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Ecological Crisis and the Need for New Metaphysics

Nickolay Omelchenko

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Copyright ©1996 and 2011 by Professor Dr. Nikolai Omelchenko, Volgograd State University, Department of Philosophy, ul. 2-ja Prodolnaja, 30, Russia 400062 Volgograd. E-Mail: nomelchenko[at-symbol]mailru.com

We need a metaphysics of respect for nature in order to overcome the ecological crisis. Genuine metaphysical respect for nature needs no supernatural substance. Matter is realized as *causa sui* and can be also defined as *natura sapiens*. Humans are not the only intelligent life forms in the universe. The new metaphysics may include Fromm's principle of love. The orientation „production for production” is not eligible for contemporary man. The meaning of human life must be correlated with essence (*logos*) of objective being.

Telling about adventures of ideas, A.N. Whitehead (1937, p. 3) noted correctly that „theories are built upon facts”, but „the reports upon facts are shot through and through with theoretical interpretation”. In his opinion, the concept of history does not exist without aesthetic predilections, beliefs in metaphysical principles, and cosmological generalizations. The concept „pure history” is a result of imagination; it is invented by historians. Historical explanations depends on „premises taken not obviously”.

Whitehead's idea can be applied to all cases. Any theoretical and practical activities of humans depend on such fundamental premises which are not naturally a subject of daily interest. Analysis of initial postulates is the matter of philosophy. Therefore, when people begin to reflect upon the foundations of their existence, they are willy-nilly becoming philosophers. The need for periodical appraisal of fundamental

principles is in particular connected with the level of efficiency for scientific investigations, and also with a demand for truth. Truth appeals to philosophy where it hopes to find itself.

In this paper I will discuss some first principles in order to overcome the ecological crisis and to establish friendly relations with the environment. These principles include: 1) a theory of nature needs no supernatural substance; 2) Fromm's concept of love is the most productive orientation for human activities; 3) the meaning of human existence must be correlated with the developing essence of objective world.

1. The Need for Metaphysics of Respect for Nature

The study of nature inevitably seals one's anticipation for understanding social phenomena: the psychology of power and emotions, society, history, politics, and morality. In the past, many scholars believed that nature represents a passive reality that requires an external active principle. In this view, nature itself was seen as not able to create its own evolution. Aristotle's idea about active form and passive matter represented such a dichotomy that continued to occupy science for a long time. Nowadays we are starting to understand the consequences of that view which deprives nature of its dynamic basis.

Vittorio Hosle (1992) noted in his Moscow lectures that the main illusion of modern meta-



physics is „the weakening of the principle of being owing to the strengthening”. In his opinion, the philosophical disparagement of nature leads finally to an ecological crisis.

Since current scientific theories are still embedded in our traditional views of nature, Hosle calls on us to learn a „metaphysical respect for nature”: „it is required [for science] to stop and to return the growing subjectivist transformation of nature.” (Hosle, 1992, p. 170)

To my mind, a first indication for this philosophia prima is the absence of a transcendent absolute. Genuine metaphysical respect for nature needs no supernatural substance. Infinite nature itself is conceptualized as *causa sui*, as a capacity of the absolute with reference to infinity. When we use terms such as „absolute truth”, „absolute time”, or „absolute space”, etc., their more appropriate interpretation signifies „infinite truth”, „eternal time”, or „endless space”, etc. This shift in the understanding of „absolute” towards „infinity” will enable us to develop theories that liberate nature from the yoke of human humiliation. Let me explain the present idea.

The concept of *natura naturata* expresses the co-dependency of reality with an external absolute - all modes of existence are created, i.e., any manifestation of humankind is created, and so is all suffering. Nature is seen as subordinate to the absolute; it is not free and so has not the sufficient ground to respect itself. If the absolute is conceptualized as being some transcendent Spirit in charge of creation, nature itself becomes a second-rate product, since Spirit will always excel nature. The concept of creation evolves in us a genuine metaphysical respect only for „something beyond”. Of course, we could also force ourselves to esteem nature, but our respect for it will bear a strong resemblance to our condescending treatment of a defective reality. For instance, the rules of good conduct can demand a master’s respect for his slave. However, notwithstanding that the master has to obey the artificial regulation, a slave will remain the master’s slave.

Thus, subjectivism (its extreme version is presented by Berkeley) and spiritualistic objectivism (as the concept of idealism by Hegel) provide for a chronic inferiority of nature, and

hence for nature’s primordial humiliation. Within the parameters of this paradigm, man gets easily accustomed to the disdainful, careless treatment of the environment. Ultimately, this habit leads to such grave consequences that human life itself comes under threat of extinction. Any pleas for the necessity of respect for nature remain unheard since the philosophical tradition leading to the humiliation of nature gives rise to only an appearance and illusion of such esteem. However, the severity of the ecological crisis requires us to become free from such illusions. It is necessary to part from our fancies, since nature is about to lose its patience and bring to life Goddess Nemesis. The ecological crisis is nature’s *testimonium paupertatis* about the intellectual tradition of humiliated being.

Vittorio Hosle considers correctly that subjectivism underrates the external universe and leads, in practice, to its destruction. Trying to find a way out, the philosopher is founding his own version of objective idealism supplemented with the theory of intersubjectivity. In Hosle (1992, p. 164) opinion, „only the absolute can serve as the basis of nature-mind unity”. It is correct that objective idealism eases the tensions regarding the ecological crisis, but it does not remove the very problem of nature’s subordination to the super-natural absolute, and hence it does not liberate nature from its created and suffering state.

Hosle does not doubt the mind’s superiority to nature and claims that it is easy to prove with transcendental arguments: namely mind but not nature is able to raise the question of the very attitude of mind to nature (see Hosle, 1992, p. 164).

I propose two reasons to question the accuracy of his „easy proof”. First, a mere capacity of human reason to raise philosophical questions does not signify any superiority to nature. Second, nature thinks itself by using human reason, and inquires about itself by contemplating upon subjects such as the problem of the mind’s attitude towards nature. Nature gives rise to reasonable civilizations in order to confirm its being and to understand itself. Infinite nature is becoming that which it is becoming. Therefore, its knowledge is rooted in the desire to know itself. Human intellect is one of many simultaneously



presented cosmic reasons by means of which matter is knowing itself. In this context, matter can be defined as *natura sapiens*. This idea expresses another thesis for a metaphysics of respect for nature.

Supposing that Cosmos is endless, we may assert that there is a countless number of worlds in the infinite. Similarly, civilizations are generally to be found at different levels of their development: some civilizations are at an early stage of their development, others are about to secede, while others have reached their highest proficiency. This alludes to the possibility that reason is an attribute of matter which constantly thinks itself. Nature cannot exist without mind, nor even lose it for a moment. In other words, as long as one living intellectual unit is present at any moment of the everlasting time stream, an endless universe thinks in itself constantly by means of such units; but, of course, these units cannot be seen in earthly categories alone.

Now I would like to mention a common justification for the proposition, „reason is an attribute of nature“. Let us assume the correctness of Berkeley's metaphysics. Namely, that the objective world exists for me because of my consciousness. In other words, an individual sees external reality by the light of reason. Without this light, a person will find himself in total gloom; he will be plunged into non-being. There is hope that other people will remain and will observe the natural and social life, but if we imagine that the whole of humankind is deprived of reason, then who will be able to certify the world's existence? Given the idealist tradition, there is no witness left. There is no object without subject, no event without witness. Hence, all being, all nature, is meaningful only in the context of earthly intellect. The lack of human reason is understood as the coming of great Nothing.

It requires a broader outlook to overcome such a logic. I suggest that we assume a plurality of worlds and a constant self-reflection of nature. From this point of view, if at some point in time humankind ceases to exist, Cosmos will cease to exist with reference to humans alone. However, as long as at least one thinking unit exists in the universe, nature cannot be reduced to nothing. Matter gives rise to new and rea-

sonable civilizations in order not to die. Nature produces reflective structures again and again; it cannot exist without them. Nature argues and confirms its being with the birth of every new intellect in the universe. The presence of mind in the world proves the existence of matter. *Homo sapiens* is only one of the witnesses of material existence; man is one of many intelligent beings created by an endless *natura naturans*. Therefore, humankind cannot be represented as the only intelligent manifestation of Cosmos. I believe that some day the anthropocentric picture of the world will be changed by a voluminous view; i.e., a view that allows us to identify intellect outside the parameter of organic matter.

The philosophies of humiliated nature are continued in the doctrines of humiliated man. Speaking of irrational and religious conceptions, Albert Camus (1955, p. 17) wrote: „The tradition of what may be called humiliated thought has never ceased to exist“. If the nurturing of a metaphysics of respect for nature helps us to get out of the ecological crisis, the simultaneous development of a metaphysics of respect for man (humanistic philosophical anthropology), will assist us in overcoming the human crisis. If the paradigm „man is a master of nature“ is outdated, it can be supposed that in due course the opposition of master and slave will also compromise itself in interpersonal relations. The idea of freedom through respect is a great idea of the twenty-first century. Apparently, the principle of reverence for any life as proposed by Albert Schweitzer must be expanded to a metaphysics of reverence for all beings: natural, social, and individual.

2. The Approach by Erich Fromm

Explaining human essence, Fromm proceeds from the statement that life of an animal is determined by biological laws. Animal is a part of nature and never leaves it, goes beyond its limits. Existence of animals are characterized by harmony between them and nature. It means that animals originally possess abilities that help them to survive in conditions which they are opposed to.

At some point of living creatures' evolution



a sudden change happened, the change that can be compared only, for instance, with the birth of Universe, - humans were born. The new race went out of nature limits, rose above it. In their persons life began to realize itself.

As the psychologist thinks, human reason and power of imagination destroyed „harmony” that characterizes animal life. „Durch ihr Entstehen wurde der Mensch zu einer Anomalie, zu einer Laune des Universums.” [With their appearance man becomes an anomaly, a whim of Universum.] (Fromm, 1955a, p. 21) He stands out of nature and at the same time he is a part of it. He is thrown into the world at some occasional point, at occasional time and he must also occasionally leave it. As far as man realizes himself, he understands his weakness and limits of his existence. He foresees his own end - death.

Man is the only creature who perceives his own being as a problem he must solve and cannot get rid of. In the base of human evolution lies the fact that man left his original motherhood - nature. He will never be able to come back, to become an animal. Now he has the only way: to leave his original motherhood and to look for another one that he will create for himself, where he will turn the surrounding world into the world of people and will become a real man (see Fromm, 1955a, p. 22).

The idea that man should be a partner of objective being is expressed in the notion of love that is defined as „die Vereinigung mit einem anderen Menschen oder Ding außerhalb seiner selbst unter der Bedingung, daß die Besonderheit und Integrität des eigenen Selbst dabei bewahrt bleibt.” [„joining another man or a thing out of oneself while keeping one’s independency and integrity.”] (Fromm, 1955a, p. 26-27) According to the psychoanalyst, in the course of love man is a single whole with the Universe and at the same time he is what he is - an unique, peculiar, and hidebound mortal creature.

Love is productive orientation, i.e., an active and creative relation of one man to another, to himself, and to nature. In love an individual feels its unity with another man, with all people, and with nature keeping at the same time his independency. Being in love leads to a wonderful situation when, for example, two

persons become the one thing and simultaneously they are two different personalities.

According to Fromm, love in this sense is never limited by one individual. „Wenn ich sagen kann, ‘ich liebe dich’, sage ich, ‘ich liebe in dir die ganze Menschheit, alles Lebendige; ich liebe in dir auch mich selbst.’, [„If I say ‘I love you’, so I say ‘I love all mankind, every living thing in you; I also love myself in you.’,] (Fromm, 1955a, p. 27) That is why love including love to oneself is opposed to egoism and narcissism. In philosophical sense, we may say that love discovers, reveals the whole world, it leads man out of the circle of solipsism, subjectivism, out of Berkeley’s metaphysics. Love brings nature, society, human being into reality.

The contrary orientation - narcissism - leaves to man the only one reality - his own thinking process, his own feelings and needs. In this state man does not feel the outer world objectively, i.e., he does not realize it like something that has its own position, conditions, and needs. If to remember the barbaric treatment of nature by contemporary man, we can conclude that people still suffer superfluous self-admiration that prevents them from seeing an objective value of external being, of nature.

Fromm points out that true love always consists of next orientations: care, feeling of responsibility, respect, and comprehension. Among many forms of man’s correlation with the outer world only love-attitude ensures freedom and integrity of an individual in his unification with another man or nature. The suggested relation removes man’s alienation from nature, moreover, love establishes new constructive relations with environment. Our relation to the world is not epiphenomenon, an occasional addition to ratio. On the contrary, this or that relation to the world expresses the essential component of our cognitive efforts and practical activities. And only love, metaphysics of respect for being has productive orientation. Fromm wrote:

„Das gesamte Leben des einzelnen ist nichts anderes als der Prozeß, sich selbst zu gebären. Tatsächlich sollten wir, wenn wir sterben, ganz geboren sein, wenn es auch das tragische Schicksal der meisten ist, daß sie sterben, bevor sie geboren sind.” [„The whole life of an individual is



nothing but the process of self-birth. In fact, we are completely born only by the moment of our death, but the tragedy of many people is that they die long before their birth.”] (Fromm, 1955a, p. 23) - We would like to believe that mankind will succeed to be born.

3. The Need for Meaning and Ecology

It seems that only after V. Frankl's research philosophy and science acquired a real possibility to study the problem of life meaning and human activities seriously, without being confused by its so to say extreme exclusiveness, without being in two minds of its actuality. The Viennese psychoanalyst proved cogently not only theoretical importance of this question, but the presence of the very need for meaning in every person. If this need is not satisfied - a man, despite all splendid showing of his prosperity and development, appears to be tragically unhappy.

According to Frankl, nowadays „[...] multiplied are the symptoms that the feeling of absence of meaning gets more and more widespread” (Frankl, 1990, p. 25). Existential vacuum turns out to be an everyday fact and the problem of life meaning becomes global. Conclusions of the psychologist are corroborated by many examples. Here is one of them.

Statistics says that among reasons of American students mortality suicide takes the second place in frequency after car accidents. And the number of attempts to commit suicide (with no lethal end) is 15 times higher. The poll of 60 students from Idaho University after such attempts of suicide showed: 85% of them did not see any more sense in their life; for all that, 93% of them were physically and mentally healthy, lived in good material conditions and in full agreement with their families, they led active social life and had the full right to be content their academic success (see Frankl, 1990, p. 26)

At first sight it is a kind of nonsense: a man is all good, everything around him is all right, but he is eager to square accounts with his life. It means that there is something unbearable in his life, that drives him to commit suicide. It is a paradox: you cannot see meaning with your eyes, cannot touch it with your fingers, or taste

it with your tongue; meaning has no weight, no physical energy or power, but for all that it makes a colossal impact on human behavior, it can even revive or, on the other hand, kill a man. Thus, the problem of life meaning cannot be indifferent for the conception of stable development, for optimisation of noosphere.

In this connection I propose to discuss a point of view that rooted deeply in social consciousness. There are some known remarks of K. Marx that Ricardo

„wants production for production, and he is right. To deny it, like the sentimental opponents of Ricardo did, saying that production itself is not an aim in itself, - means to forget that production for the sake of production is nothing but development of productive forces of mankind, i.e. development of the wealth of human nature as an aim in itself. To oppose to this aim welfare of some individuals (as Sismondi did) means to confirm that development of the whole human race must be arrested in order to ensure welfare of some individuals [...]. This method of approach leaves unclear the fact that this development of abilities of human race, though at the beginning possible at the expense of the most of human individuals and even of the whole human classes, in the end will destroy this antagonism and coincide with the development of every separate individual; that higher level of each individual progress can be reached only at the cost of such historical process in the course of which individuals are sacrificed.” (Marx, 1963, p. 123)

As we can see, Marx stands up for the bourgeois idea of „production for production” because this idea means „development of the wealth of human nature as an aim in itself”. At the beginning this development is achieved with the help of the most human individuals sacrificed for historical progress. In Marx's opinion, it happens because in the world of people like in the world of animals interests of a race always work their way at the expense of separate individuals interests. However, in the future such an anthropophagy will surely stop and the desired harmony between an individual and society will set in.



The abstract from „Capital” raises criticism. In particular, the thesis „production for production” is egoistic, narrow, and hidebound and it cannot be regarded as a social ideal. Of course, it is rather attractive to see the meaning of human life in production for the sake of production, i.e., in all-round development of individuality. But such an understanding of life meaning is as a matter of fact erroneous because it looks very much like a sophistical rule of Protagoras: „Man is measure of all things”. The ideal of a man and mankind as an aim in itself is not free from philosophy of subjectivism and from, so to say, collective solipsism.

Indeed, every individualist can say of himself that he aims at all-round development of his abilities. Moreover, each of us - usually unconsciously - is involved into realization of this purpose. Of course, something always prevents us from our moving, but we again and again overcome various obstacles to achieve the desired objective. But on this way people sometimes go too far.

Thus, man has been creating recklessly industrial production (i.e., has been self-developing) and as a result he obtained an ecological crisis. We progressed impetuously and did not want to take into consideration objective reality. When it claimed its rights, many people started thinking how to establish relations with the environment further. So, very likely, realization of human abilities must not be a catastrophe, development of human nature must go in agreement with the essence (logos) of objective world.

The ideal of production for production, i.e., of all-round development of individuality is a value of bourgeois civilization. But just this obsolete paradigm begets the crisis of society and man. Fromm warned:

„Entweder wird die westliche Welt imstande sein, eine Renaissance des Humanismus herbeizuführen, deren Hauptanliegen die volle Entwicklung der Humanität und nicht der Produktion und der Arbeit sein wird oder der Westen wird untergehen, wie schon so viele andere große Kulturen untergegangen sind.” [„Either Western world will be able to revive humanism where the main problem is not labour or production but

the most complete development of humanity, or the West will perish like many other great civilizations.”] (Fromm, 1962a, p. 155) A modern individual may reason in the following way: I develop myself all-around and I do it successfully. But what for? Who needs my efforts if I am not needed to anyone? I am all alone: in society, on Earth, in Cosmos. And even if I exel myself and all human beings in my evolution, what will it give me in the end? That is the way that a contemporary man may ask not finding the answer. As Feodor Dostoyevsky wrote,

„[...]the mystery of human existence is not in living only but in what to live for. Without clear understanding what to live for a man will not agree to live and will rather exterminate himself than to remain on earth, even if there were all breads around him”.

As we see it, the axiom „production for the sake of production” does not take into consideration the law of measure, does not know essence, logos of society, does not know nature and man itself. That is why the subjectivist idea of unlimited personal development should be supplemented with an objective principle.

Man acquires worthy meaning and destination if he correlates, links himself with endless logos of objective world. The fact is that man with his thoughts and practical activities takes part in creation of his life, of social history, of mankind and cosmos destiny. The quantity of power and the degree of human freedom in this co-creation determine the extent of his responsibility.

Co-creation of world favours the humanisation of man in greater degree than one subjectivist craving for endless progress of one’s own potentials. A touch of endless essence of being in the course of co-creation and in its results exalts and strengthens us (in other terms: makes us God-like). The idea of co-creation of objective being as the meaning and destination of human life also pays attention to the fact that people are children of Cosmos but not its masters. Man should not neglect objective reality in the name of his own life.



4. Conclusion

The need for a metaphysics of respect for nature is clearly identifiable, in particular, by the occurrence of ecological destruction which threatens human life. The current ecological crisis is nature's protest against our careless treatment of it. Matter is suggesting that man respect it. A metaphysical respect for nature presupposes that the infinite material world is realized as an absolute, as *causa sui*. In this case, the existence of Cosmos needs no supernatural substance which gives birth to suffering beings. Besides, when matter is defined as *natura sapiens*, reason is recognized as an inalienable property of space. This reason displays itself differently in the various points of an endless universe.

Apparently, Fromm's principle of love is very interesting for the new metaphysics. This orientation presupposes another way than the former tradition of „production for production“. It is possible people will learn to correlate their personal development with essence of nature, with logos of Cosmos.

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