and Danger: Essays on Heidegger and Continental Thought*, ed. by A. B. Dallery, Ch.E. Scott and P. H. Roberts, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1992, pp. 243-254: 253.

27 M. Foucault, *Ethics*, cit., p. 316.

28 J. Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2005, p. 111.

yields to narration cannot comprise many dimensions of itself: the social parameters of address, the norms through which the "I" becomes intelligible, the non-narrative or even unspeakable dimensions of the unconscious that persist as an enabling foreignness at the heart of my desire.[29]

If we accept the existing forms of rationality as a matter of course, we forget or deny the price we pay (and hence the responsibility). Therefore, both the forms of rationality and the practices of behaviour require constant problematization and reflective distance. The latter could even be called 'the ethical distance', because it creates a dynamic self-identity, which is not limited to actions or defined functions, but is sensitive to the new challenges and threats.

What happens when we place the question of the subject's constitution in the situation of the age of technology? Such localization of the question does not isolate it; and the problematization, which implies a reflective relationship with our present, is based on the relation with the previous postulates or principles and future tasks. Let's take a closer look at one of the transformations of modernity that emerged in Foucault's 'history of subject', that is, the transformation of the imperative "take care of the self" into the imperative "know yourself". According to Foucault, the care of the self or concern for the self (*epimeleia heautou*) has been understood by ancient philosophers as a gamut of activities, practices and duties that requires time, attention, repetition, exercises of body and spirit. The care of the self was inseparable from the relationship with the truth: "for the subject to have right of access to the truth he must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than himself"[30]. However, the transformation that has taken place in modernity has limited the relation with the truth: the evidence of the knowledge of oneself has gained importance, while the relationship with the truth as a practice of the self-formation and transformation was left without attention. This is the price we pay for our ability to reflect on ourselves. For Foucault, the equation of philosophical asceticism with renunciation of feeling, solidarity, and care for one's self and for others (as the price of knowledge) was one of our biggest wrong turnings[31]. However, he does not interpret this fracture as something that has happened once and for all and does not urge to return to the ancient world. For Foucault, it is more important to show the contingency of each solution, its integral relation to the problems of its own time, but also the possibility of an undefined work of freedom that lies in it.

Therefore, the general formulation of the problem, "the constitution of responsibility in the age of technology", which was the starting point for Jonas' reflections, threatens to become empty in Foucault's case, if we interpret it as a search for a universal answer or solution that can be achieved through technical-administrative means rather than as a problematization that promotes the formation of *multiple* behavioural strategies and solutions, often quite marginal.

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29 *Ibidem*, p. 135.
30 M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, cit., p. 15.
31 P. Rabinow, *Introduction. The History of Systems of Thought*, in M. Foucault *Ethics*, cit., pp. XI-XLV: XXV.

These multiple behavioural strategies can work as resistance practices. For example, Éric Darier, following the analysis of Foucault's resistance strategies in the field of environmental movement[32], seeks to show how resistance strategies can direct not only the development of alternative practices of the self, but also deeper critique of consumer system:

> it is through practical opposition to a new landfill site or incinerator that individuals and communities may start questioning the conditions which have led to a "garbage crisis". Household recycling can be one technical alternative which transforms individual subjectivity from "wasteful" consumer to recycling Green consumer. However, it could also lead one to re-question the entire process of consumerism, and why and how individuals are seduced by it.[33]

Even though Foucault's notion of asceticism as exercises of the self does not provide a ready-made response, and does not protect against mistakes, it illustrates how helplessness that we feel when faced with the hazards of the age of technology can be transformed into a few purposeful practices of responsibility. Our practices (such as responsible shopping, responsible energy consumption) should be motivated not by the abstract risk of 'global warming' or 'global garbage crisis', but, for example, by our unwillingness to identify ourselves with wasteful consumers. The success of these strategic practices is always contextual and requires constant revising, but it is this vigilant tension that enables the process of the self-transformation.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, I wanted to show that asceticism as a strategy of environmental ethics in the age of technology should not be confined to a negative action, *i.e.* to self-denial or self-restraint. Asceticism, as a practice of the self, allows us to open the possibilities of positive responsible action. I perceive these possibilities as an alternative to responsibility, limited to the managerial or technological solutions offered by Ulrich Beck, Bruno Latour and, in part, Hans Jonas. Of course, appropriate managerial and technological solutions at the national and global levels could allow us to cope with ecological threats and integrate nature within the fabric of society, but whether such a project would not be illusory if the question of the constitution of responsible subject remained unresolved.

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32 Although Foucault was rather indifferent or even critical of the ecological movement, seeing it as contradictory (on the one hand, he noticed its hostility to science and technology, on the other hand, its scientific reasoning), but his position allows me to develop what I called environmental ethics as ascetic practice in the age of technology.

33 É. Darier, *Foucault against Environmental Ethics*, ed. by É. Darier, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1999, pp. 217-240: 234.