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## *Jahr through Sass: contributions to a novel understanding of bioethics and the arts.*

*“The whole art of loving consists in retaining this high point of vision as a perspective and remaining under its spell. A life of love is a life spent in the knowledge of what is best worth knowing, a life of participation in the highest that is in man.” Nicolai Hartmann*

In 2013 Hans-Martin Sass published an article, the first known to be written by Fritz Jahr, in which the German shepherd, who conceived the term bioethics, had the opportunity to explore the power of music as a teaching tool for small children. An English version translated by Irene M. Miller and by Sass himself, which included the musical scores and illustrated the recitative passages suggested by Jahr, was also translated into Spanish and spread throughout Latin America, resulting in a strong influence on the understanding of the origins of bioethics and the arts<sup>1</sup>. This article, a tribute [*Festschrift*] to the work of Hans-Martin Sass, explores within the same text a variety of senses and perspectives of the original one, summarizing the inspirations received by Jahr from music, painting and literature.

The concept of bioethics has, from the very beginning, been linked to art. Two years before publishing his pioneer article in *Kosmos* magazine, Fritz Jahr was a school

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<sup>1</sup> This *Festschrift* is an extension of the original editorial *Bioethics and the Arts before Nazism: Fritz Jahr's Essays between 1924-1933* written by Juan Jorge Michel Fariña, Natacha Salomé Lima & Irene Cambra Badii for the *Aesthethika Journal*, Volume 8 / Issue 2, April 2013. ISSN 1553-5053 <http://www.aesthethika.org/>-Volumen-8-Número-2-

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teacher in Halle an der Saale. During the 1924-1925 school year, he had the opportunity to explore the power of music as a teaching tool for small children. The results of these investigations were included in his article *Der Tonsatz als Unterrichtsmethode* [Musical composition as a teaching method]<sup>2</sup> published in 1926. In it we find the matrix (scope) of his thought that outlines an ethical concept in constant dialogue with the sources of art -painting, literature and most especially, music.

## Musical composition and moral education

Inspired by the work of Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss, Jahr developed a methodology that proposes music as a *via regia* to mould thought and character in young children. He starts by giving his pupils a series of composition exercises [*Tonsatzübungen*], beginning with simple, monochord recitatives, sustained, for example, by the note G:



*The fall-sun smiles from the sky. - Slowly and sadly leaves are falling.*

[*Die Herbst-sonne lacht vomHimmel - Langsamundtraurigfällt das Laub*]

Given that only one note is used, variations are exclusively rhythmical. However, Jahr holds that mood changes can be promoted by playing with these brief temporal oscillations. He proposes to later increase complexity by introducing minimal movements based on half tones or a tone below or above the tonic:



*The fall-sun smiles from the sky. - Slowly and sadly leaves are falling.*

As the phrase that is “sung” is always the same, rhythmic-melodic variations seek to underline the contrast –the text, separated in two sentences by silence in the musical

<sup>2</sup> This article, the first known to be written by Fritz Jahr, was published by Hans-Martin Sass in the original German. This contribution includes the musical scores and illustrated the recitative passages suggested by the author, some of which we have reproduced in this text. There is an English version translated by Irene M. Miller and by Hans-Martin Sass himself in *Fritz Jahr. Essays in Bioethics 1924-1948* (2013) Münster: Lit Verlag.

score, always says “The fall-sun smiles from the sky. - Slowly and sadly leaves are falling.” [*Die Herbst-sonne lacht vomHimmel - Langsamundtraurigfällt das Laub*].

At a more advanced stage, and repeating his method, Jahr slowly introduces simple scales of an ascending sequence in C tonality for the first sentence and a descending sequence in Bb m for the second. The contrast between the major and minor keys generates an atmosphere of joy and sadness, respectively.



*The fall-sun smiles from the sky. - Slowly and sadly leaves are falling*

What was the purpose of this innovative methodology? Jahr based himself on the concept that musical sensitivity is easily understood by the child, who begins to mould a harmonious relationship with his own body and with language, through audition.

It is therefore not surprising that a year later, when he publishes his first, truly bioethical article *Wissenschaft vom Leben und Sittenlehre* [The science of life and moral education. Old discoveries in a new light] he used Wagner’s opera “Parsifal” as a reference to express the desirable relationship of the human being with animal and plants, in a musical and poetical way. He refers to the third act, when on Good Friday, the stem and flowers are protected by treading carefully along the river bank. A short time later, in 1927, in his now well known article *Bio-Ethik: Eine Umschau über die ethischen Beziehungen des Menschen zu Tier und Pflanze* [Bio-Ethics: reviewing the ethical relations of humans towards animals and plants], published in the *Kosmos* magazine, he would again refer to Parsifal, expanding his thoughts on the moving scene of the death of the sacred swan at the hands of a young man in the first act of the opera.<sup>3</sup>

The other important reference to Wagner is also found in 1926, when Jahr evokes Hans Sach’s speech in the opera *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*. The phrase Jahr proposed couldn’t be more suggestive: “*The art of making poetry is nothing more than the interpretation of a dream*” Why does Fritz Jahr refer us to this passage?

We should remember that both the script and the music of the opera were Wagner’s original creation, thought to provide the unique atmosphere for this creative event. This opera was about a singing competition where the two final candidates also vie

<sup>3</sup> For a broader viewpoint see also: *Nachträglich of (bio)ethics* (Aesthetika Volume 6 / Issue 2), and the Spanish version of the Richard’s Wagner Parsifal: <http://eticacycine.org/Parsifal>

for the hand of a beautiful lady. One of the candidates represents technical virtuosity and formal excellence, while the other disregards all the rules of composition but has the gift of creation. Hans Sach, the experienced cobbler and mastersinger, wants the second contestant to be given the chance of winning, which of course he does and also marries the lady.

We could ask ourselves, what does the art of composing consist of? Not in a series of learned principles but in the liberty to desire. Unique style makes a true artist and that's what links the ethical act to the creative event.

## Literature and painting

In the same way, Jahr makes use of literary references to dig deeply into its bio-ethical conception. In order to reach his perspective regarding the human being's ethical relationship with animals and plants, he refers to Hans Christian Andersen's story "The Angel", published in 1843. The story is about a boy, the son of humble parents, who took care of a flower in a dark cellar; it was his greatest and only source of joy. When the boy dies, God not only takes his soul away, he also takes all the flowers that surround him, among which was the flower the boy had so lovingly looked after. In heaven, God kisses the poor, withered flower and it acquires a voice and sings together with the angels.

We should also notice that in the article of 1927 -Bio-Ethics: reviewing the ethical relations of humans towards animals and plants- regarding animal care, Jahr appeals to another literary text, "Der heilige Haß" (Holy Hatred) by Richard Voss, in this case, in order to compare occidental thought with that which came from India. The story is about a boy, belonging to a lower Hindu caste, who refuses to kill a snake because, he argues, "snakes are also our sisters." This is the way Jahr introduces the complex matter of ethical relativism – which will in fact undergo a mayor development during the whole XX century.



Fidus: "Du sollst nicht töten!" 1892

Finally, we might also highlight an example taken from the world of plastic art. In this case the etching by Fidus “*Thou shalt not kill*” [You shall not murder], that shows a child standing in front of a young deer to prevent the hunter from shooting the animal.

Notice the androgynous features of the child. It is interesting to point out that Fidus was the pseudonym of the German painter and publicist Hugo Reinhold Karl Johann Höppener (1868-1948) who was one of the first collaborators of the first homosexual magazine in the world: *Der Eigene*. Banned during the Nazi regime, his images were recovered after his death, by the psychedelic movement of the 60s, which are today highly valued.

## **Is it possible to have a universal language? The ethical value of the erotic diversity of languages**

One more aesthetical reference: in this case indirect and curiously embedded in the critique that Jahr makes of Esperanto as a “sole universal language.”<sup>4</sup> His line of thought consists of showing the virtues of other languages, such as Ido, Esperantita or Interlingua. Although the argument is tinted with the linguistic debates of the early 20th Century, the underlying principle still holds true.

What do artificial languages such as Ido offer? The question not only acquires a technical dimension but also an ethical one. Jahr’s enthusiasm in his pioneer article, the one of 1924, lies in the value that is conferred on the diversity of languages “contained” in Ido. Such diversity, that at times makes it similar to Italian, French or Spanish, puts into play the erotic hues of human phonemics.

Let’s listen to the Our Father prayer in Ido as Fritz Jahr might probably hear it:

*Patro nia, qua esas en la cielo,  
tua nomo santigesez;  
tua regno advenez;  
tua volo facez quale en la cielo  
tale anke sur la tero.  
Donez a ni cadie l’omnadia pano,  
e pardonez a ni nia ofensi,  
quale anke ni pardonas a nia ofensanti,*

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<sup>4</sup> Weltsprache und Weltsprachen. Die Mittelschule. Zeitschrift für das gesamtmittere Schulwesen, 1926, 44:96-97. Jahr’s criticism of Esperanto is part of a wider discussion in “Die Mittelschule”, which originates from an article by Josef Driesler, Esperanto in der Mittelschule. Selbsterlebtes, “Esperanto in Middle-School. Our experience”, Die Mittelschule. Zeitschrift für das gesamtmittere Schulwesen, 1923, 37 (4):25-28, 33-35.

*e ne duktez ni aden la tento,  
ma liberigez ni del malajo.*

This passage sounds like an extraordinary example of the musicality of language. Even though this issue might exceed this *Festschrift*, let us say that Jahr's interest on mediating in the discussion with Esperanto, lies in the ethical-aesthetic potency that he attributes to Ido, more than in the linguistic technicality of one language over the other.

### **Before Nazism: *die bioethische Betätigung***

Finally, it is worthwhile recalling that these references contained in a segment of Fritz Jahr's work, the period between 1924 and 1933, are a clearly intentional selection. It refers to the production prior to Hitler's rise to power in Germany.

Was it possible to continue thinking and writing from a bio-ethical viewpoint under the regime of terror? For us Latin Americans that have undergone fierce dictatorships, it is practically impossible to avoid this question. However, we do leave the matter open for further debate. It is also interesting to notice this selection that starts and ends with Fritz Jahr's concern for children. We might find a path which leads us from moral education through musical composition (1924) to his acute reflections on the child and technology (1933)<sup>5</sup>.

Some years ago, along with Amir Muzur and Iva Rinčić we were traveling with Prof. Hans Martin Sass to reach the Zagreb airport where a nice interview took place laying the foundation for many good and successful years of joint work.<sup>6</sup> At that time we asked Prof. Hans Martin Sass how was the discovery of these sources, and he answered that certainly it was quite an event, in which chance played an important role. It was like discovering a hidden relic in an old trunk. The amazing thing about the story was the fact that in these early Fritz Jahr articles we already found relationships between, for example, tree growth and human behavior. And many related aspects which are the foundations of incipient physiology of the decade of the 1920's. This broad perspective of bioethics can be resumed, not only

<sup>5</sup> Reference to the 1924 articles was taken directly from Hans-Martin Sass' German and translated into Spanish by Agueda Dono and Michael Fisher, as well as the articles written in 1926, 1927 and the last one, The Child and technology, 1933. The others were translated into English by Elinaloan. Technical revision of all the material was done by Natacha Salomé Lima and Irene CambraBadii, in some cases taking as reference the pioneer edition for Latin America, in Portuguese, by Leo Pessini (São Paulo) and by José Roberto Goldim (UFRGS). General edition was in charge of Juan Jorge Michel Fariña, in the framework of the Research Project "Bioethics and Human Rights, an approach to the UNESCO Declaration", University of Buenos Aires, 2011-2014.

<sup>6</sup> Enterwiew made by Natacha Salomé Lima on 14th march 2011, Rijeka, Croatia; translated by Helga Ariadna Lima, who colaborated in the procedure of translating and adapting this *Festschrift*.

in relation to the care and respect of the environment, but also a deep reflection on the different relationships that human beings establish within the principles of medical ethics, animal care, on the objection that should follow the publications in the press and moral education as well. Bioethics might include for its very beginning a concern and ethical obligation not only to humans but also to the whole living environment. Bioethics as an academic discipline, as a foundational cultural and moral principle, and as a virtue.<sup>7</sup> (Sass, 2010, 24-25)

It's within the margins of this principle, we find what Jahr defined as the *bioethische Betätigung* whose most literal translation refer us to the world of relationships, meaning the world of bonds that linked human beings with their natural and non-natural surroundings. Including our ethical concerns for animals and plants, in a sort of shared responsibility towards the environment in which we live. It is also important to note that one of the current challenges of contemporary bioethics is, according to Sass, the analysis of our *expression of empathy*. This represents a major challenge when we have to deal with intercultural situations where it is necessary not only to respect the beliefs and expectations of patients (safeguarding the principle of autonomy) but also making them participants in the decisions made about their bodies and their lives (outcomes and limits of informed consent). It is increasingly necessary to work together with doctors and other related professionals around the scope of their practice, knowing that the medical discourse creates reality for everyone involved; and if a misdiagnosis can be read as 'fait accompli', the person not only loses autonomy but it limits their freedom. And although the "medical diagnosis" could be the correct one which led through an inexorable fate, the ethical perspective should safeguard the subjective dimension, looking after the autonomy and leaving a margin of decision which respects the different worldviews, which are rather unique and singular. Finally it is *not a general consideration of the world, but a possibility to find ourselves within our actions*.

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<sup>7</sup> Selected Essays in bioethics 1927-1934, Fritz Jahr. November 2010. Hans-Martin Sass: postscriptum and references, pp.24-32.

