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Challenges of 'modern evil' for the sustainable development: A request for cooperation of scientific and theological knowledge*

S.A. Kravchenko

Moscow State University of International Relations Vernadskogo Prosp., 76, Moscow, 119454, Russia Institute of Sociology of FCTAS RAS Krzhizahanovskogo St., 24/35–5, Moscow, 117218, Russia (e-mail: sociol7@yandex.ru)

Abstract. The author considers the latest challenges for the sustainable development as determined by 'modern evil'. Its essence is not limited to specific sanctions or war: it is multifaceted expressed in simulacra and fakes, 'non-events' and post-truth; producing 'moral blindness', neonationalism, xenophobia and Russophobia, 'cultural racism', and 'normal traumas' in the society and nature. Actually, 'modern evil' embodies a parallel entity in the form of a new Antichrist acting among us on behalf of a 'higher reason' and 'progressive humanity', while introducing chaos and instability into people's life worlds. The author uses interdisciplinary methods to examine specific manifestations of 'modern evil': temptations of novelty, hyper-consumption and 'conspicuous consumption', global, pragmatically oriented digitalization, which spreads destructive content. These manifestations of 'modern evil' should be replaced by the sharing of goods and services, movement towards the ethics of modesty and national-sovereign digitalization. The demand for cooperation of representatives of scientific and theological knowledge for the sake of new forms of sustainable development meets the requirements of the realities of global complexity and nonlinearity. Such cooperation can become a driver of the humanity's active production of good and humanism — as the main factor of movement to the 'sane society' functioning in harmony with humanized scientific-technological innovations and authentic nature.

Key words: 'modern evil'; sustainable development; global complexity; nonlinearity; 'arrow of time'; digitalization; humanism

Today the formation of 'global complexity' as developing nonlinearly under the influence of both external and internal factors has become visible by producing challenges for the sustainable development [32. P. 151–162]. According to the 'arrow

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of time' idea, "human societies, especially in our time, obviously have a much shorter time scale... It is interesting that with an increase of complexity, going from the stone to human societies, the role of the arrow of time, of evolutionary rhythms, increases" [28. P. 301]. 'Modern evil' is also affected by the 'arrow of time' and becomes more complex, which is manifested in its pluralization and dispersion. Its multiple faces make it more difficult to see how it deforms the life worlds of people, erases the referents of good and evil, and undermines the sustainable development. As a response to these challenges, social sciences rediscover the issues of God and religion and use the concept 'modern evil'. M. Wieviorka argues that "today God has returned to societies which until recently, were justified in believing that they were becoming totally secularized... 'Modern evil' is the outcome of human action and implies degradation, destruction, negation, in any event a challenge to the physical, mental, or moral integrity of certain people or groups, directly or indirectly" [36. P. 2, 11].

The power of 'modern evil' extends, and its influence is expressed in simulated friendship and faithfulness, communications with imagined and fabricated faceless others on Facebook. Insensitivity, lack of human spirit, and the dispersion of morality are the result of the cults of formal, pragmatic modes of thinking and acting. Global digitalization has become a 'value of values' reducing the role of local faith, culture, and traditions. Previously sustainable routines and values reproduced by religious beliefs and scientific knowledge are losing their functionality. The consequences of 'modern evil' cannot be overcome by bureaucratic and political structures — only by cooperation of scientific and theological knowledge.

There are modern reflexive theories studying 'global complexity', nonlinearity, turbulences in societies and nature [33] and innovative investigations of 'modern evil' as producing new challenges for the sustainable development [11; 36]. Subtle forms of violence deforming social and individual consciousness are considered with J. Baudrillard's theory of simulations and simulacra, his concept of 'non-event' [3; 4; 5]. In the research of simulations, new ideas have evolved: the drama-producing performances deform long-lived values and norms, affect people's behavior by the immoral force and immediate benefits [1]. To analyze the challenges of pragmatic digitalization U. Beck's theory of 'the metamorphosis' is used [14] together with theories of cosmopolitan humanism and planetary social organization [15; 27; 34].

The quintessence of 'modern evil'

Under the 'arrow of time', the evil changes its essence and appearance — its functioning becomes more sophisticated, which transforms humanism, knowledge of God and changes, respectively, the relationship of people with animate and inanimate nature and with each other. The becoming 'modern evil' is complex: it includes hybrid challenges of both moral and natural character by acting as global anonymous and lurking in human's agency. This has led directly and indirectly to social ills and nature sufferings, which is why 'modern evil' is much more dangerous than relatively simple 'old evil'. The challenges of 'modern evil' for the sustainable development are also

becoming more complex: its functionality does not affect specific people at a particular time, but rather the population of the entire world. It has brought new cults of formal efficiency and novelty, which transform social consciousness, human soul and body, life-milieu — a value-based 'homelessness' emerges. 'Modern evil' facilitates the spiral of violence by producing invisible but sophisticated forms of domination that deeply deforms human life, society, and nature. In social networks, there are powerful signs and symbols, the meanings of which do not adequately correlate with either people's will or the humanistic nature of man. It is this type of 'softer' violence that has led in Europe to a surge of neo-nationalism, xenophobia, Russophobia, and a 'new, cultural racism' that labels Jews or Russians as 'evil', cultivates hatred towards non-Western cultures and civilizations. 'Modern evil' manifests itself in the pragmatic mode of digitalization. A new, secular 'soul' of society's members emerges, and social communications are reorganized into a kind of computer functioning. 'Modern evil' also manifests itself in the deformation of man's relationship with nature, which leads to 'dead' soil and 'dead' water [29].

According to M. Wieviorka, "evil is linked with suffering which can be both physical and mental... former differences are becoming blurred. The place of God and that of nature are changing. The separation between body and soul is challenged" [36. P. 5, 6]. He pays particular attention to the four new manifestations of 'modern evil' in Europe: 1) Xenophobia undermining the capacity of Europe "to represent the humanist values which should characterize it". 2) 'New racism' or 'neo-racism': the people targeted by it are "no longer described in physical or biological terms but much more in cultural terms... Islamophobia has made Islam a religion which sets its believers apart from other members of community". 'Modern evil' stigmatizes people as 'culturally maladaptive', unable to assimilate values and norms — they are pushed to leave Europe. 3) 'Judeophobia' — the new anti-Semitism, unlike that of the previous period, does not insist on the physical attributes of Jews. "There is less talk of the 'Jewish race'. Instead it depicts a population which is in essence evil and malicious", which makes European Jews move to other countries. 4) Global terrorism replaced 'classical terrorism' (an occasional phenomenon) as a permanent feature [37. P. 205, 208-210, 213, 219].

J.C. Alexander described the essence of 'modern evil': social realities are not inherently good or bad, sacred or vulgar, they acquire a certain qualitative, moral-value content only as a result of signification, a never ending coding of realities by individual and collective actors. This ultimately determines the liquid character of social knowledge and traumatizes the ideas of good and evil: "Events are one thing, representation of them quite another... The gap between event and representation can be conceived as the 'trauma process'". The collective agents of the trauma process ('meaning making') "may be elites, but they may also be denigrated and marginalized classes. They may be prestigious religious leaders or groups of whom the majority has designed as spiritual pariahs" [2. P. 93–94]. The original meanings of events produced in social networks with the help of performances and dramatic

effects are permanently recoded into images of evil, and vice versa: "In the spectacle societies of modernity, everything is top-down; nothing comes from the bottom up... Those watching the performance don't see it as performance; they identify with the protagonists and experience enmity toward the antagonist on stage" [1. P. 2, 4]. It follows that the simulated images appear to be real and trustworthy. Often performances and dramatic effects are used for political purposes by those who control the means of symbolic communication, but the price is a growing mass skepticism that undermines the sustainable living and development.

In countering the challenges of 'modern evil', scholars and theologians have intensified the search for new forms of humanism. R. Braidotti develops the concepts of posthuman and posthumanism. There were different types of humanism in the history of mankind (in Europe, the humanist ideas of the Enlightenment). For a number of historical reasons, especially under fascism and communism ('revolutionary humanism'), the European humanism was in crisis, from which it could not recover and was replaced by "a posthuman development" which "comes from science and technology studies... This indicates a global sense of interconnection among all humans, but also between the human and non-human environment... This new pan-humanity is paradoxical in two ways: firstly, because a great deal of its interconnections are negative and based on a shared sense of vulnerability and fear of imminent catastrophes and, secondly, because this new global proximity does not always breed tolerance and peaceful coexistence; on the contrary, forms of xenophobic rejection of otherness and increasing armed violence are key features of our times". These evil realities gave rise to theorizing "a cosmopolitan posthumanism that is supported as much by the European tradition as by non-Western sources of moral and intellectual inspiration". Elaboration of new ethical values has begun. "These new formations are postulated on the demise of that 'Man' - the former measure of all things". He is replaced by the posthuman, whose ethics "proposes an enlarged sense of interconnection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others" [15. P. 39-40, 50, 49]. These ideas are important for facing the challenges of 'modern evil'. However, the concepts of posthuman and posthumanism seem ambiguous: they can be used to interpret incipient, qualitatively new ethical values and norms that are humane in their basis, but without due explanations they can be perceived as nihilism of humanism in general. It is better not to contrast Man with the posthuman, but to speak of the potential of his new social type.

The challenges of 'modern evil' to the sustainable development determined the need in cooperation of scientific and theological knowledge as two main intellectual approaches. Until the early 21st century, theology did not have an opportunity to reveal its spiritual and intellectual potential, while science did not consider the importance of faith and human spirit. The integral scientific-theological approach should be applied to study the consequences of the manifested challenges to the sustainable development: reproduction of simulacra and simulations, 'death of the social', seductions which deform human spirit and lead to the separation of body and

soul; pragmatic digitalization creating both benefits to explore nature and dangers of control over the human race.

The diagnostics of 'modern evil' requires integral and broader approaches that take into account achievements of both sciences and theology. The practical cooperation of scientific and theological knowledge can be institutionalized in the form of state-theological structures and joint intellectual projects based on the collaboration of secular and theological educational institutions. Such cooperation makes it possible to consider all sorts of dispersions and turbulences of society and nature, and to search for new forms of humanism, including the humanistic orientation of any scientific research which becomes an ethical imperative.

'Liquid evil' as the main expression of 'modern evil'

Z. Bauman and L. Donskis introduced the concept 'liquid evil': initially manifestations of evil were "based on a black-and-white social perspective, in which we can easily identify the resilience of evil in our social and political reality — assumes the appearance of goodness and love"; this is 'solid evil'. Today evil is not obvious and self-evident: low-intensity political oppression and human rights violation, low-intensity military conflicts obfuscate and obliterate the dividing line between war and peace. "War is peace, and peace is war...The old 'good' Devil represented solid evil with its symbolic logic of the quest human souls... yet the logic of liquid evil is to seduce and retreat, changing its appearance all the time". The typical feature of 'liquid evil' is "a prestidigitator-style racket of make believe" [11. P. 3–6, 15].

Under the seductions of 'liquid evil', life practices and humanistic attitudes 'blurred'. In the traditional society, there were binding realities — humanistic principles and faith shaped the strictly defined needs of human beings. For centuries, man integrally lived with nature and took from it only what was necessary. However, he could not resist the temptation to take more than was necessary for the functioning of his body and spirit. So, the 'conspicuous consumption' started as a waste of time, money, and commodities [35]. Since the Enlightenment, a formal-rational, pragmatic, and mercantile approach to nature has developed, changing not only nature but also man, means of his labor, and conditions of his existence. Globalization spread these trends throughout the world and determined the movement towards unfixed, dispersed realities that express "a culture of disengagement, discontinuity and forgetting". Its basic function is not to satisfy existing needs but to create new ones, which corresponds to 'non-satisfaction desires'. Thus, 'liquid evil' transforms the human soul and body and develops a new social type 'homo eligens' ('man choosing') with a 'consuming body' [7. P. 62, 80, 89].

The factor pushing the man towards a sin of consumerism is that humanism and anti-humanism, good and evil, prohibitions and temptations coexist in the time and space. The challenges of non-satisfaction desires turn into a planetary lawlessness and armed violence; "instead of great expectations and fairytale dreams, 'progress' generates insomnia full of nightmares" [8. P. 7–10, 11]; the increasing anxiety due to selfishness and violence generates a phobic atmosphere [6]; 'collateral damage' in the form of a value-based 'homelessness' emerges [9].

Among the challenges of 'liquid evil' to the sustainable development is the 'global epidemic of nostalgia' caused by the deformation of social happiness and justice that are found not in the present or future but in the past due to the 'optionality of human choices'. "The 'civilizing process' that was meant to have been designed, conducted and monitored by the modern state, looks more and more as a reform of human manners, not human capacities, predispositions and impulses. In the course of the civilizing process, acts of human violence were shuffled out of sight, not out of human nature". The distinction between 'good violence' and 'bad violence' disappears. "We have to file a violence-free world among perhaps the most beautiful — thought also, alas, the most out-of-reach — utopias... In the result, the Leviathan has lost in any but a purely formal sense — its assumed, and indeed commonly granted, monopoly on drawing the line separating the legitimate from illegitimate violence". To overcome the global epidemic of nostalgia and to restore the weakened social bonds by replacing 'bad', unrighteous violence with 'better' violence, has never been possible. Contrary to neoliberalism and its verdict 'there is no alternative', today, for the sake of the sustainable development, it is necessary to admit that "we — human inhabitants of the Earth — are in the either/or situation: we face joining either hands, or common graves" [10. P. 3, 13-14, 16, 22, 167].

The challenges of 'liquid evil' in their digital form are vividly expressed in social networks in which virtual, 'softer' forms of violence are produced and deform social and individual consciousness. The Internet "enslaves the mind and the will. People sit in front of a screen, a computer monitor or a tablet and immerse themselves in this reality. Virtual loves, virtual tragedies, virtual conflicts develop. We are immersed in the kingdom of crooked mirrors" [20]. According to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), in 2015, 95% of the 15-year old students in the OECD countries had Internet access at home, and on a typical weekday, spent more than two hours online after school. Children are 'connected' in different contexts, not just at home. According to the PISA 2012 data, in the OECD countries, 72% of students used computer technologies (desktops, laptops or tablet computers) at school vs 93% at home. Technology use is on the rise in other age groups as well [30].

The impact of computer technologies on students' brain and cognition becomes possible due to the 'liquid evil' power of permanent changes in the meanings of signs creating new seductions — 'needs' in the form of "object-signs of consumption" [3. P. 25]. 'Softer' forms of sign-violence and simulacra of what is good control people's consciousness and behavior. J. Baudrillard believes that human civilization heads towards a dehumanized world of simulations in all spheres of social life. There is an absorption of social events by simulacra of 'non-events': thus, viewers of the Gulf war were shown something that did not happen [4]. The

very notion of normativity and deviance begins to blur. By replacing objective and subjective reality with signs of reality, we get an illusion of reality which refers to the simulation of goodness. All former values are expressed by signs. Simulacra control not only what objects we must consume and with whom communicate, but also what we should do in general and what we should strive for. Individuals cannot realize their true needs — they may think that money can buy anything but they can only want what their group consumes. The revealing of the mechanism of simulacra production based on new seductions makes 'modern evil' transparent [5].

Recently, new challenges of 'liquid evil' have emerged in the pragmatic digitalization. There are evident achievements in digitalization: "today's digital societies give rise to new social forms... 'the digital' entails changes in the relations between technologies and social life; between knowledge, society and technology" [26. P. 11]. Benefits of the digital technology "enable and generate a new responseability to both students and educators" [16. P. 159]. However, the pragmatically oriented digitalization becomes an expression of 'liquid evil' by spreading destructive content and digital surveillance: "The digital technology is capable of creating tools that provide total control over the individual. Nothing like this could have happened in the past. Human thought, technical civilization today has reached a level where, by implementing the digital technology, it is possible to provide total control over the human person... The book of Apocalypse says that the coming of the Antichrist will be accompanied by total control over man. It does not use these words, but it is very clear from the content that it refers to the ability of total control over human behavior. It says that the seal of the Antichrist will be put on the forehead of man, and without this seal it will be impossible to buy or sell, or participate in any social relations — man will be doomed to destruction" [21].

The pragmatic digitalization promotes 'liquid evil' by constantly changing human beings. While traditionally we were conditioned by our biological and psychic physicality, by our life-worlds, today from our birth we are dependent on the consequences of digitalization. Socialization always involved the transmission of values and norms from the older generation to the younger. Today, as U. Beck argues, socialization is being metamorphosed: new generations "incarnate the digital *a priory* — yet not at the end but at the beginning of their socialization... the younger generations were already born as 'digital beings'" [14. P. 188]. Humanmachine hybrids are becoming widespread. Many people implant chips in their bodies to turn into metamorphosed cyborgs: on the one hand, this allows to scan data from the body by any mobile device; on the other hand, a variety of information can go directly to the cyborg brain. C. Greenfield argues that computers "have altered our brains", making real empathy almost impossible without visual contact and body language [19]. According to W.H. Vanderburgh, digitalization has formed 'new secular myths': "the myth of science allows us to live as if scientific knowing has no limits, thereby ruling out the need for all other knowing". As a result, "we are beginning to see glimpses of the emerging anti-person who lives as if our being a symbolic species can be ignored most of the time, only to surrender ourselves to becoming *homo informaticus*". The 'anti-person' has different ideas and criteria for happiness and justice. In the former society, happiness was sociocultural in nature, in the contemporary society, it is technical and determined by the individual adaptation to the environment through digitalization. However, a return from the 'anti-person' to human is possible — it is necessary to abandon the 'secular opium': "If we choose this course of events, we will guarantee destruction as a symbolic species, and we will most likely take the planet down with us". The digital, despite obvious benefits and conveniences, poses latent threats to people's livelihoods. By means of resymbilization and reification "we will discover how unscientific our science is in relation to all life, how inhuman our technique is, how uneconomic our unlimited growth is in producing debt rather than wealth" [34. P. 331, 333, 371, 384].

Digitalization extends its influence not only on humans but also on nature and climate making them turbulent. The transition from post-industrial and post-Internet worlds to the digital era has been accompanied by the destructions of the environment: "Most people in the developed West have very little awareness of the e-waste issue because companies have managed to ship most of it to the developing world, often illicitly" [27. P. 154-155]. Man is rooted in nature in two ways: his physicality and the conditions for life. Man depends on nature but has a creative power which manifests in emotional, volitional, and intellectual activity. If nature suffers from human destructiveness or from the damage caused by the invasion into the micro-micro world of bacteria and viruses, nature defends itself by producing new illnesses. The pragmatic digital development 'naturally' traumatizes human life and the biosphere — these are 'normal traumas' [24. P. 150-159] of nature, which lead to climate turbulence and, thus, have 'normal' traumatic effects on the economy, tourism, and human livelihoods in general. Moreover, 'normal traumas' can be caused by non-human actants - computer networks and digital clouds as complex systems can get out of the human control [25]. In the becoming socialdigital-natural realities, in particular those involving 'smart machines' and 'digital cities', the principles of artificial intelligence bring not only desirable innovations but also evils in the form of increasing vulnerabilities of dehumanization.

'Liquid evil' poses an unresolvable problem for both scientific and theological approaches. An example of cooperation of a scholar and a theologian is provided by Z. Bauman and ex-priest, now an academic theologian and cultural historian S. Obirek — both took the path "from the blind arrogance of the possessor of a single truth to the restraint of a witness to multiple human truths". They recognize natural differences between scientific and religious approaches to the interpretation of life, but oppose "uncritical quasi-religious believers" who claim a monopoly in understanding good and evil, virtue and vice, truth and falsehood [12. P. 2–3]. What is needed today is not skepticism or confrontation with reason or belief but cooperation of scientific and theological knowledge to face the challenges of 'liquid evil'. The demand for such cooperation presupposes the following: philosophers

of religion considered evil in an abstract and logical perspective, and formulated deductive arguments to show that certain facts about evil are logically incompatible with the existence of the omnipotent God [18. P. 35–66]: the theological approach is based on the recognition of God's creation of the world order. Theists usually distinguish moral and natural evils by connecting moral evil with particular persons engaged in vice and their possible salvation, while natural evil is the result of natural processes that produce victims [31]. A harmonious combination of science and theology can guarantee the development of optimal approaches to overcoming evils caused by the formal and pragmatic use of knowledge and technology. Common goals can be achieved by specific methodologies: science proceeds from the unknown risks, while theology recognizes the mystery of God and His will; science stands for innovations, theology — for the preservation of moral and spiritual traditions. However, both can develop human spirit in the integral knowledge.

Cooperation of scientific and theological knowledge can make a crucial contribution to the humanistic digital turn in the contemporary knowledge [22]. This includes the study of various manifestations of moral and natural evils, including the side-effects of digitalization, and 'illnesses' of humanist practices — like all social realities, humanism can periodically be in crisis or anomie. The humanistic digital turn can be a factor of the development of the humanist discourse based on the recognition of God's will (basic principles of the world order, preservation of the authentic nature and humanization of technologies). The common task is to develop a scientific-theological praxis, a roadmap for the formation of the humanistic language of world-knowledge and daily living.

The transition to a new model of thinking and activity based on the cooperation of scientific and theological knowledge is possible. Mankind should activate the production of the good and humanism as the main factor of the viability and sustainability of society and nature. One way is to revive the functionality of myths and archetypes, among which are the hero, the sage, the saint, the penitent. The traditional rites and social practices are very important: baptism, absolution, love of neighbor, communion, good shepherd, atonement — they have historically contributed to the social integration of the normative order.

The cooperation of scientific and theological knowledge allows for a purposeful minimization of radicalism and pragmatism in relation to the results of digital technologies and artificial intelligence. In particular, humanistic digital modernization is in demand: traditional modernization, aimed at the transition to a qualitatively new level of consumption based on the development of productive forces and digital technologies, should be replaced by an alternative type of modernization focused on the ethics of modesty. Sharing consumption becomes popular (shared use of cars, facilities, clothes, etc.) pointing to "the rise of a utility function that privileges affordable consumption over the logic of capital accumulation" [17. P. 210]. Representatives of these forms of consumption struggle against wasted and hyper consumption for the measured and modest standards of living. They believe that consumption can be based not on 'universality' of property but on principles of humanism; they look for alternatives of the pragmatic consumption, try to establish "new forms of 'bio-sociality' and bio-citizenship" [15. 41].

The goal of cooperation of science and theology implies overcoming interventions into the human genome, shaping a humane relationship between society and nature, taking into account new climatic and epidemiological turbulences. The evil of the pragmatic digitalization is a great challenge for all social, natural and human sciences together with the theological knowledge. In response to these challenges, scholars have developed new integral approaches to digitalization, which incorporate humanizing trends of the contemporary knowledge. It is hoped that scientists' and theologians' cooperation can ensure the transition to a fundamentally different trend of development while preserving the humanistic foundations in all technical innovations. All previous turns in science were based on ideas of pragmatic efficiency and growth of benefits; today we need a humanistic digital turn. We witness the emergence of a global human community that cannot do without God's will and moral regulators — a cosmopolitan ethic based on a cosmopolitan responsibility develops. As U. Beck argues, 'planetary ethics' presupposes 'forgiving the unforgivable': "not only God must forgive, but human beings must forgive human beings" [13. P. 46].

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Вызовы «современного зла» устойчивому развитию: запрос на сотрудничество научного и теологического знания

С.А. Кравченко

Московский государственный институт международных отношений просп. Вернадского, 76, Москва, 119454, Россия Институт социологии ФНИСЦ РАН ул. Кржижановского, 24/35, к. 5, Москва, 117218, Россия (e-mail: sociol7@yandex.ru)

Аннотация. В статье анализируются новейшие вызовы устойчивому развитию, порождаемые «современным злом», суть которого не ограничивается конкретными санкциями или войной: оно многолико — выражается в симулякрах и фейках, «не-событиях» и постправде, культивирует «моральную слепоту», неонационализм, ксенофобию и русофобию, «куль-

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турный расизм», «нормальные травмы» человека, общества и природы. «Современное зло» фактически олицетворяет параллельную сущность в виде нового Антихриста, действующего среди нас от имени «высшего разума» и «передового человечества», внося при этом хаос и неустойчивость в жизненные миры людей. В статье используются междисциплинарные методы исследования конкретных проявлений «современного зла»: соблазнов новизны, гиперпотребления и «демонстративного потребления», глобальной, прагматически ориентированной цифровизации, распространяющей деструктивный контент, которым противопоставляется совместное использование товаров и услуг, движение к этике скромности и национально-суверенная цифровизация. Автор обосновывает востребованность сотрудничества представителей научного и теологического знания ради выработки новых форм устойчивого развития, адекватных реалиям глобальной сложности и нелинейности. Это сотрудничество может стать драйвером перехода к активному производству добра и гуманизма как главного фактора движения к «здоровому обществу», функционирующему в гармонии с очеловеченными научно-технологическими инновациями и аутентичной природой.

Ключевые слова: «современное зло»; устойчивое развитие; глобальная сложность; нелинейность; «стрела времени»; цифровизация; гуманизм