

IDEOLOGICAL CURRENTS AND THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

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The geocentric perception in ancient Hellenism

The geocentric perception in ancient Hellenism concerns itself with the survey of the Earth in an attempt to discern the following: the Earth is the center of life and thought for the Greeks; to Homer, it is the (all-mother) of which Xenophanes says: "out of Earth all things originate and all things consummate." The Earth engenders everything: the inanimate, the world of plants and animals, people, indeed she is even "mother of gods" and "principal of gods" (Sophocles).

Greeks are not foreign to the idea of the evolution of all species and genres - from the lower to the highest life-forms up to man as "derived from other animals" (Anaximander). In this way they praise the unity and identity of all. In the words of Heraclitus, "in the body - the Earth - out of which each and every being and life itself express themselves in many forms and as her [Earth's] agents, all beings are offspring of the one, the 'Mother', the Earth, as well as siblings to each other. All is one, and out of all one, and from one all." (Heraclitus)

The Greeks also do not ignore the qualitative difference between people and the rest of living beings. According to Plato, "man participates in his holy fate through his relation to God." They also do not overlook the qualitative difference separating men from gods. The gods are the immortal and the omnipotent, as opposed to the mortal, ephemeral generations of men. However, they do not separate men and gods from the natural environment and the world so that they may live and come into conflict with it or, most likely, they enlist gods and men in the physical world so that the cosmos should constitute a totally harmonious totality, "a living animal united with truth", a "perfect animal", the "most beautiful of all" according to Plato. The gods are the protectors and obeyers of the physical and ethical order, and humans are called to live "by nature" and in harmony with it. Nevertheless, some behavior against nature and against the physical order was noticed in ancient Hellenism, as well as unwise utilisation and destruction of the physical environment and the surrounding world. Already in the beginnings of Greek myth, Mother Earth is forced to slay the giant Orion who was indiscriminately killing her animals. Indeed, Plato complains that because of illegitimate human intervention involving logging as well as the ensuing "cataclysmic rainstorms", soil was carried off the beautiful landscape of Attica, leaving behind only the stones, "like the bones of a sick body".

With the preponderance of Orphism, the rise of the further versus the here, the afterlife versus the present, and the transient world versus the present world along with the philosophic currents of neo-Platonic and neo-Pythagorean philosophy, the geocentric cosmic model of Hellenism was overturned. Spiritualism took the lead and the soul as well as the beyond and the afterlife whereas nature, and life according to nature were considered as sinful and evil. Plotinus feels shame for bearing a body. The Earth and the world are depreciated, belittled, yes even despised since the world is considered a hindrance to the acquisition of the true life after death. This current of hatred of the Earth and its world which, in various forms and variations will convene and parallel many Christian ascetic currents, makes its presence felt up to our times.

Similar statements could also be made about the Judeo-Christian worldview. Here, of course, the resident, central idea is theocentric - the divine is dominant. According to Scripture, "Everything from the divine, through the divine and to the divine...all derives from God." But even here, the Earth is the source of existence and life for all living beings. From the Earth derives everything that has life - and even man - "whom God created from the Earth's dust." The qualitative difference between humans and the animals is reiterated in Scripture which mentions that God "has inspired man with the breath of life." It must be stressed, however, that even the spiritual aspect of man is created and not divine. The whole of human existence belongs to the realm of creation. The overemphasising of man having been created in the image of God, as interpreted by the later theology, has significantly harmed the relationship of human beings to the rest of the world, for it acclaims the distance separating man at the expense of the organic relation that unites him with the rest of the physical world.

Scripture narrates the initial, harmonious relation of humans towards the rest of the physical world. God placed humans in Paradise to "labor and keep" and not destroy it. The amazing proximity and harmony of humans towards nature is mentioned in Scripture in reference to Adam calling the animals of the Earth "by name". God was also not distant to the world, but present, "perambulating in Paradise in the sunset," and "rejoicing in his works."

Later, however, the relation of man to the physical world and to God is reversed. Humans are not using but abusing their strengths and potential. The life of humans is inundated with evil deeds and crimes. Their thoughts and actions turn "towards wicked things all day", for which reason, "the evils of men have multiplied on the Earth." They become murderers of all the offspring of Earth, "the fear and terror of all the beasts of the Earth"; Earth avenges herself by producing not fruit "but thorns." As a result, the Earth - paradise of plenty - becomes a place

of torments for humans as well, "a valley of tears". The natural, the sensual, the earthen, the "body" are considered as non-real and sinful, whereas the spiritual and the soul are praised. The here and the present life are considered deceptive, whereas Paradise is sought in a life after death.

Jesus Christ not only re-established the original, harmonic relation of man-God-nature, but gave a completely new meaning to it. Jesus Christ as son of God establishes a new absolute acceptance of nature. Scripture states that the Son of God "become flesh". Thus, he not only assumed the fleshen form, but imputed flesh - and, by extension, all of nature - as his own body. Creation is not simply the domain of God but his "flesh" which, by accepting, he renewed, resurrected and glorified, so that, in the name of Jesus Christ, the whole world is a "new creation". This theological point is of the greatest significance for a proper examination of the physical world. Not only is man charged to safeguard and protect the Earth and its worldöavailing himself of its services, for the world is not his possession but God's. Indeed, according to Scripture, "(t)he world and everything in it belongs to God," but man is godless when he pillages and destroys nature, since all creation is the "flesh" of God. Atheism and destruction of nature are synonymous ideas.

What is especially characteristic of The New Ages is the return to nature and the acceptance of the sensual and the material, in antithesis to previous ages where the prevalent place was given to the soul and the spiritual. But even here, the return to nature is not accomplished through love or a feeling of co-existence of humans so as to march together, but by selfishness and unlimited self-interest. Humans see nature only as a means to improve their own life and a human Gigantism is developing, a super-human man-machine who, with the perfect technical means he now possesses indiscriminately destroys the body of the Earth and its life, culminating in the unlimited physical catastrophes occurring in our days, and the dangers of technology that are threatening us.

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