



# THE PHENOMENON OF SCARCITY:

Being, Man and Community

A SYNTHESIS OF AN  
INTERDISCIPLINARY  
INQUIRY INTO  
SCARCITY:

RESEARCH  
APPROACHES AND  
PERSPECTIVES



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# A SYNTHESIS OF AN INTERDISCIPLINARY INQUIRY INTO SCARCITY: RESEARCH APPROACHES AND PERSPECTIVES

Edited by

Elena Leontjeva, Aneta Vainė, Marija Vyšniauskaitė

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## Abstract

This paper<sup>1</sup> presents a hermeneutic interpretation of philosophical, theological, psychological, sociological, anthropological and economic research on scarcity and interdisciplinary insights about the role of scarcity in the order of being and daily existence.

The disciplines embraced in this research project name and define scarcity in different ways and address distinct aspects of scarcity. Yet, the study reveals essential similarities across the disciplines and leads to a conclusion that scarcity is a universal phenomenon that unfolds through diverse forms and manifestations.

The social sciences typically concentrate on negative aspects of scarcity that disguise scarcity as an origin of being, creation, and change. This study takes a step further and focuses on the least explored aspects of scarcity that turn out to be positive and essential for the functioning of society.

Philosophy explains scarcity as one of the primary elements in the structure of being and a fundamental cause of change. Christian theology, especially Biblical theology, explains the purposefulness of scarcity. Scarcity appears to be an inevitable mark of our being in body, in space, and in time. This understanding lays the ground for exploring the connection between scarcity, freedom, and morality. Psychology, sociology, and anthropology show that our negative daily experiences of scarcity raise tensions and overshadow the understanding of its roots and purpose. Negative economic experiences and the traditional reduction of scarcity to the shortage of material goods create an illusion that scarcity has to be abolished. Such a perception leads to a meaningless confrontation of man with the reality, society, and oneself.

The understanding and acceptance of scarcity makes it possible to direct human energy and efforts toward purposeful and productive action, cooperation, and advancement.

Keywords: scarcity, interdisciplinary, freedom, perception, experience.

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# Introduction

## **A source of inspiration and assumptions of the interdisciplinary study on scarcity and key findings from different disciplines**

Scarcity, lack, and limitation are usually regarded as synonyms that describe the fact that material and nonmaterial things in this world and human beings themselves are limited and finite. Our research shows that scarcity is:

- one of the metaphysical elements of the origin of being together with form and matter (philosophy);
- a precondition of freedom and a sign of blessing (theology);
- poverty, a lack of material resources (anthropology);
- a state of dissatisfaction with biological and social needs (psychology);
- a tension between natural needs and socially constructed wants (sociology);
- a lack of resources (economics).

Everybody is born in the condition of scarcity. In order to survive, it is necessary to act so that resources are put to useful ends. However, resources are not used by a single agent. There are other agents who want to use the same resources to satisfy their needs. A possibility of conflict *or* of cooperation evolves:

*The natural scarcity of the means of sustenance forces every living being to look upon all other living beings as deadly foes in the struggle for survival, and generates pitiless biological competition. But with man these irreconcilable conflicts of interests disappear in the division of labor; people become cooperators in striving after ends common to all of them.* (Mises, 1999, p. 667).

Our research finds that scarcity is addressed by all disciplines but through different aspects and by different names. To philosophers and theologians, scarcity is known as an integral, ontological feature of being; they are able to penetrate its origins. Yet, even in those prime disciplines the topic of scarcity is fragmentary. Significant findings of ancient and medieval thought remained underdeveloped and were not taken forward. The knowledge of scarcity as an ontological category remained relatively incoherent and was barely applied in the social sciences.

The fact that a common vocabulary is absent and adjacent phenomena and their interactions are not explored confirms that we have undertaken to study a subject barely known to science. Notably, this seems to be in line with the spirit of this study: the knowledge about scarcity is scarce.

This synthesis of our interdisciplinary research on scarcity is based on the hermeneutical method. The findings of studies from across the disciplines are interpreted and reproduced. Each study helps to understand the whole, which in turn unlocks distinct texts. While working on this project we had to take several directions at once: develop a dictionary of terms and concepts, explore the relationship between the phenomena under analysis, and investigate each discipline's potential to contribute to the study. The six disciplines – philosophy, theology, economics, anthropology, psychology, and sociology – provide a framework for the analysis of scarcity. They offer profound insights and open up horizons for further research.

Classical philosophers, starting with Aristotle (384–322 BC) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) who later builds on Aristotle's heritage, show that scarcity is a universal cause of being and change. That explains why scarcity is reflected in so many different areas. The will lacks the good and seeks the good; a bud lacks a blossom and gradually acquires it; a human being lacks knowledge and seeks it. Scarcity is revealed as a core stimulus of any change, an integral feature of a dynamic reality.

Philosophy shows that scarcity belongs to the reality of being and explains it as one of the primary causes. Meanwhile, Christian theology and Biblical studies explain the sources of scarcity itself. The theologians on our research team come to independent conclusions that scarcity is a purposeful characteristic of being, a natural and inherent element of creation. Theology argues that scarcity came into being together with creation, and so it may not be associated exclusively with sin or evil. Scarcity is a necessary attribute of our being in body, time, and space. The world and humanity are created in such a way that every created being is open to change inherent to its nature. This means that everything is marked by scarcity.

Philosophy and theology bring the knowledge of the phenomenon of scarcity. Yet, our researchers emphasize that their disciplines do not offer a profound analysis of scarcity, so there is no universal and coherent theory of scarcity. That explains why the social sciences have not adopted philosophical and theological concepts of scarcity. In those branches of science, scarcity is an object of human experience whose evaluation

depends on a particular experience. “From the point of view of anthropology and sociology, scarcity is fundamental,” and at the same time “in the area of sociality scarcity is surprisingly ‘bypassed’, both in practice and in theory” (Valantiejus, 2015, p. 6-7).

The late scholastics who inherited from Aquinas the idea of scarcity as an origin of being had an unparalleled opportunity to develop it further. In a time of expanding and emancipating economic relations, theologians saw a need to explain the morality of economic action. That advanced moral philosophy and economics. We therefore paid special attention to the works of the late scholastics, and especially to the heritage of the school of Salamanca. The studies reveal that scarcity was associated with the lack of concrete mundane things, rather than with primordial scarcity beyond experience. This explains the tendency to regard scarcity as a consequence of original sin and to associate it with evil. Still, the works of the late scholastics offer multiple groundbreaking insights that can deepen the understanding of the role of scarcity, such as the explication of private property, of value, and of the mechanism of exchange. This study does not suggest that scarcity as a concept of ontological reality was purposefully developed by the late scholastics, or that this notion gave impetus to the understanding of economic laws. Most probably, scarcity as understood in the Thomistic way intuitively inspired and directed the works of the late scholastics, but was not specifically defined or described.

The ontological nature of scarcity is not properly acknowledged by the social sciences and so it viewed as something negative, as misfortune, poverty, injustice, or an outcome of class struggle. The social sciences are orientated towards the elimination of scarcity.

*If we accept that fundamental scarcity, ontic or original sin, is a constant in human beings, then any theory speaking about the complete elimination of scarcity in human society and all our environment is a utopia. In other words, people cannot create themselves nor their surrounding environment in which this feature does not exist (Kèvalas, 2016, p. 12).*

The loss of the understanding of human imperfection (or of man being created in theological terms) may explain the perception of scarcity as something artificial: As people increasingly deny their imperfection, they increasingly tend to see scarcity as something unnatural and construed, and therefore, as something to be removed. “Abolishing scarcity is equivalent to

putting an end to life and change, to the existence of matter and body” (Leontjeva, 2016, p. 2).

Sociology, anthropology, and psychology all speak about scarcity as experienced and transformed needs and desires. This caused tension at the beginning of the research. However, a more profound methodological approach helped to gradually unfold the meaning of scarcity for human beings.

Scarcity is almost everything people need or want but have not obtained yet. For human beings scarcity is primarily a personal matter, something “I lack.” It is therefore essential to answer the question whether there is a strict distinction between needs and desires.

This study gives a new insight into the foundations of economic activity. Work, property, exchange, competition, money – all are different responses to scarcity that enable people to deal with it and be able to create and multiply goods, expand cooperation and peaceful development.

### **Interdisciplinary findings**

An interdisciplinary approach raised a number of challenges in the preparatory phase of this project, but the interpretation of the thoughts of philosophers, theologians, psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and economists brought forth a new understanding of scarcity and offered fascinating insights.

Philosophy reveals the primordial character of scarcity at the ontological level. Theology explains the purpose of scarcity, and at the junction of those two disciplines a dialogue between scarcity and freedom scarcity unfolds. The social sciences make it clear how an ordinary person experiences scarcity and how those experiences obscure the ontological and purposeful nature of scarcity. Seen from the perspective of economics, scarcity is understood as a lack of resources, but this is only the tip of the iceberg. A closer consideration of the concept of “surplus” introduced by sociology explains why freedom, which furthers economic prosperity, disguises scarcity and opens space to critique of the economy:

*It is a presupposition of elementary contact with reality that the sociologist, as people in everyday life, from the very beginning lives with the paradox of abundance, which naturally, potentially hides*



*scarcity ... “Scarcity” has to be explored together with expected “abundance,” that means dialectically – this is a brief sociological response to one-sided concepts of human beings in economy, politics and culture (Valantiejus, 2015, p. 7, 9).*

Initially, a psychological examination of needs and desires did not seem to answer the questions we posed, but our interdisciplinary analysis reveals that we can define quite precisely – with the help of the concept of needs and desires – what an ordinary person regards as scarcity. The shift that can be seen in the concept of needs and wants explains a shift in the understanding of scarcity.

The reciprocity of psychology and economics explains how a person responds to scarcity in everyday life, and why some people treat it as a stimulus for creative action, while others are paralyzed by it:

*M. Seligman tried to explain the medical condition of depressed people who are reluctant to take active steps to improve their living situation. Seligman concluded that a person or an animal in an unfavorable situation, incurring one or another need, seeks to eliminate it, but the repeated failure of an attempt to meet the need establishes a tendency not to struggle to improve the situation. Even when an opportunity arises to change the situation for the better and to meet actual needs, the individual cannot do so, because he or she lacks the successful experience of having satisfied similar needs. The elimination of such learned helplessness is a long-term and complex individual process of relearning, in which obstacles to overcome should be low and surmountable: this process must be accompanied by continuous and timely encouragement (Laurinavičius, Rekašiūtė-Balsienė, 2015, p. 9).*

The study shows that the distinction between needs and wants is subjective. In each individual situation, the same good can be seen both as a desire and as a need; hence, any application of a uniform and objective criterion to a group of people is impractical and can be used as a coercive instrument: “the attempt to overcome scarcity, to centralize and rationally meet the needs of many or all members of society easily transforms into regulatory systems of needs and moral norms” (Degèsys, 2015, p. 17). In the Middle Ages, material things weren’t the only needs, and they were not even the primary needs. For example, Aquinas said that there are six fundamental goods: life, marriage, knowledge, sociality, practicality, and the human

relationship with the transcendental (Alves, Moreira, 2015, p. 3).

Scarcity also turns out to be a tool of comparison. It can irritate people, not only because they lack something, but because others do better and lack less. Hostility disguises mutual benefit.

There is a tendency to interpret one's own and other people's success and failure differently. A person tends to attribute his or her own high achievements to personal qualities and efforts, and another person's achievements, to external factors. In the case of failure, which may be an unmet need, it is the other way round. People tend to attribute personal failures to external circumstances or the doings of unfriendly people or groups. This helps to protect one's self-esteem and dignity (Laurinavičius, Rekašiūtė-Balsienė, 2015, p. 9).

Psychology is in accord with the insights of economists about the elimination of scarcity without human effort.

In this paper we synthesize the studies from the different disciplines and present central observations about scarcity as a cause of being, scarcity as an element of the world and human nature, the complexity of the recognition of scarcity, its role in the emergence of economic activity and economic science, and the relationship between scarcity and morality. Those findings are guidelines for understanding scarcity and an invitation to embrace valuable insights that could not be explored in more detail in this project.

## **1. The reality of scarcity**

### **1.1. Scarcity as a cause of being**

The fundamental theoretical reflection on the essence of scarcity started with the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BC). To explain reality, Aristotle identified three primary origins of being: form, matter and scarcity (στέρησις, privatio). “Origins have in common that they are the first of which something either comes into being or is known” (Aristotle and Barnes, 1984, p. 60). Those elements are necessary for the processes defining and enabling being itself to take place. For things to come into being, to exist and to change, it takes a) that which evolves; b) that which is in opposition to what evolves; and c) that out of which something evolves. According to Aristotle's definition, a thing that evolves is the form; in opposition to it is scarcity; and all the opposites of emergence and change

operate in matter.

To justify scarcity as an origin, it has to be conceptually separated from nothingness. Scarcity is not absolute nothingness, but an actual non-being in a particular matter, which can be actualized according to the form. For example, fire does not come into being out of the absence of just anything, but only out of those things that have the potential to cause fire, like dry straw. Therefore, in relation to matter, scarcity is to be understood as a non-being of something, and thus scarcity is not the same as pure nothingness or nothing. Scarcity is a kind of fountain because it makes the emergence, change and advancement of all entities in this world possible.

Aristotle's thoughts about the origins of being were developed further by medieval thinker Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). In his early work, *On the Principles of Nature*, he interprets three characteristic original features of every entity. The new thing he points out is that matter and scarcity concur according to the object, but differ in terms of perception. For example, the same object is bronze (matter) and formless until the form of the statue appears (i.e., lacking form). However, the understanding of bronze itself and formlessness differs because of the difference of being bronze and being formless (Plėšnys, 2016). So, scarcity makes possible the emergence of entities out of opposite things, but itself does not appear in any pure shape. That explains why people struggle to understand scarcity as a principle of origin. This knowledge is never acquired by the senses; it is attained only by a mental effort of deconstructing entities and searching for their causes. Meanwhile, a variety of manifestations of scarcity, like a particular shortage of time, material goods, skills, or a lack of relationships, are experienced directly. Such experiences are often accompanied by discomfort, and so scarcity is invariably seen in a negative context. Having a negative understanding of scarcity, people do not wish to relieve or reduce scarcities they experience, but to eliminate them as a source of discomfort altogether. Due to the primordial nature of scarcity this is simply impossible, therefore any such attempts are doomed to waste energy in a meaningless pursuit.

The complexity of the comprehension of scarcity, inherent to its primordial nature, leads human beings into confrontation with the order of being. It is therefore fundamentally important to be able to step back from sensory experience and to make an effort to understand scarcity as an original principle. "Aristotle distinguished three spiritual powers or functions: the vegetative, sensory, and reasonable. Vegetative spiritual power is characteristic of plants; besides the vegetative power animals possess

sensory skills, while a human being among all living creatures is the only one with the spiritual power of reason” (Solovej, 2015, p. 8-9). Rationality, the unique human characteristic, indicates that he or she is not only capable of sensory experience, but also of understanding the order of being and its essential elements, such as scarcity. Only by accepting scarcity in themselves and in the order of being can human beings direct their energy to pursue chosen ends, self-improvement, cooperation, and the multiplication of goods.

## **1.2. Scarcity as an element of the world**

Theories interpreting the physical structure of the world also touch upon scarcity. Although this understanding is not fully applicable to the human world, it reveals a universal view of being. Human and physical structures of the world are connected by the same primary origins.

Even before Aristotle, the Greek philosopher Democritus (460-370 BC) explained reality by equating being with atoms, absolutely solid and indivisible particles. The emptiness separating the atoms he regarded as non-being; the temporary atomic combinations, emerging for some time, forming and dispersing the configurations of atoms, he explained as a manifestation of phenomenal nature (Furley, 1987). A void, an empty space between the atoms, can be linked to scarcity:

*After all, if there were not the void separating atoms, these would be like statically bricked in parts in a wall of concrete; or they would appear as absolutely inert conglomerate made of glued particles. Not being able to move, they could not form atomic configurations; therefore, phenomena and, obviously, the whole phenomenal richness and diversity could not be possible in this world (Kardelis, 2016, p. 12).*

In the physical world, scarcity must be understood as one of the essential reasons of movement and emergence of new phenomena. If there were no scarcity, if atoms were filling all space, they would not be able to move and create new combinations. The fact that physical reality is now revealed to our senses as changing, diverse, and advancing is determined by the background of scarcity, by space and opportunities. Therefore, it can be said that the interacting of being/entities (atoms) and non-being/scarcity

(emptiness) is a necessity of all real existence.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to emphasize that the attempt to apply such an atomistic understanding of physical reality to human beings would cause extensive damage. At the level of atoms, everything is determined by physical laws, and the outcomes are known in advance. In such a reality, a human being would be perceived only as a combination of atoms, only of physical nature. It would not be possible to regard people as free, rational, moral agents who unpredictably change reality by their actions and relationships.

### **1.3. Scarcity as a mark of humanity**

Human beings are temporary, finite, fallible and limited, but at the same time they are self-improving beings. Such is the human nature that separates us from the physical and metaphysical world. Persons differ from physical nature by their freedom and opportunity to advance and make progress, and from the divine metaphysical world by an inability to achieve complete perfection.

*We can start from the fact that a human being is born naked. In many societies nudity is associated with poverty and lack of status. Having been born in such an early stage of biological development (compared with other mammals), individuals need a lot of things to survive and to continue to grow up. The birth of a person is the first shock into scarcity – coldness, insecurity, hunger, a natural need for closeness and attention, etc. (Matulevičius, 2015, p. 7).*

Theologians talk about being created in “perfect dependence” (Syssoev, 2015, 2), about the “needy man” (Wolff, 1974, quoted in Lahayne, 2015, p. 7). According to them, this is the fundamental Old Testament term for the human being living in a condition of scarcity, expressing our state of wanting, desiring, and longing. Since the creation of humanity, we are needy people in our whole being. “I” (my nefesh, soul) am made to receive, to be augmented and fulfilled. Only God is life in himself; we are creatures,

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to emphasize that the attempt to apply such an atomistic understanding of physical reality to human beings would cause extensive damage. On the level of atoms, everything is determined by physical forces whose effects are known in advance. In such a reality, a human being would be perceived only as a combination of atoms, only of physical nature. It would not be possible to regard people as free, rational, moral subjects who by their actions and relationships with others unpredictably change reality.

that means we obtain creaturely life (Lahayne, 2015, p. 6).

*Aristotle pointed out that a person is a compositum, a merger of various elements of act and potency, of form and matter. It is this idea that opens up a new perspective to understand the problem of scarcity. From now on, we can speak about scarcity not only in a negative, but in a positive way – about the potential and possibilities of a human being (Solovej, 2015, p. 10).*

Human beings do not only know and experience lacking in themselves and their environment, but they are also able to alleviate it. Scarcity is a stimulus for action. In this way, free human activity gives meaning to our aspirations, the implementation of which actualizes human potential. Scarcity is therefore to be regarded as a factor defining the humanity of people. The ability to accept it and to appropriately respond to it is an opportunity to actualize one's potential in harmony with the structure of this world.

According to Thomas Aquinas, the essence of humanity is the openness for the infinite, the desire to surpass one's limitations, to transcend and thus actualize oneself. At the same time, it is essential to realize the boundaries of one's potential and the limits in overcoming scarcity. "The ancient Greeks would say to themselves and, of course, to people in these days: do not try to become gods, but try to become the best people according to your capacity and capabilities" (Kardelis, 2016, 6). The acceptance of oneself as a constantly lacking being makes it possible to avoid an endless war against one's nature. Divine perfection is beyond human reach; but the path toward human completeness marked by internal and external scarcity is a harmonious fulfillment of one's being:

*To see what is positive in scarcity inspires us to seek every kind of fullness, the fulfillment of one's being, which best allows to unfold our human potential in the range of limits of ontological possible perfection, set by our limited human nature (Kardelis, 2016, p. 2).*

It is important to emphasize that only free individuals can actualize their potential. According to the Thomistic tradition, freedom is an essential condition for overcoming individual imperfections and unfolding the personality.

*Only due to freedom can a person make use of his or her potentiality to enlarge, reduce or remove scarcity and deficiencies. The*

*weaknesses and imperfections human beings detect in themselves and their environment can become a positive opportunity to actualize their inherent potential (Solovej, 2016, p. 12).*

In theology, scarcity and freedom are not the primary sources. The first source is God's love. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15, NIV). One of the most important theological discoveries is that scarcity is a necessary prerequisite for a person to develop their nature, to work and to continue the creation of the world. Scarcity is the other side of creativity, activity, choice, and freedom itself. If there were no scarcity, there would not be freedom for people to create, to choose and to act; there would not be change and life in the world. "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (Genesis 1:28, NIV). Improving the world, human beings are also called to improve themselves: lack of knowledge, lack of another, lack of love, and other aspects of scarcity are not easy to bear but are necessary to acquire knowledge and to achieve the fullness of our human vocation. Therefore, theologically, scarcity appears to be a necessary and proper characteristic of being. Rational analysis reveals a paradox: the human mind identifies, but also creates, scarcity:

*Human intelligence also implies the permanent reality of scarcity, since the human mind can predict what is still only potent and not yet realized. The mind becomes an instrument to see new opportunities and realize them. Here the divine-like power of the mind shows to human beings the scarcity in themselves and their environment or opportunities lying dormant in potentialities. Therefore, we can say these yet unrealized opportunities "persecute" as scarcity. By reason of the possibility of the mind to recognize a new potency, persons experience new forms of scarcity beside them, which are inevitable due to in that moment still not realized fruits of the human mind. It is worth noting that the very power of the mind for creativity and activity helps to overcome not only "small scarcities" (food, housing, relationships), but also contributes to know "the great scarcity" and its purposefulness ...Animals do not survive such a scarcity caused by rationality, because they do not possess the power of mind (Kévalas, 2016, p. 6).*

In that context, the importance of reflecting on scarcity is obvious. The mind

comprehends that scarcity is not absolute. Human beings are mindful to choose measures to improve a situation and have the freedom to accomplish it. They are to be regarded as independent beings, ends in themselves, but open to personal development and the knowledge of others, but not to forced dependency. Those features are captured on the primordial level and develop into a definition of what it means to be human.

#### **1.4. Scarcity as a universal concept of humanity**

The fundamental or ontological scarcity of perfection is rooted in the nature of the world and human beings, and thus cannot be eliminated. All entities originate from a lack of something, and therefore all entities are marked by scarcity. The fact that something is changing, coming into being, or disappearing already indicates that the world is not complete.

According to the ancient Greeks, everything around us is characterized by the scarcity of absolute ontological perfection. Plato (2009) perceived all phenomena and objects of the dynamic world as dialectics of scarcity in the very center of tension between being and nothingness. That understanding of reality reveals the universality of scarcity. It is found in the ontological structure of the world, in the physical and natural world, and in humans. Scarcity is also revealed in human relationships.

To Interpret relationships between people, the Greeks drew on myths. Plato highlights the bodily origin of desire with the myth about the origin of biological gender. The lust for another person, according to him, stems from the once divided human nature. The full, spherical beings had been cut in half, which explains why people now passionately desire the other. They seek to merge again, back to the primordial full, non-scarce form (Plato, 2000, 189c-193d).

In theology, the relationship with other people is also considered in the context of scarcity. “This ontological scarcity becomes a positive incentive for communion in a society where the relationship with another human being is also an expression of longing for communion with God” (Kévalas, 2016, p. 22). There are different stages of relationships:

- Before the fall – scarcity as a prerequisite of relationships and freedom.
- After the fall – scarcity as a source of war, fear and violence.
- In salvation – scarcity can be realized restfully and hopefully.



In the first stage, God created distinct beings who are dependent on each other – heaven and earth, male and female, etc. Prior to the fall, scarcity was a blessing and a gift to humans. “Being created does not only mean to come into being in time, but to accept one’s existence from another, to be existentially dependent, to exist through another, to be destined, in other words – to be metaphysically limited” (Syssoev, 2015, p. 4). Therefore, already in the creation of humankind, metaphysical dependence on each other is ingrained. The fact that a human was not created alone directly implies that we have been created for communion.

After the fall, scarcity became a source of fragmentation and made confrontation possible. Humans started to believe that they could be God, shrug off their finiteness, and take over territory, resources, and other people. However, once the world’s goods and the presence of other people is regarded as prey to take rather than accepted as a gift, this mindset paves a road to destruction and self-destruction. If other people are the enemy and just a tool, humans will be in a permanent state of confrontation and war. The fall changed human reality and relationships, including their relation with scarcity. Desire, which is infinite, is now directed at earthly goods; people have become insatiable and experience any deficiency as injustice, a violation of their freedom. Freedom becomes intertwined with the ability to realize one’s desires. Scarcity as a blessing turns into scarcity as a burden. In contrast to the almighty God, human beings are weak. Marks of disability and decline – our defects and shortcomings, diseases and sufferings – are consequences of the fall. After the fall, evil came into the world; until then the human body, created by God, was limited in its strength, but not frail (Lahayne, 2015, p. 6).

Indeed, the most convenient way to live in this world is to understand scarcity as a unifying principle, accepting otherness as an end in itself, as an opportunity to cooperate and freely relate to other people. In that manner, the possibility of harmony with the world, with our nature, and with others opens up. Psychology views community as an innate human characteristic.

*The sense of community, which has been mentioned as one of the social needs, is innate (a lone human being cannot survive). He or she feels wholesome and happy when a person successfully cooperates with others in achieving the objectives of one’s own or of the society (Laurinavičius, Rekašiūtė-Balsienė, 2015, p. 12).*

Postulating natural human sociability, anthropology also indicates that it

shows scarcity in all spheres of life:

*From the anthropological point of view, response to ontological scarcity is reciprocity and exchange. Having experienced social isolation, a human being is afflicted by psychological and mental suffering. Having lost contact with their social environment people often lose their mental health or dehumanize, i.e., fall back into a primordial state of chaos, which in its essence is in opposite to what a human being is (Matulevičius, 2015, p. 14-15).*

Human interdependence and the desire for relationship do not deny autonomy because the real craving for relationship is a desire to know the other as a free, independent “world.” Thereby, people enrich themselves and lessen personal scarcity. Enslaving others means only an artificial augmentation of oneself which does not reduce but deepens imperfection, loneliness, and meaninglessness.

### **1.5. Positive aspects of scarcity**

There is no coherent philosophy of scarcity. That usually leads to its negative understanding in social sciences, and this is fundamentally important in the light of its perception as a primordial principle. The analysis of positive aspects of scarcity yields original insights and is a methodological breakthrough in this interdisciplinary study.

A lack of knowledge about scarcity in such social sciences as psychology or sociology can be explained by the fact that the examination of the assumption about scarcity falls beyond the boundaries of those disciplines. The social sciences focus on the manifestations of scarcity, not on scarcity *per se*, therefore the fundamental premises about scarcity may be overlooked.

Philosophy reveals the role of scarcity in the ontological structure of the world and uncovers its positive manifestations. Plato explores scarcity in two ways. On the one hand, he views scarcity as a deficit in which an entity lacks some essential components. On the other, he considers scarcity as a stimulus to act, to move, and to change. For Aristotle, scarcity is an opportunity: the potency and its effect and the act.

If everything existed in total abundance, people would lose their identity and meaning of life. It is impossible to grasp the world while ignoring its

limitations. After all, “scarcity does not become apparent in a negative form of raising resignation and depression, but as a positive existential challenge and a catalyst of passionate spiritual adventure” (Kardelis, 2016, p. 5). Scarcity arouses curiosity, the desire to know. From that perspective, to lack something and understand this lack is not a negative experience. On the contrary, such a desire or longing is often experienced as more pleasant than the satisfaction itself. We just have to think about, for example, the feeling of hunger before dinner or a recommended and not-yet-read book. Experiencing scarcity and the expectation of pleasure can be more enjoyable than the feeling of abundance or of satiety. Thus, curiosity and the joy of discovering are made possible by scarcity.

Through the scarcity of wisdom and the desire for it, the essence of philosophy is revealed. “I know that I know nothing,” Socrates said who, like all mortals, lacked the fullness of divine wisdom. According to the Greek, to be aware of one’s scarce knowledge means to be on the right track, because only fools think they know everything. That nicely illustrates the myth of Eros (in Plato’s Symposium), who lacked wisdom and therefore passionately sought it:

*His lack is shown to be not absolute: as son of Contrivance, Eros had a vague understanding of wisdom, and thus the ability to passionately (in an “erotic” way) seek after it. But as son of Poverty, he was condemned to seek wisdom for ever and to never finally meet it, hence to always stay on the road to wisdom and permanently in a state of scarcity, though not absolute scarcity. In Plato’s dialogue, Eros is emerging as the prototype and paradigm of every true philosopher, a passionate lover of wisdom (Kardelis, 2016, p. 3-4).*

You cannot have passion and the potential for pursuit, desire, and love if you already have it all and do not fear losing it. The feeling of scarcity excites desire and encourages action and aspiration; it reveals that the desired thing is important. The degree of personal mental freedom is proportional to the individual scarcity:

*The greater our freedom, the greater our scarcity: after all, our freedom is characterized by the availability of choices. In the case of infinite freedom this number of choices is also infinite – like an infinite number of degrees of freedom in a hypothetical mechanical system. Possessing infinite freedom, at the starting point of our existence, where we choose from an infinite number of possible variations of*

*your life, we see them all as unrealized possibilities – each of them as one or the other hypothetically realized goal of our fast imagination corresponds to our final point of teleological fulfillment* (Kardelis, 2016, p. 17).

The endless number of unrealized possibilities associated with scarcity is a positive and potential future horizon. Even if it is sometimes received as an irritant, we should not heedlessly strive for fully overcoming basic scarcity because this is not possible. However, neither should we ignore it, thus impoverishing ourselves to a narrow perception of our options. It is important to evaluate an alternative: instead of fundamental scarcity and freedom, we could have determinism and slavery. Suffering in restricted freedom is much deeper than suffering in an imperfect, but free, world.

### **1.6. Scarcity as an attribute of human nature**

The marks of scarcity in human beings themselves explain why it is hardly accepted. Human beings are fallible, they lack knowledge, and they are social beings. Marks of scarcity are to be found in the world too. The world is limited in time and in space, and its resources must be put to proper use. Imperfect people act in an imperfect world. In this regard, the reasons for rejecting scarcity have to be refined:

*The ontological level: The understanding of scarcity as a basic phenomenon of being is complicated by the fact that the primordial elements of being are not entities in themselves. In order to understand them intentional effort of thinking is demanded. Through the senses only manifestations of the primordial element can be experienced, but not its essence. Yet at the same time scarcity is hard to think of, because the sensory perception of it immediately calls for action. It “impacts human persons as a catalyst, triggers the internal engine, promoting action, hope, and goals. This arising activity directs the attention away from the possibility of reflection”* (Leontjeva, 2016, p. 3).

The social, anthropological level: Being ignorant of the primordial nature of scarcity and its role in reality, people treat scarcity as a consequence of unjust social reality, a result of bad human actions. Scarcity is experienced as bereavement, poverty, evil, and injustice. Attention is then drawn to how to eliminate those phenomena, and the feelings of scarcity with them. Scarcity is always experienced personally; it is perceived as “I lack,” and

this feeling inhibits the understanding of the primordial and universal nature of scarcity. Such a perception of scarcity is prevalent among people and dominates social sciences. In anthropology, “the concept of scarcity is not perceived as a permanent and independent element of the reality, but as a platform for social relationships and often as a result of social relations themselves ... the understanding of scarcity through the prism of poverty in social anthropology and sociology means first of all the analysis of power relations” (Matulevičius 2015, p. 3-4). Anthropology diversifies the discourse of scarcity, speaking about the interpretation of scarcity as mystification and stigmatization. It is likely that human consciousness has covered scarcity from time immemorial.

The chronological level: The natural and human world is open to ongoing transformation in time. A pattern of change is written into natural objects; processes take place in due time, which means that every moment a subject lacks its future form. The seed lacks sprouts, the sprout the plant, the plant the bud, the bud the blossom, the blossom the fruit. Scarcity in nature is understood as a distance separating the current status from what will evolve. It is easier to recognize scarcity when the potency is near fulfillment. The same is to be said about man as a physical being.

In human reality, vagueness, insecurity, and future uncertainty are hard to endure. “Insecurity turns scarcity into an enemy of the human race, because it seems as if it is the only thing that hinders people from accumulating enough to feel safe” (Leontjeva, 2016, p. 9). Constant waiting makes scarcity even more difficult to bear. People hurry to satisfy their desires, to shorten their waiting time and to distance themselves from scarcities. A person does not know when one scarcity vanishes, when another arises, and how to cope with it. Naturally, people long for security given by abundance, so they undertake purposeful action as their response to scarcity. However, they can make mistakes and experience failure due to natural causes, such as a bad harvest due to weather conditions, or human error. The acceptance of scarcity as an immanent principle does not guarantee security, but it helps to understand that scarcity is no impediment to happiness.

Potential scarcity, described by a formula “It may be, but it is not there yet” depends on a person lacking something: The person can control the time it takes to satisfy a desire. For example, it is possible to learn the Japanese language, or to build a house, moreover, a person can refuse to desire, and thus liberate him or herself from a particular experience of scarcity. Natural scarcity described by a formula “it must be, but it is not there yet”(such as

physical maturing) is related to natural processes and difficult to control.

Moral norms, religion, and rationality help a person handle scarcity in the flow of time, to develop self-control and moderation, and timely make proper decisions. Linear time obliges people to assume responsibility for future consequences. Events do not recur regardless of human action, but they are driven by our deeds – every moment is created by another moment. Every choice has consequences for a person, other human beings, and the environment. The theological level: The denial of scarcity is closely linked to the teaching of original sin. Original sin has changed human reality and relationships, and the relationship with scarcity. Formerly being only a blessing and a gift, scarcity has become a wound and a burden. Unlimited human desires are now directed mostly to the goods of the earth. The work that was a pure gift before the fall, a tool to subdue this world, became hard and severe, and is resisted. All areas of human experience are now marked with a sign of imperfection, starting with mutuality and freedom – all is vulnerable to error and sin. All that can lead to evil, which is also experienced as scarcity and causes a natural human resistance. The understanding of scarcity as a punishment begins to obscure scarcity as a blessing, although the initial purpose of scarcity does not cease to be valid. The denial of the theological distinction between the Creator and creation encourages the thinking that, before the fall, the world and human beings were perfect and did not differ in their perfection from God. The ignorance of that theological distinction has dire consequences: It is believed that abundance can replace scarcity. Authors of this project warn that the denial of this particular distinction creates a context and space for Marxist and materialistic ideologies, and new pantheistic movements to spread. Though outwardly different, they all nourish the illusion of human omnipotence and promise to eliminate scarcity (Lahayne, 2016). Therefore, the understanding that scarcity has existed since the creation of the world and prior to the fall, is fundamental.

### **1.7. Two responses to scarcity**

Scarcity is usually a stimulus to action, but under certain circumstances it can paralyze. For example, a lack of health may become an incentive to start exercising and healthy eating, but it can also become a source of depression and resignation. The reaction to scarcity depends on a person's character, experience, and values.

People can respond to the stimulus of scarcity by productive action or by

advancing pretensions to get what they need. Productive action may be rewarded, while pretensions do not involve much of an effort. In the former case, people act as active and responsible creators who improve themselves and unfold their potential through work and learning. Therefore, in theology, “work for a living is not only a curse because of sin, but a way to express one’s likeness of God” (Syssoev, 2015, p. 9). In the latter case, people respond only as claim holders and consumers and thereby deprive themselves of an opportunity for self-development and fulfillment.

*Human development through work, knowledge, and other efforts is inseparable from the development of all creation... though being limited and dependent people are not only separated from God, but their limitedness and dependence can become an intermediate position through which the Creator is united not only with humanity, but also to the whole creation (Syssoev, 2015, p. 9).*

It is important to note that the different responses to scarcity also determine different approaches to freedom. In the first case, we are concerned with the freedom to act and bring a goal to fruition; and in the second, freedom is seen as a right to get a good without effort, usually at the expense of other people. Indeed, to realize freedom and to respond to scarcity properly is only possible with knowledge, creativity, and daily service to others. “Liberation” from this toil is identical to the removal of liberty, reducing people to the status of animals that are fully provided for.

## **2. Scarcity and economics**

### **2.1. The discovery of scarcity in economics**

Economic activity evolved as an attempt to survive in the face of scarcity. Unsurprisingly, economic science consistently developed the concept of scarcity. The understanding of scarcity in terms of the material world has evolved from a concrete perception in the Middle Ages to a more abstract idea in modern times. “In the Middle Ages, the modern (material) concept of scarcity was not conceptualized directly. There was no abstract thinking about the scarcity of physical items per se; this type of thinking was reserved for spiritual things” (Alves, Moreira, 2015, p. 2). Scarcity in a broader sense was a subject of religious thinking in the context of eternal life. Economic activity was regarded as a measure to ensure human existence and in order to realize one’s potential.

The theologian T. R. Malthus (1766-1834) was almost the first to discover and coherently present the universality of scarcity; he gave a new meaning to the discourse. Thinking about the nature of poverty, he discovered scarcity as a universal phenomenon with natural causes, such as population growth and production capacity. Concerned about poverty, the scholar looked at scarcity negatively, as a kind of disorder. As a theologian, Malthus sensed that scarcity is somehow part of God's providence. His common religious assumption was that, because God created everything, this should lead to good. To the question of how this might happen, the theologian gave no answer. Malthus argued that the infinite variety of nature is admirably adapted to pursue higher goals of creativity and create as much good as possible. A negative view of the human reproductive capacity and underestimating human creative power resulted in Malthus' well-known conclusion: Humanity will not be able to feed itself. Malthus did not foresee the opportunities to be offered by extended economic relations and the industrial revolution; nevertheless, his insights remain extremely valuable. When we revisit them, we can understand that humanity would actually have been facing a gloomy future had it not been for the vast multiplication of goods that had been possible thanks to economic activity. Indirectly, Malthus reveals the contribution of modern economics to the fortune of civilization: Human beings are capable of feeding themselves and thereby of enabling a continuous growth in human population.

Authors of this study number a wide range of inventions, from the recipe of bread to oil-refining technology, emphasizing that behind technological progress lies the tireless human creative genius and entrepreneurship, in response to scarcity. Baking bread takes flour, which must be milled from grain. Thus, the invention of the mill was an important step forward in food production. The Romans invented the rotary hand mill; earlier people used water- or horse-powered mills, which later became the windmill. The need to produce more and better food caused a wave of brilliant ideas (Lahayne, 2015, p. 16). The authors stress that the most important presupposition of those inventions and their practical application is freedom. A participating historian warns that if humanity loses the abilities which helped avoid the brink of starvation, the prophecy of Malthus still might come true and humanity would face universal poverty and hunger again (Davies, 2015, p. 1). A theologian continues: Ancient constraints fell away, which made room for political and social freedom, which the world had not seen before. Freedom was a necessary prerequisite for the spreading of ideas. Some 200 years ago, Europe and North America surpassed the once rich and ingenious China and India, not least because they widely ensured human freedoms



(Lahayne, 2015, p. 18).

Economist Carl Menger (1840-1921) reflects upon the universality of scarcity. Back in the 18th century physiocrats noted that things that were not scarce did not become economic goods. They did not analyse “free goods” (like air) because those were so abundant that they could not become objects of exchange. In fact, most classical economists were able to exclude such goods of unlimited quantity from the scientific investigation of “property.” Limited supply was essential for the definition of the classic law of supply and demand (Kirzner, 1976, p. 111).

Menger uses scarcity as a way to distinguish economic goods from non-economic goods and to explain how economic activity comes into being. In defining goods that are lacking, Menger refrains from assessing whether a man really needs them and whether there is really a shortage of a certain good in the world. He logically distinguishes between goods that are too abundant to be scarce, and goods that are scarce and may become lacking. The by Menger’s introduced criterion of scarcity distinguishes between goods regardless of their physical characteristics, origin, and other features. The criterion of scarcity introduces a clear order in a complex world and helps us understand why the economy came into being. Menger also shows that subjectivity is not an issue. The fact that air in one case is an economic good, and in another not, is not a paradox or misunderstanding. Rather, it is a logical consequence of the application of the criterion of scarcity.

Ludwig von Mises tries to surpass the framework of traditional economics: The primary task of reason is to cope with the limits imposed by human nature and to deal with scarcity. An acting and thinking person is the outcome of a world of scarcity; a world in which all prosperity can only be achieved through hard work, through acting which is “economic” (Mises 1999, p. 235).

The hermeneutic approach of this study gives insight into the birth of economic activity from the perspective of other disciplines. Theology sheds light on human limitedness and mortality, and thus newly explains the importance of these factors for the emergence of economizing action. Whence time of a mortal man becomes scarce, the economic aspect runs through all of human life: Everywhere a question comes up how to use limited resources within the limitations of time. In addition, humans are in constant need of energy: Our bodies spend energy very quickly, so there is always a need for food to supply more energy. Before the fall of the first

human beings, such a condition was not life threatening, so there was no hard struggle for survival (Lahayne, 2015, p. 6).

At the junction of the disciplines, it is understood that it is impossible to think of a world without scarcity, and therefore without economic activity, because (a) there are things that cannot be multiplied, such as time, and (b) because human desires are not limited. At the same time, it is clear that any human choice between different opportunities of using limited time and resources requires economization. Not the nature or quantity of goals, but (a) the limitedness of time and resources, and (b) the opportunity to use them alternatively create the preconditions for the emergence of economic activity. Thus, human behavior related with the satisfaction of human needs with limited means that have alternative uses predetermines choice and carries an economic aspect (Šilėnas, Žukauskas, 2016, p. 6).

Anthropology, in turn, reflects the inherent nature of human action:

*On the basis of M. Eliade's interpretative logic, one can conclude that scarcity as an anthropological experience belongs to the primordial area of chaos from which humans both symbolically, ritually and physically are trying to break free. They transform the surrounding natural environment from the chaotic and 'not designed' to the 'created;' they take the natural resources and convert them in creating added value to overcome scarcity (Matulevičius 2015, p. 9).*

Introducing the term “transformation of scarcity,” the author outlines an anthropological picture: Humans make efforts to save, to utilize, and to create not only what is consumed, but also what remains and is transferred to the next generation. Productive work aims to transform existing things into more useful ones. In this way, completely new things come into being: This type of work creates things that previously did not exist. That fact alone implies scarcity. The technological development and creation of new products alleviates basic scarcity, but the rise of new opportunities induces scarcity. The creation of new technological devices causes a desire to possess them, and here again reason is needed to make a decision. Perfect abundance would mean the full and instantaneous presence of all, in which case no work would exist and be necessary. All we desire would be available. Therefore, scarcity is directly related to the work (Lahayne, 2015, p. 11).

Economist Lionel Robbins (1898-1984) elaborates on the importance of the

context of scarcity so that economics as a science and its tasks are redefined. According to Robbins, economics examines human behavior in the interaction of ends and limited resources that have alternative uses. His definition negates the misconception that economics is only concerned with peoples' material well-being and its task is to explain how well-being is created (Šilėnas, Žukauskas, 2016, p. 9)

Robbins articulates a paradox that has been little understood to this day: While economic activity allows humanity to multiply material goods, that is not the main task of economics as a branch of science. Robbins fights against the materialistic definition of economics and maintains that, in general, it is not possible to distinguish between material and non-material well-being. Therefore, economics does not explore only material goods and prosperity. Economics examines people in their pursuit to satisfy their desires through actions, and, in particular, the exchange process as a tool for everybody to "produce" the fulfillment of one's desires. The goods can be tangible (e.g., items) or intangible (e.g., services), as Rothbard sums up the tasks of economics as a science (2011, p. 162). In light of this study it can be added that economics is not a science about numbers, as is often thought, but about human beings who, as limited and mortal, face scarcity and are forced to calculate, evaluate, compare, and choose constantly. Such an understanding of economics justifies one of the goals of this study: to find the points of contact and to gain fruitful insights from disciplines that center around the human being.

Scarcity as an incentive to act, to improve, and to multiply is at play in many different ways depending on external conditions. For example, according to research on an Asian rural population (Davies, 2015, p. 4), life on the edge of survival drives important changes in thinking and acting. When scarcity is so extreme that it can possibly result in death, people become completely intolerant to risks and hostile to innovation. Communities develop solidarity customs; it is common, for example, to help a neighbor during a famine. At the same time, the quest for profit, the use of innovations, price fixing, and similar economic activities become stigmatized or prohibited.

Over the last 40 years the global population has increased from 4.5 billion to 7 billion. At the same time, the space available space on Earth has not expanded, and the agricultural workforce has decreased. Despite that, the number of people living in absolute poverty has fallen from 2 billion to 1.5 billion (Roser, 1945). In other words, the number of people not living in

poverty has increased from 2.5 billion to 5.5 billion. Although economic relations and the progress of technology today allow people to satisfy ever-growing needs and to do it efficiently, this does not mean that scarcity ceases to exist.

The theological and economic discourse complement each other, stressing that people are the most precious and scarce asset. It is wrong to view every new human being as a burden and an extra mouth to feed. Each new person uniquely enriches the world, and creative human power is a vast resource (Lahayne, 2015, p. 20).

## **2.2. The emergence of economic phenomena in the context of scarcity**

Action or work is the primary economic phenomenon and a response to scarcity. People constantly look for and come up with new ways to discern, prevent, and alleviate scarcity. It is remarkable that in this process, people are able to overcome obstacles and reap benefits. We produce food to eat and clothes to wear, but we usually produce more than we need. Sometimes we invent a device that can be usefully applied more widely than we expected; we create drugs which save lives today and help find solutions in other areas in the future; our buildings endure much longer than one season, and so on. Animals do not reach such results (Soto, 2015, p. 1).

The core of human action is constant and unceasing choice, how to use limited resources, including time. The process of choice reveals one of the most important modern economic concepts developed by economist Friedrich von Wieser (1851-1926): alternative costs. If we would live in a world of unlimited goods and time, we still would have to choose, but such a choice would not have alternative costs. Robbins (1932, p. 13) explained it as follows: If I want to do two things having abundant time and means at disposal, and if I do not want to use the time and means for anything else, my behavior will be different from the one described in economics. Nirvana is not necessarily a pure blessing; it is just the perfect satisfaction of all needs.

It is important to understand alternative costs in everyday activities: As we choose the best option of using limited time and resources, we forego the second best choice. When we assess those choices, we perform an economic action: The less valuable is declined because, under given circumstances, the other option seems more valuable. In order to obtain additional

quantities of any good, we have to give up something – a quantity of other goods or an opportunity to do something else (Baumgärtner et al., 2006).

The paradigm can be discovered not only in the activities that are traditionally referred to as economic, but also in other areas. For example, going for a walk, a person loses the pleasure of reading a book; while reading, they cannot play with a child. Even in the practice of love, according to theologians, people face the heavy burden of choice: “A realistic view of human life impels us to recognize that love is a choice: To indulge in a laborious undertaking, it is necessary to abandon all other, though perfectly legitimate, plans of self-realization” (Syssoev, 2015, p. 21). Not surprisingly, talking about choices, Lionel Robbins (1932, p. 13) exceeds the limits of economics. He writes: Here we are, conscious creatures, full of desires, aspirations, and instinctive tendencies, which encourage us to act in a variety of different ways. However, the time devoted to fulfill these desires is limited. The world does not provide us all possibilities necessary for perfect fullness. Life is short. Nature is not generous.

Scarcity of time and other goods /resources/ forces us to economize, to use goods as efficiently as possible and to save, as well as to find ways to increase/multiply/ them. Menger’s definition of economization can be rephrased: It consists of saving (preserving a unit), retaining the useful features of products, deciding which need is to be met and which is not, and then effectively using goods (Šilėnas, Žukauskas, 2016, p. 20).

Menger concludes that even property is a result of scarcity. “Property ... is not an arbitrary invention, but the only practical solution to the problem, which stems from the mismatch between the quantity of existing and desired economic goods” (Menger, 2007). In this regard, Menger’s thoughts are totally contrary to the conviction of philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) that the scarcity of goods is a result of private ownership. Menger’s interpretation is the opposite: Scarcity is the cause and private property is the consequence. According to Menger, when a clan lives near a river, there is never a shortage of water, so the need for private ownership of water will never arise. Similarly, alternative ways to provide water or investments in water efficiency will not come into being. Menger clarified the emergence of ownership, while at the same time showing that the intention to abolish property can never eliminate scarcity.

Menger’s thought is related to the insight of Biblical studies on the old

wisdom of divinely inspired people that “It is easier to live in peace at a distance from each other, where everyone lives within his or her own territory and is not obliged to fight for resources.” Thus, the fundamental objective of private property and the division of land is “to avoid strife and injustice and to enable people to live together sustainably and peacefully. The emergence of private borders appears to be necessary and expedient” (Leontjeva, 2016, p. 16, 11). Thomas Aquinas reflected on the experience of humankind and concluded that the abandoning of common ownership and the emergence of private ownership under the condition of sin (1) encourages self-sacrificing work, (2) leads to greater efficiency, and (3) ensures peace. Aquinas went further and denied the traditional Augustinian approach. He emphasized that there are reasons to believe that private property existed before the fall. Although in the Garden of Eden all things were considered common, the fact that people had to use them for subsistence bears testimony to the existence of the concept of ownership (dominium). However, after the fall, it became much more productive to expand property so that everybody could best serve God. Human laziness and envy were an impediment to keeping things in common (Alves, Moreira, 2015, p. 8).

Exploring the origins of property, Menger came to a valuable insight: Whenever natural conditions permit, people are prone to the common use of goods. Thus, all goods which are not missing and which do not raise the question of alternative use can and will be used as common property. However, it is important to note that so-called primitive or “natural” communism arose from a simple fact: Certain goods existed in such huge quantities that they ceased to be economic goods (Šilėnas, Žukauskas, 2016, p. 21). This is an answer to the never-ending question about the preconditions for the emergence of communism.

Not only work and property, but also exchange, money, pricing, cooperation, and competition have arisen as a spontaneous response to scarcity. Those phenomena came into being in the recurrent chain of choices; they are reflecting the human nature and the order of being. This study gives insight into economic phenomena as predisposed by ontological scarcity and thus purposeful and indispensable.

### **3. Scarcity and morality**

#### **3.1. The relation between scarcity, freedom, and the good**

“In the Aristotelian and Thomistic tradition the good is that which corresponds to the essence of the entity. In another aspect, the good is that to which every entity consciously or unconsciously strives as a goal, which corresponds to the nature and at the same to the essence of the entity” (Plėšnys, 2016, p. 1). Scarcity is a part of the reality of being and of human nature; therefore, accepting it paves the way for moral choices. Actions are characterized not only by economization. Moral criteria are always involved in the process of choosing. In light of scarcity, we can see the necessity of morality anew: Moral norms are intended to distinguish the good and to make the right choices. When scarcity is ignored, opposed or sought to be rooted out (or when an illusion is created that scarcity does not exist), it leads to moral confusion. For example, if under the pressure of scarcity people take a job and experience it as a suffering or coercion, they morally feel like doing something inappropriate, as if energy and time could be used for a more noble cause. Or saving the world from some deficiency and suffering, a person feels morally correct; however, that is an illusion. Hence, the understanding of scarcity sustains moral life and helps people choose correctly.

Morality is not possible where there is no freedom, as in nature whose processes are determined by physical laws. In the human world, people operate freely. Freedom is exercised in acting (responding to scarcity), and thus assuming responsibility for the consequences. People cannot be held responsible for involuntary actions. For example, a person cannot stop aging or fully prevent diseases. Responsibility goes with freedom and promotes the good and choosing correctly, because in the future, the choosing person and others will face the consequences of actions:

*The free self-determination of acts is related to the moral side of human beings, and expresses the fullness of personal freedom. Therefore, the human person is not only able to be free, but is free to choose the good, that is, he or she cannot only be desiring freedom, but also desiring good (Solovej, 2015, p. 12).*

The good is distinguished from evil by free choice, which is supported by practical reason or natural law (lex naturales):

*Having a mind and free will, a person, on the basis of reason, is setting many goals. Evaluating with the same reason he or she determines which goals are good and understands how those goals can be achieved. In thinking this way people choose the means to*

*realize an objective* (Plėšnys, 2016, p. 1).

Reason helps people to make choices, to understand their nature, accept reality, evaluate alternatives, and weigh consequences; rationality functions within the individual and universal moral compass. Human beings, to fulfill their nature, are to be in tune with God's will through thinking so that they can judge for themselves what is best and can direct their will toward the good (Alves, Moreira 2015, p. 7).

*In the most general sense lex naturales is the requirement to seek good and avoid evil in all activities. And what is good, we already know: good is what an individual seeks after to perfect his or her nature. We can realize our natural abilities and refine our nature in very different ways. Therefore, the good is quite an individual concept. On the other hand, it is also common, because we are all people with a human nature* (Plėšnys, 2016, p. 1).

The mind enables us to understand which action is just, freedom allows us to act, and the will helps us achieve things. It stimulates the desire for what is good and keeps us on the right track.

According to the ancient understanding of the good, we can say that the good is what perfects the person, and allows the powers of mind, will, and feeling to develop. Evil in the moral sense is a corrupting force which distracts from what is consistent with the essence of the individual and the order of being.

*The human being is incomplete (or lacks something) in the sense that the Creator gave him only powers – mind, feelings, and will – on the basis of which each person is invited by the Creator to implement his or her unique vocation. Striving for the good and perfecting one's nature, the person becomes a mature personality* (Plėšnys, 2016, p. 1).

In theology, human scarcity is manifested in the experience of being limited compared to God. All created beings lack the fullness of being, which only God possesses. Scarcity is an inherent and necessary mark of creation:

*All created beings, including humans, are finite beings, participating in God's being. They are limited because they lack the foundation of existence in themselves. Therefore, human beings and elements of the created world are "involved in being" and this participation in being is "borrowed" from God, who is the most proper Being* (Kėvalas,



2016, p. 3).

If people were not limited and did not experience scarcity, they would not have the space to realize their freedom and to improve themselves. Theological texts state that when people come to understand the world, they find an encoded moral code in it, a kind of “grammar.” With their reason, human beings recognize the law of human existence, or the natural law.

*Thus, the existence of the natural law in the context of human existence speaks about a drawn line, reminding that persons have to accept their own corporeality or the ontological deficiency, compared with the divine Being (Kévalas, 2016, p. 4).*

### **3.2. Understanding scarcity as good and evil**

Scarcity is often regarded as a negative phenomenon; it is associated with poverty and injustice. The philosophy of Enlightenment particularly advanced such an understanding, stating that a person can eliminate all possible deficiencies and change human nature and the whole structure of the world. Scarcity is seen as a lack of something specific which should not be there, a defect of being that can be amended. Such an interpretation narrows the concept of scarcity and ignores its function as a basic element of being:

*Scarcity (as origin per accidens) can in no way be evil. On the one hand, scarcity is an origin of all created being and belongs to entities by their very nature. But good is what corresponds to nature. Therefore, scarcity is a good (Plėšnys, 2016, p. 6).*

It follows that scarcity as an origin should not be associated with evil. A deficiency as a lack of a specific form, a defect, is to be regarded as evil, when an entity is lacking that which by nature it should possess. Analyzing the relationship between scarcity and evil, the authors of this study do not only refer to scarcity as a defect, but also describe the role of scarcity on the moral level. “Not only the lacking of what should belong to entities by their very nature is evil, but also an action which disarrays the proper functioning of an entity. Such disordered actions are theft, lies, murder, and so on” (Plėšnys, 2016, p. 6). An action that ignores the order of being or is intended to inflict scarcity by violating the freedom of others must be regarded as immoral. However, ontological scarcity itself is potential to be exploited; it creates an opportunity to strive after the essence and purpose of entities.

That is how evil is associated with scarcity in the theological tradition. A study of Genesis in the Old Testament provides an understanding that, after the fall, human actions often lead to evil, which is experienced as scarcity.

*Chapter 14 of the Genesis tells stories which will become paradigmatic to humanity: enslaved people rise, rebellions are suppressed, inhabitants of one land go to war against the people of another land, looting their possessions and food ... These verses scream out loud of all forms of scarcity, thrown into the human reality and the means by which people react to scarcity. Those means are force, deceit, violence and power. The way human beings found to respond to material scarcity, using violence against one's neighbor, increases spiritual scarcity. Scarcity as evil is experienced and spreads (Leontjeva, 2016, p. 11).*

This negatively experienced scarcity, incited by evil, obscures the positive aspects of scarcity as an origin of being.

Profit appears to be a natural consequence of human action. Under normal conditions, the absence of profit (in a sense of the fruit of human activity) would be unnatural. Profit as a fruit is sought after by everybody, whereby persons act according to their role in society: physicians seek health of their patients, the police seek security, politicians seek concord and progress in society, educators seek wise and virtuous people, and business people seek financial results. Something is going wrong when people who do their work do not generate profit or suffer a loss (Soto, 2015, p. 2). Where people intend to achieve enrichment through action, evil can befall them, such as a poor harvest or an absence of the expected performance, leading to greater scarcity. The reasons may be different: human error, failure to foresee, or irresponsible and inappropriate decisions. The challenge is to distinguish when losses are due to deliberate immoral activities, and when they can be ascribed to unforeseen changes in circumstances or errors. It is wise to remember that people may be inclined to regard the mistakes of others as an intentional sin. In contrast to that, one's own immorality is justified by circumstances and imperfections.

*The moment of will, encoded in human nature, affects freedom, and freedom affects morality. The strengthening of the human will allows to freely choose moral values, and thus to overcome the internal lack of perfection due to the impaired human nature ... While human beings and the society are surrounded by physical scarcity or lack of*

*resources and ontological scarcity or internal lack of freedom, the aim of overcoming them is not just the reduction of scarcity as such, because it is inescapable or preordained, but its purpose is to enable human moral abilities* (Kévalas, 2016, p. 9).

It is important not to confuse evil (situations where an entity does not fulfill its goal and essence) with ontological scarcity that opens up a possibility to acquire or not to acquire that essence. The existence of possibilities to unfold is a good. Evil is not making use of those possibilities. “The fact that the removal of scarcity is good does not indicate that its presence is evil” (Plėšnys, 2016, p. 7). Scarcity is a condition of human creativity; at the same time, it leads a person to tension, the need to overcome one’s limitations. That is one of the reasons why it is difficult for a person to accept scarcity as good.

The mind as one of the essential traits of human nature is able to foresee that which exists only potentially and is not yet realized. This potency reveals not only the inevitability of scarcity, but also its positive side:

*The mind becomes an instrument to see new opportunities and realize them. Here the divine power of the mind shows to persons the scarcity in them and their environment or the opportunities now potentially existing. Therefore, we can say that these yet unrealized opportunities “persecute” people as scarcity* (Kévalas, 2016, p. 5).

It is important to see that scarcity is a condition for human fulfillment and creativity. Being creative human beings resembles God:

*Human creativity is a power, a sign of being made in the image of God. But it also raises a tension or even suffering, because a person feels having the power to call into being what is not yet realized, but he or she needs to overcome internal resistance that inclines to rigidity and fixation. The person feels able to rise above natural borders of necessity. However, this possibility is “costly” to a person: it takes time, physical and intellectual effort, finally will, – qualities which are limited in every human being. Therefore, the inescapable tension between what is humanly possible, and what is concretely realizable can be defined as scarcity due to the ability to be creative* (Kévalas, 2016, p. 5).

### **3.3. Morality as a response to scarcity**

The response to scarcity can be classified into three categories. First, a person uses the surrounding nature to satisfy their needs. From an economic point of view, the productivity of those relations depends on human ingenuity and the tools available. However, in the sense of satisfaction of human needs, this access is limited; it is relatively inefficient because cooperation between people and specialization are not included. Second, in order to meet one's needs, a person may force other individuals and seek to benefit from coercive relations: war, robbery, theft, or slavery. Third, a person can participate in voluntary relationships with other individuals through joint work and the division of labor, cooperation and voluntary exchange.

Human activity, responding to scarcity, is connected with morality in two ways. First, only voluntary relationships without violence can be regarded as moral. The absence of coercive elements distinguishes moral from immoral actions. The use of violence is contrary to freedom. It therefore prevents individual development through choices, and thus hampers virtuous action.

Second, the answer to scarcity may be a way for peaceful, voluntary, and economically efficient solutions to take root:

*Consistently practicing exchange as an expression of transformation of scarcity and facing it as a universal phenomenon, we see that human activities, as well as their ethical assessment are closely related and influence each other* (Matulevičius, 2015, p. 14).

In the economic sense voluntary human relationships are much more efficient than coercion. It is impossible to objectively state that any coercive action is productive because it is impossible to compare the aggressor's benefit to the damage the coerced person suffers. Moreover, because all relations of violence damage at least one party, they are less productive than relations in which both sides benefit (Šilėnas, Žukauskas, 2016).

Scarcity combines economic laws and morality in a unique way. First, observing moral rules serves people's economic activities, furthers their mutuality and efficiency. Second, both understanding of economic laws and awareness of moral standards, and adherence to them, enable people to properly respond to scarcity and multiply goods, without encroaching on other people's freedom and interests. Third, economic laws themselves have come into existence due to human actions under the conditions of scarcity. Therefore, actions which reduce scarcity by means consistent with

the natural order, are to be regarded as moral.

In action, a person obeys the laws of economics. However, for human economic activity to be peaceful and coherent harmonious, a certain normative basis is required. People have to respect each other's property, and to keep agreements and commitments. Morality can be viewed as rules that gradually evolved to lead people into peaceful and fruitful relationships. For an act to be moral the object and the motivation is important.

In the eyes of Thomas Aquinas, economic transactions, as with all human relations, are inseparable from ethics. Since people flourish when they living virtuously and with integrity, virtue is important in business and all other areas of human activity. Moral aims in the economy are neither superficial nor negligible. In stark contrast, they are fundamental in understanding peoples' motivations: Why they produce and exchange goods (Dierksmeier, 2013, p. 159-178).

Certain virtues, such as self-control, wisdom, generosity, and love are directed not only to economic relations. They also allow a person to integrate scarcity into daily life.

Virtue is a stable and strong determination to do good. Constantly repeating actions directed to the good, following the dictates of common sense, virtues subordinate and overwhelm all human faculties, leading them to perfection and final flourishing (Syssoev, 2015, p. 21).

Thus, human beings are not only objects controlled by the laws of nature. Moral laws apply to them because they are free creatures (Solovej, 2015, p. 13). The ignorance of economic laws weakens the opportunity to properly respond to scarcity. The disregard for moral norms also weakens relationships with others. It makes them futile, painful, or breaks them off permanently. Aristotle and Aquinas argue that society and the actions of an individual are inextricably linked, in a systematic and synergistic way: If I use my freedom correctly, I will become a better and more virtuous person. In turn, the good achieved by me positively impacts other people. However, if I use freedom incorrectly, vices and wickedness will take root and spread in me and around me (Soto, 2015, p. 1).

To summarize, every action has an impact on the person, on others, and on the world. If, in order to reduce their scarcity or wishing evil to others someone uses violence, they undermine freedom and cause scarcity around

them. Thus, this study is crowned with the understanding that the discovery of scarcity as a cause of being and an inherent characteristic of human nature, the comprehension of economic laws, as well as the knowledge and practice of moral norms serve human freedom, harmony, and prosperity.

## **Conclusion**

Scarcity is one of the three causes of being and change. It is universal and omnipresent in all processes of being. Scarcity is manifested in human nature and functions as a key factor for people to learn, to act, and to seek fellowship and mutuality. Without scarcity, human freedom would be impossible; there would be no space for creativity and improvement. At the same time, scarcity incites discomfort and insecurity; it constantly reminds people of their limitations and is often seen as a negative phenomenon. Such a perception hinders the understanding of scarcity and may incentivize plans to fight it. This is characteristic of the individual and society. Many find comfort in the idea that scarcity will be abolished sooner or later. Yet, it is because of scarcity and – first and foremost – because of human limitations and mortality that people have to constantly make choices. And so scarce goods become economic goods. Ontological scarcity gives rise to economic phenomena, and economic activity makes multiplication of goods possible for the purpose of overcoming specific experiences of scarcity. It thus forms conditions for freedom and peace. And yet, scarcity will never disappear and will continue to pose challenges for humanity. In the reality of scarcity, the necessity of moral norms is obvious. Moral norms allow people to make the right choices, to know their limitations, and to foresee the consequences of actions for themselves, for others, and for the world. The knowledge of scarcity deepens the understanding of moral norms and allows a better understanding of the structure of being and the reality in which humanity lives and acts. At the same time, it creates conditions for a sustainable and peaceful cooperation.

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