Nature - Our Master Teacher

Short version†

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- The Ecocrisis - Threat for the survival of the biosphere and mankind

The ecocrisis is the dominant crisis of the world of today. However, the stakeholders in politics and economy refuse to recognize the full significance of this fact. They overlook that the small changes in our environment every day may suddenly run into a cataclysm that destroys the biosphere.

The ecocrisis is the result of our persisting in the rationalistic-deterministic worldview, which has unfolded progressively from the early agricultural societies passing by the Enlightenment until the Anthropocene. The unilateral orientation of our mind to rationality is an aberration. It inhibits us to develop a more realistic representation of nature, thus not allowing us to establish the true relation with nature. However, a true relation with nature is imperative if we want to overcome the ecocrisis.

The ecocrisis is accompanied by a decline of culture that escapes the attention of the younger generations because of a lack of comparison with the past. There is a menace of mental impoverishment that exacerbates the crisis by preventing us from recognizing its reach with its multiple aspects. Thus, we find ourselves captured in a vicious circle. As a consequence, we lack the equipment for mastering the complexity that we have allowed to develop.

- The Necessity of change of paradigm

We are in a conflict with nature. We are exhorted to mitigate it, or better, to surmount it. In such a situation it is necessary to have a realistic perception of the "opponent." Nature has created us. This means that she has a perception of us. We are the "assailant." Therefore, it is up to us to reassess our perception of her.

The human society's line of thinking and acting has been determined by its worldview. The rational-determinist worldview continues to dominate thought and action. While the natural sciences progressed considerably regarding the elucidation of the phenomena of nature, they were nevertheless unable to develop a perception of nature as a whole. The Abrahamic religions cut their relation to nature right from the beginning by centering their attention to a human being detached from or even opposed to nature. Therefore, a perception of nature could not be expected from them. Without an appropriate notion of nature, we are also unable to develop a perception of our position in it, and unable, as well, to evolve to an appropriate perception of ourselves. Put in another way, a change of our worldview (paradigm) is mandatory. Without such a change our decisions will continue to be infected by the former way of thinking and our coping with the ecocrisis will fail. It is time to lay the foundation for a new paradigm in the futuregenerations.

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† This article is the translation of the short version of my article in German with the title „Die Nature - unser Lehrmeister" to be found In the German section of my website

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- A model for the new paradigm

Nearly a century ago, the philosopher Martin Heidegger already recognized the need of a change of paradigm [1]. He found an approach which seemed suited to him, in Friedrich Hölderlin's hymn "As when on a holiday…," namely, in the two statements [2]:

Nature which is older than the ages and above the gods of Occident and Orient…

and

Nature acts according to the "firm law" ("veste Gesez").

As we can see, the Hölderlin-Heidegger model has two components. Heidegger has identified the first component as a spiritual envelope, the essence of nature, and the second component, the firm law, as the principle of acting of nature. Envelope and principle of acting must complement each other. The essence of nature pervades every aspect of the real and supervises it, whereas the principle of acting implements the essence of nature in reality. Since nature is the supreme instance, she is the holy. The infringement of the holy leads to hopelessness (*Heil-losigkeit*, loss of a sense of salvation). Heidegger discusses in depth the first component, as well as its relation to the second component, but neither he nor Hölderlin has something concrete to say concerning the second component. Hence, we must rely on our own investigations in this regard.

- The Essence of Nature

The first component of Hölderlin was an opportunity for Heidegger to give us a breathtaking description of what nature is. As the all-present, all-creating and all-living, the essence of nature pervades all that is real via the firm law. In fact, it supervises the firm law. Moreover, it ensures that all processes in the universe are attuned between each other so that the wholeness of the system—nature—is preserved. Hence, understanding the essence of nature is not merely a philosophical subtlety, but has a real significance for us humans. With the essence of nature we can reintegrate the holy into our life. Together with the firm law the holy predetermines the measure , i.e., what is commensurate for our acting and, at the same time, for the preservation of the biosphere and the basis of our existence. In other words, it is a precondition for our surmounting the ecocrisis.

- The firm law

The firm law is the rulebook of nature. The rulebook encompasses more than the known rules of physics (law of gravitation, the laws of thermodynamics, etc.). Starting with the second half of the 20th century the emerging systems theory contributed further typical features of nature such as self-organization, bipolarity, non-linearity and attractor to this rulebook [3]. Taken as such, these rules are value-neutral. They become rules of the firm law only if they are combined with the essence of nature. We violate the rules of the firm law regularly.

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[1] Martin Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry, translation by Keith Hoeller, Humanity Books, New York, 2000, ISBN-10 157392735X, p. 67-99

[2] included in [1]

- The essence of nature within us

Since, according to Hölderlin, nature is all-encompassing, we too are part of nature. Thus, our place is within her, not besides or even above her. As part of nature, we too have an essence that dwells as part of the essence of nature, since it is guided by the same rules of the firm law. Heidegger was the first philosopher who designated the essence of nature within us as our being. To be within nature signifies to integrate her within us, to respect and to combine both the essence and the firm law of nature.

Until the beginning of the 20th century our knowledge of our essence was only very vague. We named it our soul. We felt it, but we knew not more about it. Finally, the psychology of S. Freud and C.G. Jung lead to the discovery of the unconscious as seat of both the Self and the essence of nature within us.

In the second half of the 20th century the bicameral structure of the human brain was discovered. The left hemisphere was identified as the seat of rational thought, the right hemisphere as the seat of the Jungian Self as and the link to our unconscious [4]. Thus we note that the Heideggerian notion of being, the Jungian notion of Self and the neurophysiological discovery of the function of the right hemisphere coincide.

Several thousand years ago the human society began to rely more and more on the usage of the left hemisphere and to neglect the right hemisphere. This shift was accompanied by an increasing secularization, in the course of which the contact with the right hemisphere got lost more and more. This loss was synonymous with the loss of contact with the essence of nature and with our Self. The ecocrisis is the consequence of this developing. Obviously, the restoration of the contact to our right hemisphere, to our Self and to the essence of nature is the primary precondition for the new paradigm. The cooperation between the two hemispheres of our brain/mind will expand considerably our insight into the great interrelationships and create consciousness in a wider sense.

- The realization of the change of paradigm

The implementation of the change of paradigm will be a difficult endeavor that will take many decades. The reigning paradigm is an attractor and, therefore, will resist tenaciously to be dislodged. Maybe an event of global reach will be required to get it started. The insemination of the rulebook of the firm law is a thematic enhancement of the curriculum of schooling at all levels, but it must be adapted to the respective age of the disciples. In addition, a continuous training of the adults will be desirable in order to accelerate the dissemination of the new paradigm.

The establishment of the contact to our Self and to the essence of nature cannot be obtained by an education in the usual sense. Education can only sensitize to listen to the appeal of the unconscious and communicate the mechanisms at work in our brain, but it is finally the assignment of each individual to accomplish this step. Our mind - and nature - are awaiting our attention to their appeal.

My thanks go to Casey Rentmeester for correcting my English.

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[3] Die Natur - Unser Lehrmeister, Appendice C, on this website, German section

[4] A. Stevens, Archetypes Revisited, Brunner-Routledge, 2002, chap. 13