



THE PHENOMENON OF SCARCITY:

Being, Man and Community



LITHUANIAN FREE MARKET INSTITUTE

A SYNTHESIS OF AN
INTERDISCIPLINARY
INQUIRY INTO
SCARCITY:

RESEARCH
APPROACHES AND
PERSPECTIVES

Vilnius

2016

Content

Abstract	5
INTRODUCTION	
Source of inspiration and assumptions of the interdisciplinary study on scarcity and essential findings of different disciplines	7
Findings due to interdisciplinary synergy	11
1. THE REALITY OF SCARCITY	
1.1. Scarcity as one of the origins of being	14
1.2. Scarcity as an element of this world	16
1.3. Scarcity as a mark of humanity	17
1.4. Scarcity on the level common to all human beings	20
1.5. Positive aspects of scarcity	23
1.6. Scarcity as an attribute of human nature	25
1.7. Two responses to scarcity: to act or to get	28
2. SCARCITY AND ECONOMICS	
2.1. The discovery of scarcity in economics	30
2.2. The emergence of economic phenomena in the context of scarcity	35
3. SCARCITY AND MORALITY	
3.1. The relation between scarcity, freedom and the good	39
3.2. Understanding scarcity as good and evil	42
3.3. Morality as a response to scarcity	45
Conclusion	48
Bibliography	49

Abstract

In this paper the research of philosophers, theologians, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and economists on scarcity is hermeneutically interpreted. Having analyzed and clarified points of contact, interdisciplinary insights about the role of scarcity in the order of being and everybody's lives are given.

Scarcity is named and characterized differently in these disciplines; they address different aspects of it. But essential similarities warrant the conclusion that scarcity is a universal phenomenon which unfolds in different forms.

The social sciences typically concentrate on the study of negative aspects of scarcity, which rather mask scarcity as an origin of being, creation and change. In contrast to this approach, this study goes further and focuses on the least explored aspects of the phenomenon, which are not only positive, but also necessary for the normal functioning of society and reality in general.

Philosophy explains scarcity as one of the primary elements in the structure of being and a fundamental reason for change. Christian theology, especially Biblical theology, explains the foundations of this purposefulness. Scarcity appears to be an inevitable mark of our being in a body, in space and in time. This insight opens up the opportunity to go deeper into the connection of scarcity, freedom and morality. Psychology, sociology and anthropology have shown that negative daily experiences of scarcity raise tensions and overshadow the opportunity to reflect on scarcity as a primordial principle and understand its objective and purpose. Negative experiences and the traditional reduction of scarcity in economics to the shortage of material goods create the illusion we need to fight with scarcity and try to eliminate it. This drags into a meaningless fight with the world, society and oneself.

The understanding and the acceptance of scarcity allow the direction of energy and efforts towards purposeful action, improvement, cooperation and the increasing of goods.

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

INTRODUCTION

Source of inspiration and assumptions of the interdisciplinary study on scarcity and essential findings of different disciplines

Scarcity, lack and limitedness are usually regarded as synonyms which describe the fact that the material and nonmaterial things in this world and human beings themselves are limited and finite. The researchers who participated in this project have shown that scarcity is:

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

Everybody is born in the context of scarcity, and in order to survive it is necessary to act so that resources are transformed into useful goods. However, there is not only one actor in the world making use of resources; there are also other actors who also want to use the same resources to satisfy their own needs. Thus, the possibility of conflict, or vice versa, of cooperation opens up:

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).

Having started this project, we found that scarcity is discovered in all disciplines in different aspects and is variously named. To philosophers and theologians scarcity is known as an integral, ontological feature of being; they are able to penetrate into the sources of its origin. However, even in these foundational disciplines the topic is fragmentary: the important findings of ancient and medieval thinking remained underdeveloped, the necessary continuation did not happen. Thus, the knowledge of scarcity as an ontological category remained relatively incoherent and practically not applied to the social sciences.

The fact that a common vocabulary is absent and that adjacent phenomena and their interactions are not explored showed that we have undertaken to study

a subject that is hardly known by science. It can be said that this is in line with the spirit of this study: we have found that people have scarce knowledge of scarcity.

This synthesis of the interdisciplinary study on scarcity is based on the hermeneutical method. The meaning of the different texts is reproduced by interpreting them: each passage helps to understand the whole issue, which in return serves to unlock the single texts. Working on this project we had to move in several directions at once: to develop a dictionary of terms and concepts, to outline relations of the explored phenomena, and at the same time to go deeper into each discipline's opportunity to provide knowledge of scarcity. The selected six disciplines – philosophy, theology, economics, anthropology, psychology and sociology – helped to provide a framework of scarcity, as mentioned in the beginning: explaining a lot of things, but also opening up horizons for additional research.

The classical authors of philosophy, starting with Aristotle (384–322 BCE) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), who developed his heritage further, showed that scarcity is the universal origin of evolvment and change. This explains why scarcity is reflected in so many different areas: the will, lacking the good, seeks goodness; the bud, lacking the blossom, gradually acquires it; the human being, lacking knowledge, seeks after it. Scarcity is revealed as the key stimulus of all change, an integral feature of a dynamic reality.

Showing that scarcity belongs to the reality of being, philosophy explains it as one of the primary causes. Meanwhile, Christian theology and Biblical studies help to explain the sources of scarcity itself. Independently of one another the theologians involved in this research came to this conclusion: scarcity is a purposeful characteristic of being, a natural element of creation and inherent to it. It is argued that scarcity came into being in this world together with the creation. Therefore, it must not be associated exclusively with sin or evil. Scarcity is a necessary attribute of our being in a body, in time and space. The world and human beings are created in such a way that each created being is open to change inherent to its nature, which means that everything is marked by scarcity.

Philosophy and theology open up knowledge of the phenomenon of scarcity; nevertheless, participating researchers in this study underline that in their disciplines scarcity has not been fully investigated, and thus there has not been a universal and coherent theory. This explains why philosophical and theological concepts of scarcity have not been taken into consideration by social sciences. In these branches of science scarcity is an object of human experience in life and of their evaluation. "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 as in theory” (Valantiejus, 2015, p. 6-7).

The late scholastics, who inherited from Thomas 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 the need to answer the question about the morality of economic actions. This gave rise to a new step in moral philosophy and economics. Therefore, we paid special attention to the works of the late scholastics, and especially to the heritage of the school of Salamanca. The studies have revealed that scarcity was more associated with the lack of concrete mundane things, and not with primordial scarcity beyond experience; hence the tendency to regard scarcity as a consequence of original sin and to associate it with evil. Yet the works of the late scholastics are full of breakthroughs that can be used to deepen the understanding of the role of scarcity, such as the explication of private property, of value and of the mechanism of exchange. However, this study does not suggest that scarcity as a concept of ontological reality was purposefully developed by the late scholastics and that particularly this notion gave impetus to the understanding of economic laws. Most probably, scarcity, understood in a Thomistic way, intuitively inspired and directed the works of the late scholastics, but it was not specifically named and described.

By not taking into consideration the ontological nature of scarcity, it inevitably remains something negative in the social sciences; it is perceived as misfortune, poverty, injustice, or an outcome of class struggle. In large part the social sciences are orientated towards its removal. “<...> 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, persons cannot create themselves nor their surrounding environment in which this feature does not exist” (Kévalas, 2016, p. 12). The loss of the understanding of human imperfection (or in theological terms their being as created) is related with the perception of scarcity as something artificial: the more people began to deny their imperfection, the more they tend to see scarcity as something unnatural, non-original, and created and therefore to be annulled. “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. In the beginning of the project this caused a kind of tension. However, as the methodology of the different sciences delved more deeply, an understanding of what scarcity means for human beings was gra-

dually untangled. Scarcity is almost everything people need or want and do not receive yet – for human beings scarcity is primarily a personal matter, “scarce for me.” Therefore, the answer to the question whether there is strict distinction between needs and desires is essential.

This study gave new insights into economic activity. Work, property, exchange, competition, money – all these are different responses to scarcity, enabling people not only to come to terms with it, but, given its presence, to create, enrich goods, and to expand cooperation and peaceful development.

Findings due to interdisciplinary synergy

The 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 very enriching insights.

Philosophy revealed the primordial character of scarcity on the ontological level; theology helped to understand the purpose of scarcity; and at the junction of these disciplines a kind of dialogue between freedom and scarcity emerged. The social sciences made it clear how an ordinary person is experiencing scarcity and how these experiences obscure the ontological and purposeful nature of scarcity. Seen from the perspective of economics, scarcity is understood as lack of resources, yet this appeared to be just the tip of the iceberg. The concept of “abundance”, introduced by sociology, made it clear why freedom in the economy furthers prosperity and, nonetheless, overshadows scarcity and allows for critiquing the economy:

It is a presupposition of elementary contact with reality that the sociologist, as persons 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).

In the beginning the examination of needs and desires in psychology seemed not to answer to the questions raised, but the synthesis of all the works revealed that we can precisely through needs and desires define what an ordinary person (not the researchers) regards as scarcity. The slide, recorded in the area of needs and desires, explains the slide in the understanding of scarcity.

The reciprocity of psychology and economics helps to understand how a person responds to scarcity in his or her everyday life, and why it is for some people a stimulus for creative action, while others are rather 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 can not 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 (Laurinavicius, 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 criteria to a group of people is impractical and can even 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” (Degėsys, 2015, p. 17). In the Middle Ages not only material things were regarded as needs, and they were not even the primary needs. For example, Aquinas said that there are six fundamental goods: not only life, but also 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 he or she lacks something, but because others are doing better and are missing less. Mutual benefit is hidden by hostility.

There is a tendency to interpretate one’s own and other people’s success and failure differently, which is apparent in showing favor to oneself. A person is prone to explain his or her high achievements at work with personal qualities and efforts, while the other person’s are ascribed to various 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 to the action of hostile people or groups; with that the person’s self-esteem is protected (Laurinavicius, Rekašiūtė-Balsienė, 2015, p. 9).

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

In the following synthesis, based on the texts of different disciplines, we will present the central observations under these headings: scarcity as an origin of being, as an element of the world and human beings, the complexity of the acceptance of scarcity, its role in the emergence of economic activity and economic science, and moral aspects of scarcity. These findings are guidelines for the understanding of scarcity and an invitation to unfold the riches touched upon, but which could not be explored in detail due to the objectives and constraints of this project.

1. THE REALITY OF SCARCITY

1.1. Scarcity as one of the origins of being

Fundamental and theoretical reflection on the essence of scarcity started with Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE). To explain reality, Aristotle identified three primary origins of being: matter, scarcity (στέρησις, privatio) and form. “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). These elements are necessary for processes of defining and actualisation of being itself to take place. For things to come into being, to exist and to change it takes a) that which emerges; b) that which is in opposition to what emerges; c) that out of which something emerges. According to Aristotle’s definition, the thing which emerges 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 not-being of something, and thus scarcity is not the same as pure nothingness or nothing. Scarcity is a kind of fountain, because it makes possible the emergence and evolution of all entities in this world.

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 apprehension. 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 (Plěšnys, 2016). So, scarcity makes possible the emergence of entities out of opposite things, but itself does not appear in any pure shape. This 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 conscious mental effort, deconstructing entities, searching for their causes. Meanwhile, a variety of manifestations of scarcity, like a particular time, material goods, skills, a lack of relationships, is experienced directly. This experience is often

accompanied by discomfort, and thus scarcity is inertly seen in a negative context. Fighting with these sensory manifestations with the goal to eliminate the grounds of scarcity altogether is neverending. Having established a negative understanding of scarcity a person, experiencing scarcity, does not intend to relieve or to reduce it, but to eliminate scarcity so that it is not a discomfort causing mark of experience anymore. Due to the primordial nature of scarcity this is simply impossible, and a person determined to do so is condemned 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 through thinking. Only by thinking and accepting scarcity in itself and in being in general can human beings direct their energies to chosen goals, improvement, cooperation and the increasing of goods.

1.2. Scarcity as an element of this world

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

Even before Aristotle Greek natural philosopher Democritus (460-370 BCE) 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, a lack of atoms in a particular place:

<...> 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 the 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.¹

¹It 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.

1.3. Scarcity as a mark of humanity

Human beings are time-limited, fallible, finite and lacking, but at the same time are self-improving beings. Such is the human nature that separates us from the physical, and from the metaphysical world. Persons differ from the physical nature by freedom and opportunity to grow and make progress, 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, p. 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 the 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, 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 which 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 persons. 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, p. 6). The acceptance of oneself as an always lacking being ensures that a human being will not become entangled in an endless war against one's nature. A human person should not long for divine perfection which is beyond our reach; but the path marked by internal and external scarcity toward human fullness is a harmonious fulfilment 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 a free person can actualize his or her potential. According to the Thomistic tradition, freedom is an essential condition for the overcoming of individual imperfections and the unfolding of 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. Here the very first 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 be able to develop his or her nature, to work and to continue the creation of the world. Scarcity is the other side of creativity, activity, choice and even freedom itself. If there were no scarcity there would not be freedom for people to create, to act, to choose; 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 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 cannot only help to identify, but it 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 this context the importance of reflection on scarcity is obvious again. Mind comprehends that experienced scarcity is not absolute. Human beings are mindful to choose measures to improve a situation and have the freedom to accomplish this. They are to be regarded as an independent being, an end in themselves, but at the same time open to personal development, to the knowledge of others, but not to forced dependency. These features are captured on the primordial level and eventually develop into a definition of what it means to be human.

1.4. Scarcity on the level common to all human beings

The fundamental or ontological scarcity of perfection is deeply rooted in the nature of the world and human beings, and thus cannot be eliminated. All entities originate from a current lack of something, therefore all emerged entities are marked by scarcity. The mere 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 scarcity of absolute ontological perfection. Plato (2009) perceived all phenomena and objects of the dynamic world as dialectics of scarcity and fullness in the very center of the tension between being and nothingness. This understanding of reality reveals the universality of scarcity. It is found not only in the ontological structure of the world accessible to human minds, not only in the physical and natural world, and not just in the human beings themselves. Scarcity is also revealed in human relationships.

Interpreting 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. Previously existing full, spherical beings had been cut in half. This 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 several stages of relationships:

1. before the fall – scarcity as a prerequisite of relationships and freedom;
2. after the fall – scarcity as a source of war, fear and violence;
3. in salvation – scarcity can be realized restfully and hopefully.

In the first stage, God created separate and limited beings, dependent on each other, – heaven and earth, male and female, etc. It is expounded that prior to the fall scarcity was a blessing and a gift to human beings. "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 creation

of mankind, metaphysical dependence on each other is ingrained. The fact that a human being 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. Human beings 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 not accepted as a gift, but regarded as a prey to take, this mindset paves a road of destruction and self-destruction. If all see in other people the enemy and just a tool, the human race will be in a permanent state of confrontation and war. The Fall changed human reality and relationships, including the relation with scarcity. Desire, which is infinite, is now first and foremost directed to earthly goods; people have become insatiable and begun to experience any deficiency as injustice, as 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, disease and suffering – are consequences of the fall. After the fall evil came into this 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 this manner the possibility of harmony with the order of this world, the environment, 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 can not 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, Rekačiūtė-Balsienė, 2015, p. 12).

Postulating natural human sociability, anthropology also indicates that it unfolds the presence of scarcity in all spheres of human life:

From the anthropological point of view, response to ontological scarcity is reciprocity and exchange. <...> The human being, having experienced social isolation, is afflicted by psychological and mental suffering. Having lost contact with one's social environment people often lose their mental health or dehumanise, 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 dependence on each other and the desire for relationship do not deny autonomy, since the real craving for relationship is a desire to know the other as a free, independent 'world'. Thereby people enrich themselves and reduce personal scarcity. To enslave others is only an artificial augmentation of oneself which does not reduce, but rather deepens imperfection, loneliness and meaninglessness.

1.5. Positive aspects of scarcity

There is no coherent philosophy of scarcity. This 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.

The lack of awareness of scarcity in social sciences is related to the fact that the examination of the presuppositions of these disciplines is outside of their interest and opportunities. Because the social sciences tend to focus on the manifestations of scarcity rather than on its presuppositions, fundamental premises about scarcity can be overlooked.

Philosophical tools enable to look at the heart of the matter; they reveal the role of scarcity in the ontological structure of the world and its positive manifestations. Plato inquired into scarcity in two ways. On the one hand, he viewed scarcity as a deficit in which an entity lacked essential components. On the other hand, he also viewed scarcity as a stimulus to act, to move and to change. In Aristotle's philosophy scarcity was presented as an opportunity: the potency and its effect and the act.

If everything existed in total abundance, persons would lose their identity and meaning for life. It is also impossible to grasp the world ignoring its limitations, temporality and change. 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 this perspective, to lack something and understand this lack is not a negative experience. On the contrary, such a desire or longing is often experienced 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, the 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," said Socrates who, like all mortals, lacked the fullness of divine wisdom. According to the Greek, to be aware of one's own scarce knowledge means to be on the right track, because only fools think

they know everything. This nicely illustrates the myth of Eros (in Plato's Symposium), who lacked wisdom and therefore passionately sought after 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 can not have passion and the potential for pursuit, desire and love if you have already all this and no fear of losing it. The feeling of scarcity excites desire, 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 number of all possible 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 this is sometimes received as an annoying irritant, we should not heedlessly strive for fully overcoming basic scarcity, because this is not possible; neither should we ignore it, thus impoverishing ourselves to a narrow perception of our options. It is also important to evaluate an alternative: instead of fundamental scarcity, freedom and infinite choices we could have determinism and slavery. Suffering in a restricted freedom is much deeper than suffering in an imperfect, but free world.

1.6. Scarcity as an attribute of human nature

Though being one of the three origins of all coming into existence, scarcity, however, is hardly accepted. The marks of scarcity in human beings themselves help to understand why this is the case. Human beings are fallible, corporeal beings in time, they lack knowledge and other people – they are social beings. Marks of scarcity are to be found in the world too. The world is temporary and limited in space, its resources are limited and must be transformed to proper use. Persons with an imperfect nature are acting in an imperfect world. In this regard, the reasons for the rejection of 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 of activity directs the attention away from the possibility of reflection” (Leontjeva, 2016, p. 3).

The social, anthropological level: Being ignorant of and, therefore, not recognizing the primordial nature of scarcity, its accurateness and crucial role in the processes of dynamic reality, people inevitably treat scarcity as a consequence of unjust social reality, as a result of bad human actions. Scarcity is experienced as bereavement, poverty, evil, injustice; attention is drawn to the question how to eliminate these phenomena, and the feelings of scarcity with them. The feeling of scarcity is experienced personally; scarcity is perceived as a “scarce for me”, and this feeling postpones even more the understanding of the primordial and universal nature of scarcity. This treatment of scarcity is prevalent not only among ordinary people but also dominates the 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” (Matulevičius 2015, p. 3). “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. 4). Anthropology diversifies the discourse of scarcity, speaking about such interpretation of scarcity like its

mystification and stigmatization. It is likely that human consciousness is covering scarcity from time immemorial.

The time 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 at least for a moment until then the 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 most easily understood as a distance separating the current status from that which is to emerge. It is easier to understand forms of scarcity, which directly gives rise to something; it is more difficult to understand scarcity which comprises a big number of processes of change in time. The same is to be said about the physical nature of human beings.

In free and rational human reality vagueness, insecurity and uncertainty about the future are hard to endure. "Insecurity turns scarcity into an enemy of human beings, because it seems as if it is the only thing that hinders people from accumulating enough to feel safe" (Simonen, 2016, p. 9). Constant waiting makes scarcity even more difficult to bear. People try to prepone the satisfaction of desires, to shorten the waiting time, or vice versa – to distance some scarcities, to extend time, to stretch waiting. A person does not know when scarcity stops, when a new type arises and what will be the mechanism to cope with it, its speed and result. Naturally, people long for security which is given by abundance, and thus they undertake purposeful actions. However, in this activity people can make mistakes and experience failure due to natural causes, such as bad harvest because of weather conditions, or human error like the failure to anticipate events. The acceptance of scarcity does not guarantee security, but helps to understand that scarcity is no impediment to happiness.

"It may be, but it is not yet" or potential scarcity depends on the person lacking something: he or she 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, but a person can refuse to desire, and at the same time to experience scarcity. On the other hand, "it must be, but it is not yet" or natural scarcity is related to natural processes and for human beings difficult to control, such as physical maturing.

Moral norms, religion and rationality help a person to handle scarcity in the flow of time, to develop self-control and moderation, choose proper and timely decisions. The concept of linear time obliges to assume responsibility for consequences in the future. 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 nonacceptance of scarcity is closely linked to the teaching of original sin. Original sin has changed human reality and relationships, as well as 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 which before the fall was a pure gift, a good tool to be able to live in this world, became hard and severe and is thus being resisted. All areas of human experience are now marked with a sign of imperfection, such as the phenomena of mutability and freedom or exchange, and vulnerability to error and sin. All this 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 – to be a blessing and an invitation to continue the development of the world – 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 absolutely perfect and did not differ in their perfection from God. The ignorance of this theological distinction has dire consequences: it is believed that already on this earth 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, 2015). 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: to act or to get

Scarcity is usually a stimulus to action, but under certain circumstances it can paralyze. For example, the lack of health may be an encouragement to start exercising and eating healthily, but it can also depress, incite to give up and not to take any action. The reaction to scarcity is individual and depends on character traits, experience and values.

To the stimulus of scarcity a person can also respond in two ways: acting, or simply expressing a claim to get what you need. In the first case, in acting someone responds to scarcity and will finally be rewarded by a fruitful result. In the second case, a person may receive the deficient thing without too much personal effort. In the first case, people act as active and responsible creators; at the same time, they improve and unfold their potentials through work and knowledge. 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 second case, people respond only as consumers or claim holders and thus shut themselves off from key opportunities: to develop and come to fruition.

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 notice 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 come to fruition, in the second with freedom as a right to get without effort, usually at the expense of other people. Indeed, to realize freedom and to meet needs of scarcity is only possible in a challenging way of knowledge, creativity and daily service to others. Liberation from this toil is identical to the removal of liberty and to reduce persons to the status of animals that are fully provided for.

2. SCARCITY AND ECONOMICS

2.1. The discovery of scarcity in economics

Human economic activity has emerged as an attempt to survive in the face of scarcity. Unsurprisingly, economic science purposefully developed the concept of scarcity. The understanding of scarcity in terms of the material world has evolved from a very concrete concept in the Middle Ages to a more abstract concept in modern times. In the early Middle Ages no abstract term was used to describe scarcity in physical surroundings. Only very specific terms were used to indicate the lack of a specific item. “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 this 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 since God created everything, this should lead to good. To the question “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 at the same time underestimating human creative power resulted in Malthus’ well-known conclusion: humanity will not be able to feed itself. The scientist did not foresee the opportunities offered by extended economic relations and the industrial revolution, nevertheless, his insights remain extremely valuable. Rethinking them critically we can understand that humanity is actually facing a gloomy future, if not for the great increase of goods due to human economic activities. Indirectly Malthus reveals the contribution of modern economics to the fortune of civilization: human beings are capable of feeding themselves, thus making possible the continuous growth in human population.

Authors of this study number a wide range series of inventions, from the recipe of bread to oil refining technology, emphasizing that behind the whole concept of technological progress lies the tireless human creative genius, entrepreneurship and response to scarcity. Baking bread takes flour, and this has to be milled from grain. Thus, the invention of the mill was an important step forward in the production of food. The Romans invented the rotary hand mill; earlier people used water or horse-powered mills, later the windmill was invented. The need to produce more and better food caused a wave of good ideas (Lahayne, 2015, p. 16). The authors stress that the most important presupposition of all these inventions and their practical application is freedom. A participating historian warns that if humanity loses the abilities which helped pull back from balancing on 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: antique constraints abated, and that made room for political and social freedom, which the world has not seen before. Freedom was a necessary prerequisite for the spreading of more and more ideas. Some two hundred years ago Europe and North America surpassed the once also rich and ingenious China and India, not least because they widely ensured human freedoms (Lahayne, 2015, p. 18).

Economist Carl Menger (1840-1921) deeply reflected the universality of scarcity. Already the physiocrats in the eighteenth century noticed that things which are not lacking do not become economic goods. They did not analyze “free goods” (e.g., air), because these are so numerous that they cannot become objects of exchange. In fact, most of the classical economists were able to exclude such goods of unlimited quantity from the scientific investigation of “property”. Essential for the definition of the classic law of supply and demand has been limited supply (Kirzner, 1976, p. 111).

Menger used scarcity as a way to separate economic from non-economic goods and to explain how economic activity comes into being. In specifying the goods which are lacking, Menger refrained from assessing whether a person really needs them and whether there is really not enough of a certain good in the world. He simply logically distinguished between goods that are too numerous to be scarce to any person now or in the future, and goods that are lacking or may run out. The criteria introduced by Menger allowed the ability to distinguish between goods, regardless of their physical characteristics, origin and other features. The criterion of scarcity introduces a very clear order in a complex world and helps us to understand why the economy came into being. He also showed that subjectivity is not a problem. The fact that, for example, air in one case is an economic good,

and in another not, is not a paradox or misunderstanding. Rather it is the logical consequence of the application of the criterion of scarcity.

Ludwig von Mises intended to surpass the framework of traditional economics: the primary task of the mind is to cope with the limits imposed by human nature, and to struggle 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 called “economic” (Mises 1999, p. 235).

This project 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. Living for a limited period of time, the economic aspect runs through all of human social life: everywhere the question arises 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 felt need for food to supply more energy. Before the fall of the first human beings, such a situation was not dangerous or life-threatening at all, so there was no hard struggle for survival (Lahayne, 2015, p. 6).

At the junction of the disciplines the understanding matures that it is impossible to think of a world without scarcity and therefore without economic activity, because (a) there are things that cannot be amplified, 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 behaviour, concerned with the satisfaction of human needs and differently used means, makes it possible to choose and has 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 intelligently utilize and to create, including not only what is consumed, but also what remains and is trans-

ferred to the next generation. Productive work aims to transform existing things into more useful ones. In this way completely new things come into being: each of this type of work creates things that previously did not exist. This fact alone implies scarcity. The technological development and the creation of new products alleviate basic scarcity, but the presenting of new opportunities even more induces scarcity. The creation of new technological devices causes the desire to have them, and here again thinking is needed to help 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 directly available. Therefore, scarcity is directly related to the work (Lahayne, 2015, p. 11).

Economist Lionel Robbins (1898-1984) extended the importance of the context of scarcity in such a way that the definition and tasks of economics as science have been recast. According to him, economics examines human behaviour in the interaction of goals and limited resources which have alternative uses. This definition negates the misconception that economics is only interested in peoples' material well-being, and its purpose is to explain how that prosperity is created (Šilėnas, Žukauskas, 2016, p. 9)

Robbins saw a paradox which to this day is little understood: while human economic activity allows the increase of goods, this is not the main task of economics as a branch of science. The scholar fought against the materialistic definition of economics and maintained that in general it is not possible to distinguish between material and non-material well-being. Therefore, economics is not a science which explores only material goods and prosperity. Economics examines people trying 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. These 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 the light of this study it can be added that economics in its core is not a science about numbers, as is often thought, but about human beings who, as limited and mortal, facing scarcity, are forced to calculate, evaluate, compare and choose constantly. Such an understanding of economics justifies one of the goals of this study: to search for points of contact and to gain fruitful insights from disciplines that focus on the human being.

Scarcity as an incentive to act, improve and multiply works in 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 determines 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 hos-

tile to innovation. Communities developed solidarity customs; it is common, for example, to help a neighbour in the case of famine. At the same time, the quest for profit, the use of innovations, the fixing of prices and similar economic activities become stigmatized or even prohibited.

Over the past 40 years the global population increased from 4.5 billion to 7 billion. At the same time, neither has the available space on the earth has enlarged, nor has the agricultural workforce increased. Nevertheless, the number of people living in absolute poverty fell 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 40 years ago, to 5.5 billion now. Although economic relations and the progress of technology today allow to meet ever growing needs and to do this better and better, 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 the most scarce asset. It is wrong to look at a person first of all as a burden and an extra mouth to feed. Every new person uniquely enriches the world, and the human creative power turns out to be an inexhaustible 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, a response to scarcity. We are creatively looking for and finding new ways to discern, prevent and mitigate problems caused by scarcity. It is remarkable, that in this process people are able to not just overcome obstacles but also receive benefits. We produce food to eat, clothes to wear, but we usually produce more than we personally need. Sometimes we invent a device that can be usefully applied more widely than we expected; we create drugs which save lives now and in the future help to find solutions in other areas; 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 this 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 behaviour 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 cost in the activities of every day life: in choosing the very best option of using limited time and resources, the second best does not come to fruition. In assessing these best choices an economic action is performed: the less valuable is rejected because under certain circumstances another one seems more valuable. In order to gain 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).

This 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, he or she 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 intensive work, it is necessary to abandon one or

another, though perfectly legitimate, plans of self-realization” (Syssoev, 2015, p. 21). Not surprisingly, talking about choices, Lionel Robbins (1932, p. 13) clearly 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 fulfil 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 forces us to economize: to use goods as efficiently as possible, to save, as well as to find ways to increase them. Menger’s definition of economization can be rephrased in modern words: 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. The scholar clarified the emergence of ownership, while at the same time showing that the intention to eliminate scarcity can never solve the problem of deficiencies.

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” (Simonen, 2016, p. 16, 11). Thomas Aquinas reflected on the experience of mankind and came to the conclusion that the abandoning of common 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 even further, denying the traditional Augustinian approach. He underlined 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 in order to meet needs necessary for survival, 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. As in the past, human inner laziness and envy were an impediment to keeping things in common (Alves, Moreira, 2015, p. 8).

Going deeper into the origins of property, Menger comes to a valuable insight: whenever natural conditions permit, people are prone to the common use of goods. Thus, all the 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 the 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, what the preconditions for the emergence of communism are.

Not only work and property, but also exchange, money, pricing, cooperation and competition have arisen as a spontaneous response of humanity to scarcity. These phenomena came into being in the recurrent chain of choices; they are consistent with human nature and the reality of existence. This study gives insight into economic phenomena as natural and inevitable, predisposed by ontological scarcity. Such an understanding of economic phenomena is an important breakthrough that allows us to regard these phenomena as purposeful and indispensable and to recognize in them reflections of the reality of human nature.

3. SCARCITY AND MORALITY

3.1. The relation between scarcity, freedom and the good

“In the Aristotelian and Thomistic tradition in one aspect 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” (Plěšnýs, 2016, p. 1). Scarcity is a part of the reality of being and of human nature, therefore accepting and acting on it paves the way for moral choices. Actions are characterized not only by economization; certain moral criteria are always involved in the process of choosing. In the light of scarcity, the necessity of morality is newly seen: moral norms are in order to know the good and to responsibly choose it. When scarcity is ignored, fought against, or when its destruction is aimed at or the illusion is created that it does not exist, all this leads to moral confusion. For example, if pressed by scarcity a person takes on a job and regards this as suffering and violence, he or she morally feels like doing something inappropriate, as if energy and time could be used for better purposes. Or saving the world from any deficiency and suffering, a person feels morally correct, however, in the light of the structure of this world, this is an illusion. Thus the understanding of scarcity sustains moral life, and helps to 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 can not hold back the aging process or fully prevent diseases. Responsibility goes together with freedom and also promotes, through free decisions, to approximate to the good and to choose correctly, because in the future both the choosing person, as well as other people and the whole environment, 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 procedures to realize an objective (Plėšnys, 2016, p. 1).

Rationally choosing a way, understanding one's individual nature, accepting the surrounding reality, evaluating alternatives, weighing consequences, all these demonstrate that rationality functions in the frame of the individual and universal moral compass. Human beings, to fulfill their very nature, are to be in tune with God's will through thinking, so that they can judge for themselves what is the best and can direct their will towards 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, Laisvė, p. 1).

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

According to the antique understanding of the good, we can say that the good is what perfects the person, and allows the powers of mind, will and feelings 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 lack 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 persons would not be limited and experience scarcity, they would not have space to implement their freedom and improve. In theological texts it is also sta-

ted that knowing the world human beings find in it encoded a moral code, a kind of “grammar”. With their mind human beings recognize the law of human existence, 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, in human beings (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. In particular Enlightenment philosophy encouraged such an understanding, stating that a person can eliminate all possible deficiencies, change human nature and the whole structure of the world. In this approach scarcity is seen as a concrete lack which may not be, a defect of being that can be corrected. Such an interpretation narrows the concept of scarcity and ignores its function as a basic or original 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. Analysing the relationship between scarcity and evil, the authors of this study do not only refer to scarcity as a defect, but also briefly 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 stealing, lying, murder, and so on." (Plėšnys, 2016, p. 6) Therefore, an action that ignores scarcity and thus the nature of reality, or which intends to reduce one's own scarcity violating the freedom of others, must be regarded as immoral. However, ontological scarcity itself is a potency to be unfolded; it creates an opportunity to strive after good, the essence and purpose of entities.

This is how evil is associated with scarcity in the theological tradition. A study of the book 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 ways in which people react to scarcity. These methods 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, covers the positive aspects of scarcity as an origin of being. Profit appears to be a natural consequence of human action. Under normal, healthy conditions the absence of profit (in a general sense the fruit of human activity) would be unnatural. According to this approach, “profit” 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 even suffer a loss (Soto, 2015, p. 2).

Where people intend to achieve enrichment through actions, evil can befall 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, 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 inevitable errors. It is true and it must be remembered that people may be inclined to regard the mistakes of others as an intentional sin. In contrast to that, one’s own immorality is covered by circumstances and imperfections.

The moment of will, encoded in human nature, affects freedom, and freedom 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, that is situations where an entity does not reach its goal and essence, with ontological scarcity, which opens up the possibility to acquire this essence or not. The existence of possibilities to unfold is a good. Evil is not making use of these 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 a tension, namely the need to overcome one’s limitations. This 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 not only reveals 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 are similar to 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 which 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 that what is concretely realizeable can be described in the reality of 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 of all, a person uses the surrounding nature to satisfy needs. From an economic point of view, the productivity of these relations depends on human ingenuity and the tools available to him or her. 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, slavery and so on. Third, a person can participate in voluntary relationships with other individuals: joint work and the division of labor, cooperation and voluntary exchange.

Human activity, aiming to respond to scarcity, is connected with morality in two ways. First of all, only voluntary relationships, not based on violence, can be regarded as moral. The presence or 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.

Secondly, 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 total phenomenon, we see that human activities, as well as their ethical assessment are closely related and influence each other (Matulevičius, 2015, p. 14).

Voluntary human relationships are economically much more efficient than those that are coerced. It is impossible to objectively state that any coercive action is productive, since it is impossible to compare the aggressor's benefit to the damage the coerced person suffers. Moreover, since all relations of violence damage at least one half of the relationship, they are less productive than relations in which both sides benefit (Šilėnas, Žukauskas, 2016).

Scarcity somehow combines economic laws and morality. First, observing moral rules serves people's economic activities, furthers their efficiency and facilitates them. Second, both economic laws and their understanding and awareness of moral standards and adherence to them enable people to properly respond to scarcity and increase 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, these actions, choosing to reduce scarcity by means consistent with the natural order, are to be regarded as moral.

Morality can be viewed as rules which gradually developed to lead people into peaceful and fruitful relationships. By acting on these rules, a person obeys the laws of economics. However, for human economic activities to be peaceful and smooth a certain normative basis is required. People have to respect each other's property, to keep agreements and commitments. For an act to be moral, not only the object, but also 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 living virtuously and with integrity (and they crave to flourish), virtue is important both in business and in 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 are directed not only to economic relations, such as self-control, wisdom, generosity, love; they 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 surrounding them. The disregard for moral norms also weakens the relationships with others, makes them barren, painful or breaks them off permanently. Aristotle and Aquinas argued that the actions of society and the individual person are inextricably linked, and this in systematic and synergistical way: if I will use my freedom correctly, I myself will become a better and more virtuous person. In turn, the goodness 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 himself, on others and on the world. If in order to reduce their scarcity persons use violence, they

undermine freedom and cause scarcity around them. Thus this study is topped by the understanding that the discovery of scarcity as an origin of being and human nature, the comprehension of economic laws and the knowledge and practice of moral norms serve human freedom, concord and prosperity.

Conclusion

Scarcity is one of three origins of all emergence and change, hence it is universal, ubiquitous and found in all processes of being. Scarcity is particularly manifested in human life and functions as a key factor for a person to know, to act, and to have fellowship. Without scarcity human freedom would be impossible; there would be no space for creativity and improvement. And at the same time scarcity gives rise to discomfort and insecurity; it constantly reminds people of their limitations and, therefore, is often seen as a negative phenomenon, which one wishes to remove. Such a reaction hinders the understanding of scarcity, and even urges a person to develop and carry about plans of its abolition. This is typical of both the individual and society: a large part of humanity takes comfort in the idea that scarcity sooner or later will be eliminated. It is because of scarcity, and first and foremost human limitations and mortality, that people constantly have to choose, and thus limited goods become economic ones. Because of ontological scarcity economic phenomena emerge, and economic activity allows goods to increase, to overcome specific scarcity, in this manner forming conditions for freedom and peace. However, scarcity will not disappear, its challenge to human beings will remain. In the reality of scarcity, the necessity of moral norms is obvious. They allow people to make right choices, to know their limitations and to foresee the consequences of actions for themselves, others and the world. The knowledge of scarcity deepens the understanding of moral norms and allows a better understanding of the structure of existence in which human beings live and work. At the same time, it creates conditions for sustainable and peaceful cooperation of people.

Bibliography

Aquinas, T. (no date). *Thomas Aquinas: De Principiis Naturae: English*. Trans. R. A. Kocourek. Available at <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/DePrincNaturae.htm> (Accessed on 26 January 2016)

Alves A., Moreira P. 2015. *Scarcity, Economics and Morality: the Contribution of the Late Iberian Scholastics*.

Aristotle and Barnes, J. 1984. *Complete works of Aristotle, volume 2: The revised Oxford translation*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes and Jonathan Barnes Aristotle. 6th edn. United States: Princeton University Press.

Baumgärtner, S., Becker, C., Faber, M. and Manstetten, R. 2006. Relative and absolute scarcity of nature. Assessing the roles of economics and ecology for biodiversity conservation. *Ecological Economics*, 59(4), pp. 487–498. doi: 10.1016/j.ecolecon.2005.11.012.

Davies, S. 2015. *Economic History, Scarcity, and Morality*.

Degésys, L. 2015. *Stoka kaip fenomenologinės analizės objektas*.

Dierksmeier, C. 2013. Scholastic Business Ethics: Thomas Aquinas Versus William of Ockham' in *Handbook of the Philosophical Foundations of Business Ethics*, ed. Luetge, Springer, pp. 159-178.

Furley, D.J. 1987. *The Greek cosmologists: Volume 1, the formation of the atomic theory and its earliest critics: V.1: Formation of the atomic theory and its earliest critics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kardelis, N. 2016. *Pozityviųjų stokos aspektų įžvalgos senovės graikų filosofijoje*.

Kėvalas, K. 2016. *Stokos pozityvumo arba „palaiminimo“ žmogui teologinė interpretacija*.

Kirzner, I. M. 1976. *The Economic Point of View: An Essay in the History of Economic Thought*. Kansas City: Sheed and Ward Inc.

Lahayne, H. 2015. *Blessings of Scarcity, Hope of Abundance*.

Laurinavičius A., Rekašiūtė-Balsienė R. 2015. *Asmenybės poreikių samprata skirtingų psichologijos krypčių teorijose*.

Leontjeva E. 2016. *Hermeneutinė Pradžios Knygos interpretacija*.

Matulevičius S. 2015. *Stoka kaip antropologijos objektas*.

Menger, C. 2007. *Principles of economics*. Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute.

Mises, L. Von. 1999. *Human action, a treatise on economics*. Scholars edn. Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute.

- Platonas. 2000. *Puota, arba apie meilę*. Ver. T Aleknieinė. Vilnius, Lietuva: Aidai.
- Platonas. 2009. *Sokrato apologija*. Vilnius: Aidai.
- Plėšnys A. 2016. *Laisvė*.
- Plėšnys A. 2016. *Stoka ir jos vertybiniai aspektai*.
- Robbins, L. 1932. *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*. London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd.
- Roser, M. 1945. *Economic Convergence between countries*. Available at: <http://ourworldindata.org/> (Accessed: 18 April 2016).
- Rothbard M. 2011. *Man, Economy, and State with Power and Market, Scholar's Edition*. Ludwig Von Mises Institute.
- Syssoev P. 2015. *Stoka: teologinės įžvalgos*.
- Solovej V. 2015. *Žmogaus paveikslas klasikinėje filosofijoje*.
- Soto A. 2015. *Profit and its morality*.
- Šilėnas Ž., Žukauskas V. 2016. *Scarcity and Economics*.
- Šventasis Raštas. 1999. *Ekumeninis leidimas*. Vilnius: Lietuvos Biblijos draugija.
- Valantiejus A. 2015. *Stokos paradoksas sociologijoje ir socialiniame gyvenime*.