

**Heidegger's understanding of nature.  
Draft of a phenomenological "philosophy of ecology"**

The issue regarding understanding of nature and what today will be actualized as philosophy of ecology for sure is not new but it has been old as philosophy itself. Specifically, even initially when within Hellenic pre-Socrats philosophy has been obvious reducing of what is considered the initial, the original, expressed in well known matrix of existing of all the Being, into physical, material, natural elements. Consequently, Thales' water, Anaximen's air or Heraclit's fire have always presented the power and expression of antic mind that diversity of existing reduced to a single element, which as a cause of all existing is nothing but the natural. Further development of philosophy has dedicated greater or minor role to nature and what considered natural, whether it has been put at the level of God like in Spinoza's work, whether it has been reduced to mere instrumentality given by the modern thinkers, what is expressly presented in Hegel's animosity towards the natural.

Somewhere we could in the similar mode consider learning on nature given by Martin Heidegger, the most important philosopher of 20th century, which shall be the main subject of this work. Basically, the work will be based on two main theses, where one has as its goal to show how Heidegger understands and treats the nature, while the second deals with the role of technique and its understanding of nature.

**Heidegger and nature**

Among the Heidegger's works which more systematically examine the nature and which could be considered what Von Herrmann characterized as Heidegger I or the first phase in his work, there is the most important Heidegger's work *Being and Time*. Here we shall mention only the early Heidegger's reflections on this issue, so that we could later discuss the works from the Heidegger II, where his vision can be seen more profound and more detailed.

So, the main problem in this early phase is to show that there is something like readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand. Both are part of the environment (Umwelt), and the first one refers to how we exactly encounter nature. The second refers to how we conceive nature once we have withdrawn from the upset and the perceptual field of the readiness-to-hand into the realm of abstraction.

Immediately in these two differences can be seen that Heidegger observes nature in two modes. The first one is through the matrix of readiness, while the second one is through the matrix of presence. In the first case we have the pure nature, what is given, the mere things we find in the nature such as stone, grass, trees, sky, earth, etc. On the other hand, the sphere of presence includes the objective nature, corresponding to the nature as treated by the modern science, where we could speak about instrumentalization of nature. This becomes clear when considering that the area of presence is the area of tool, or a mode to valorise pragmatically the nature.

Much more important and greater contribution to affirmative understanding of nature we can find in the later Heidegger's work, where we shall point those related to issues of relationship between the earth and the world. These are mostly the works dedicated to art and

poetic modes of human existence. Similarly, these later insights are mostly related to notions such as earth, then greater interest for the notion *physis* and obviously the critical considerations on technology.

Now we shall give a couple of notes on greater interest expressed for *physis*, and then we shall consider Heidegger's reflections of the issue earth which is an inalienable aspect of his perception of fourfold. The word itself *physis* originated from Greek somehow constantly follows the German philosopher during the early and later works. Thus, in the later phase of his work it goes to be equalled to the meaning of existence itself. Moreover, Heidegger offers discussion on *physis* in the context of criticism of metaphysics including numerous critical notes expressed in his later philosophy.

When considering revitalization of concepts such as earth, sky, world then we have the paradigmatic Heidegger's works such as *The Origin of the Work of Art*, *Building Dwelling Thinking* or *Poetically Man Dwells*, where he more explicitly considers not only human dwelling but his leaving on earth and need to its preservation.

Thus in his work *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, Heidegger considers the true man's dwelling and asks among other things in which way a man decides to take certain place. Dwelling is human essence, and leaving would mean belong to fourfold made of sky, earth, gods and mortals. Or as Heidegger says:

"Earth is the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal. When we say earth, we are already thinking of the other three along with it, but we give no thought to the simple oneness of the four.

The sky is the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year's seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds and blue depth of the ether ...

The divinities are the beckoning messengers of the godhead. Out of the holy sway of the godhead, the god appears in his presence or withdraws into his concealment ...

The mortals are the human beings. They are called mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death as death. Only man dies, and indeed continually, as long as he remains on earth, under the sky, before the divinities ..."<sup>1</sup>

In this fourfold connection Peter Critchley will see the connection between two main principles, nature and culture. "The fourfold of earth, sky, gods, and mortals is actually the twofold of nature and culture. "Sky" and "Earth" together refer to nature. Individuals, mortals, gathered together by a common "heritage" by a shared pantheon of gods, refer to culture or community: only by dwelling in "the sight of the gods" does "man become a people (Volk)".<sup>2</sup>

Further Critchley notes :

"Dwelling-space is therefore a bounded space. It is a space "cleared and free ... within a boundary," a boundary being "not that at which something stops but .. that from which it begins its presenting. It follows from this that there are many therefore fourfolds. The ethics of dwelling involves a combination of localism and universalism. The fourfold in which one dwells is a local

1 M.Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling", *Thinking*, in: M. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harperperennia, New York, 1971, pp.148.

2 P.Critchley, "Martin Heidegger: Ontology and Ecology", in: P.Critchley, *The City of Reason* Vol. 7 *The Ecological Concept Of The City (e-book)* Available through: Academia website <http://mmu.academia.edu/PeterCritchley/Books>, pp.3.

fourfold. The ethics of dwelling will therefore vary according to place and person. The primary object of guardianship and the local fourfold is not the universe or the planet, but the particular fourfold to which one belongs. "<sup>3</sup>

However, all previously said, takes us to further insight according to which we must stand in the truth of Being so as to be able to liberate ourselves of protectorate of metaphysics and thus become the ones who take care of dwelling, earth, nature. It should be noted that every of the aforementioned elements has been reflected in the other one, which refer to interconnection of all the moments of the fourfold. Even in his work *The Origin of Work of Art*, Heidegger notes the relationship between the world and earth for which the Greek temple is paradigmatic, where the world and earth are in the relation of discovering and hiding, of constant struggle and replenishment. That would represent, when understood better, the aforementioned conflict, correlation between nature (earth) and culture (world), where the world would give the laws, namely establishing *ethos* of the earth. Thereafter, Heidegger's equalization of *ethos* with man's dwelling only confirms the mentioned correlation, this is how we come to ethical context of dwelling, because that is the mode of our living and our responsibility towards the place, i.e. nature. Contrary to carelessness and irresponsibility of dwelling of the metaphysical man, only a man living in the fourfold, valorises the possibility of *ethos*.

Of course, living in the fourfold understands rejection of standardized geographical definition of the place and acceptance of releasing boundaries in the truth of being as well as acceptance of poetic measure living on the earth. "This measure-taking is itself an authentic measure-taking, no measures gauging with ready-made measuring rods for the making of maps. Nor is poetry and building the sense of raising and fitting buildings. But poetry, as the authentic gauging of the dimension of dwelling, is the primal form of building. "<sup>4</sup>

### **Ambiguity of technique and nature**

The issues of technique and technological are complex and broad question, at least presented in Heidegger's work, to be expressed in all the aspects in this work. What should be mentioned is for sure the issue regarding technique and its treatment of nature. Heidegger has been praised among the numerous philosophers of ecology because of his strong criticism of positivist, pragmatic and mechanistic understanding of nature that was established since Descartes and then spread in scientist circles to be expanded notably in the contemporary circles. It is well known that Heidegger's late phase has emphasized the destructive moments of modern technology, manifested as the will for the will, will for control, domination and exploitation. Consideration of the technique in *The Question Concerning Technology* shows that the essence of the technique is not something technical and that the will towards rational and technological management over nature contained in what actually constitutes the essence of the technique which is of metaphysical character. More precisely its essence embodies enframing (*Gestell*) having its source in metaphysics. Of course, technique for Heidegger has also an important role in ancient Greek art where it refers to the possibility of creating, producing, *poiesis*, and this presents an affirmative vision of technique. Mostly, Heidegger inaugurates the kind of thought

3 *Ibid*, pp.4.

4 M.Heidegger, "Poetically Man Dwells", in: *Poetry, Language,Thought*, pp.224, 225.

based on phenomenology and hermeneutics, the so-called essential thought, within which it is only possible to listen to the truth of its existence.

In any case, Heidegger expects the establishment of an appropriate balance between humanity and nature, he constantly criticizes the anthropocentric approach which according to him characterizes philosophy since Plato and which is manifested in already mentioned will for domination over nature. Inspired to achieve an absolutization of knowledge and management of nature, being a process which culminates in Hegel's absolutization of spirit, leads to the formation of self-enslavement of humans by technology. "Modern technology as an ordering revealing is, then, no merely human doing. Therefore we must take that challenging that sets upon man to order the real as standing-reserve in accordance with the way in which it shows itself. That challenging gathers man into ordering. This gathering concentrates man upon ordering the real as standing-reserve (Bestand)".<sup>5</sup> To be more precise, the man himself has become not only the slave but the tool of technique. Heidegger warns that an objective character of technique has been expanding on earth more decidedly and quickly than every. Herewith it can be noticed how the whole world becomes reduced to mathematics and calculability.

Thereafter, it becomes evident that Heidegger criticizes openly technology as an establishment of order and disciplining of nature, and this represents the torture that in the end include a man himself as a part of the nature.

It is also important to see that Heidegger makes difference between good and bad technology, and thus shoes in Van Gog's picture, an old mill, a bridge on the river are the examples of good technology, while hydro-electric or atomic weapons are examples of a bad technology. There is a well known example of a bridge from the *Building Dwelling Thinking* which may confirm this statement. Here we have a bridge seen clearly and perfectly blended into the landscape. Although a technical matter, the bridge as a construction does not violate the natural environment but clears the space and creates a place for living. What however enables the difference between them?

It is interesting that bad aspects of technology Heidegger are characterized as reducing nature to mere survival which is being transformed into an ordinary source for something. Nature itself becomes a source for something, i.e. for human use. But left to its own technology becomes an object of fascination. It has its own life, capricious and unpredictable.

Heidegger's characterization of bad technology is followed by the series of attributes such as "modern technology is a challenging, forcing, ravishing, attacking, throttling, dominating, exploiting, imposing, disposing, exposing, and deposing.

When interpreting Heidegger's understanding of technology Rojcewicz says that: "For Heidegger, not only modern technology is a challenging, it is a dishonourable one; nature is given no chance to defend itself and is instead forced to give satisfaction. What demand does modern technology place upon nature, what is the satisfaction claimed in the challenge? It is the demand that nature yield up its energies and resources so that they might be on call, ie, readily available for human use. The claim is made that nature's treasures are merely there to satisfy, as

5 M. Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", in: *The Question Concerning Technology, and other Essays*, Garland Publishing, New York, 1977, pp.19.

efficiently as possible, human needs and whims. This attitude is diametrically opposed to the one of respect. " 6

Herewith there is a reason why according to Heidegger technological production in this negative concept cannot be *poiesis*, which used to be the characteristic of an antic production, or technology in an affirmative sense as poetics. In that sense it can be confirmed that the antic understanding of technique represents primarily harmonization with the *telos* of nature, its natural possibilities, which understands that *poiesis* enables that all these purposes are disclosed. On the other hand, modern technology is not harmonization but exploiting of all potentials of nature, it does not respect nature but enslaves.

### Concluding remarks

Aforementioned moments in Heidegger's philosophy did not have as a purpose to consider all particulars within his understanding of nature, which is much more complex than presented in this Draft. What we wanted to emphasize here can be described as two main theses that when balanced constitute specific Heidegger philosophy of nature, i.e. ecology. Here we shall mention the authors such as Zimmerman who according to theses of *profound ecology* states at least in his early works that Heidegger could fit in such a project of thought and action. However, such a judgement could not be accepted, taking into account a fact that Heidegger rejects any possibility of reducing his understanding to defined metaphysical adverse-appearances such could be considered nowadays ecological project, which together with capitalist neoliberalism grows into specific ideology. Also, it is quite clear that Heidegger does not fit into today's expansion of animal rights, where we point out that animal species are just put higher on ethical scale, but that human being in ideology of humanism has been reduced to mere animal species, one among many other. In support of this statement there is more emphasized *animal humanism* that according to Badiou's understanding reduces solidarity among the humans, transforming it into matrix that man is concurrence to a man, Darwinian Code of struggle for survival in the brutal new-colonial robbery of what we call the Western world.

Consequently, Heidegger can be still classified as a holder of an idea that man should return to the simple, primal mode of leaving, and that is living according to nature within the nature. That is obvious in his understanding of the fourfold, that represents the most open call to accept the nature, earth in its truth, i.e. truth of its existence. Similarly, the criticism regarding technology of world has as its objective to suggest that technique has its ambivalent nature, as antic *poiesis* and as modern technocracy, and that in return and the reaffirmation of antic Greek ideal can be seen return from the nihilistic fate of the modern world.

Therefore, even if we could speak about a Heidegger philosophy of ecology then it would include two foundations which in this presentation as a Draft are characterised by notion of nature given in the fourfold on the one hand, and by notion of criticism of modern technique on the other hand.

6 R. Rojcewicz, *The Gods And Technology*, State University Of New York Press, New York, 2006, pp.72.

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