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The Relation between Man and World

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ABSTRACT

Human identity has traditionally been defined by way of juxtaposing man and world in a static and substantialist manner. This approach implies a false *idealism* in terms of ontology and creates a misleading sense of *exclusivism* in terms of anthropology.

The relation between man and world can only be properly understood on the basis of *transcendental realism*, a position that acknowledges the interdependence of self-experience and world-experience in the sense of *Realdialektik*. Anthropology and ontology are indeed two sides of the same coin.

Referring to discourses of phenomenology and transcendental philosophy, the paper analyzes the ontological dialectic of man and world, including the cosmological dimension, offers a critique of the traditional “anthropocentric” approach, and reflects on the civilizational impact of a comprehensive “ontological anthropology.”

(I)

The ontological dialectic of man and world

In the Western philosophical tradition, the question as to the essence of man has mostly been asked as if the human being existed in a kind of philosophical version of “splendid isolation.” Man was set apart from “nature” as the realm of mere “objects” of his reflection and volition. The entirety of material objects and living creatures was perceived as “the other” from which the human being was considered “shielded” – in a rather abstract manner – by virtue of his consciousness in which, according to this conception, the “outside world” is mirrored and which alone provided its *raison d'être*. This *false anthropomorphism*, and the *voluntarism* attached to it, is based on the erroneous ontological assumptions of philosophical *idealism*¹ and on a peculiar – and literal – interpretation of the *Genesis*. This position is at the roots of Western anthropocentrism with its artificial, almost “synthetic,” *teleology* that subordinates everything natural, in fact the entire κόσμος, to the human being’s will. It is also an assumption that is totally ignorant of the basic logical error of teleological thinking, which reverses the chain of natural causality (as Nicolai Hartmann has convincingly demonstrated long ago),² and that also leads to a utilitarian position in terms of *ethics*.

As we have explained elsewhere in more detail, the question about the “essence” of man cannot be answered within a conceptual framework that is based on the assumption of an abstract *hiatus* between man and world, which presupposes a false (or artificial) idealism in ontological terms.³ The human being, with its unique form of self-reflection – though

¹ In this context, “idealism” is not understood in the sense of moral philosophy, but as an ontological position.

² Nicolai Hartmann, *Teleologisches Denken*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2nd ed. 1966.

³ Hans Köchler, “The Relation of Man and World: Existential and Phenomenological Perspectives,” in: *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 15 (1985), pp. 275-286, esp. chapter 2: “The dialectic relationship of self-experience and world-experience.” See also

this is not the only such capacity among living beings –, cannot be perceived as existing independently from the real (physical) world. Not only is its identity being shaped through constant interaction with a specific natural environment (*Umwelt*);⁴ it is itself the product of evolution not merely in a biological sense, related to the history of planet earth, but in connection with the development of the universe. Adequately addressing the issue requires an awareness of the essentially *dialectical* relation⁵ between “self-experience” and “world-experience” that results from the interdependence between the *ego* (subject) and the world.

In a certain sense, transcendental philosophy – in a first systematic approach towards a critical epistemology,⁶ if not for the first time in the history of Western philosophy – has taken into account that the “object” (of perception) cannot be defined in abstract (and artificial) distinction from the “subject,” thus paving the way for an analysis of the human being in the *comprehensive* meaning of *In-der-Welt-sein* (being-in-the-world) such as the one advanced in Husserl’s conception of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*)⁷ and, preceding it, in Heidegger’s “existential ontology.”⁸ Transcendental philosophy, however, eventually proved to be ignorant of the material

the author’s paper: “The Relation between Man and World: A Transcendental-Anthropological Problem,” in: *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. 14 (1983), pp. 181-186.

⁴ For a detailed analysis of the interdependent relationship of man and world in the biological context see Jakob von Uexküll und Georg Kriszat, *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen. Ein. Bilderbuch unsichtbarer Welten. Bedeutungslehre. (Mit einem Vorwort von Adolf Portmann und einer Einleitung von Thure von Uexküll.)* (Series *Conditio humana.*) Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1970.

⁵ The terms “dialectical” and “dialectics” are not used here in an idealistic context, but in the meaning of “*Realdialektik*” which the author has worked out in: *Die Subjekt-Objekt-Dialektik in der transzendentalen Phänomenologie. Das Seinsproblem zwischen Idealismus und Realismus.* Meisenheim a. G.: Anton Hain, 1974.

⁶ We refer here to Kant’s “criticism” as expressed in what he himself had characterized as a “Copernican revolution” of epistemology. (*Critique of Pure Reason*, preface to the second edition of 1787.)

⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie.* Ed. Elisabeth Ströker. Hamburg: Meiner, 1977. (Philosophische Bibliothek, Vol. 292.) – On the notion of “Lebenswelt” in the context of Husserlian phenomenology see, *inter alia*, Iso Kern, “Die Lebenswelt als Grundlagenproblem der objektiven Wissenschaften und als universales Wahrheits- und Seinsproblem,” in: Elisabeth Ströker (ed.), *Lebenswelt und Wissenschaft in der Philosophie Edmund Husserls.* Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1979, pp. 68-78.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit.* Tübingen: Niemeyer, 17th ed. 1993.

world and could not adequately interpret its *ontological* status. In the context of modern phenomenological thinking, this has become particularly obvious in Husserl's "idealistic" adaptation of the transcendental paradigm.⁹

On the basis of this approach, "nature" was reduced to the status of a mere "object of perception" and the *a priori* structures of the human mind (consciousness) were analyzed in isolation from the "real" world that was essentially defined as "ideal" reality, structured by the human mind (which in turn was perceived as the "transcendental synthesis of apperception").¹⁰ German *idealism* has, at least initially, continued on this path of "hypostatization" of consciousness – until Hegel's "absolute" idealism has brought about a paradigm change that meant an interpretation of the *subject* (mind) in the sense of an *universal* ontological reality and a reading of the evolution of the *κόσμος* as "appearance," indeed self-realization, of the mind (or "spirit") (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*).¹¹

In 20th century thinking, Husserlian transcendental phenomenology – the legacy of the later Husserl – had, as referred to earlier, again made a turn towards the ontological idealism of the "pure transcendental subject" (*reines transzendentes Subjekt*), which does absorb virtually all aspects of reality in a kind of nuclear self-reflexion (self-consciousness) which Husserl considered as the absolute source of reality,¹² claiming that even if the

⁹ For details see the author's *Die Subjekt-Objekt-Dialektik in der transzendentalen Phänomenologie*.

¹⁰ *Critique of Pure Reason*, second edition of 1787, Part II, § 16: "Von der ursprünglich-synthetischen Einheit der Apperzeption." – Kant's notion of the *Ding an sich* (thing-in-itself) does somehow not fit into this "transcendental" framework and – not surprisingly – was dismissed by the later idealists as a relic of "dogmatic" thinking.

¹¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Collected Works, Vol. 9. Ed. Wolfgang Bonsiepen. Hamburg: Meiner, 1980.

¹² For a critique of this version of ontological idealism see Hans Köchler, "The 'A Priori' Moment of the Subject-Object-Dialectic in Transcendental Phenomenology: The Relationship between 'A priori' and 'Ideality'," in: *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. 3 (1974), pp. 183-198. – See also the author's analyses in: *Phenomenological Realism. Selected Essays*. Frankfurt a. M., Bern: Peter Lang, 1986.

outside world would disappear this would in no way affect the transcendental subject.¹³

However, the phenomenologically inspired idealism of the 20th century was not the only way in which the transcendental paradigm was interpreted. This school of thought, in its exclusive emphasis on the “purity” of the mind (with *apriori* structures that make of space and time mere modes of perception and locate them in the “ideal realm”), could not appreciate what we call the *Realdialektik* (“real dialectics”) of consciousness, something which implies that awareness of ourselves and the reality of our subjectivity is not achieved through *soliloquia*, or by means of mere self-encounters of an *ego* that is interpreted as epiphany of the absolute transcendental subject, but only through the subject’s distinguishing itself from a real object as the “other” which is not the self.

Furthermore, modern “evolutionary epistemology” has made us aware of the “real” behind the “ideal,” when claiming to have undertaken a new – indeed a second, after Kant’s initial one – “Copernican Revolution,” this time back towards natural reality. In a far-reaching effort to reevaluate the precepts of Kant’s transcendental epistemology and make them compatible with modern biology, Konrad Lorenz¹⁴ had tried to look “behind the mirror” of ideality and understand the natural origin of the (ideal) transcendental forms of perception (*Anschauungsformen*) and of the categories.¹⁵ This rather ambitious epistemological effort, combining

¹³ Cf., *inter alia*, Husserl’s apodictic statement in an analysis about the “independence” of the phenomenological judgment from natural judgment: “... dass es ein reines Bewußtsein gibt und dass reines Bewußtsein, wenn auch modifiziert, übrig bleibt als mein *ego cogito*, auch wenn die Welt nicht existierte.” (Edmund Husserl, *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie 1910/11*. [Husserliana, Vol. XIII.] Hamburg: Meiner, 2nd ed. 1992, fn. 1 on p. 57, in § 17: “Unabhängigkeit des phänomenologischen Urteils vom natürlichen Urteil.”)

¹⁴ Konrad Lorenz, “Kants Lehre vom Apriorischen im Lichte der gegenwärtigen Biologie,” in: *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie*, Vol. 15 (1941/42), pp. 94-125. – For a comprehensive debate of Lorenz’s epistemological “paradigm change” see, *inter alia*, Günther Stark, *Konrad Lorenz pro und kontra. Die Welt schuf den Geist nach ihrem Bilde*. Baden-Baden: German University Press, 2006. (Series “Kritik der evolutionären Vernunft.”)

¹⁵ Konrad Lorenz, *Die Rückseite des Spiegels. Versuch einer Naturgeschichte menschlichen Erkennens*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 9th ed. 1987.

philosophical and biological concepts, has resulted in a form of “realistic idealism” or “idealistic realism” which, so the evolutionary epistemologists claimed, does enable transcendental philosophy to properly explain the interdependent relationship between man and world. This approach, according to their “naturalistic” interpretation, brings transcendental philosophy in line with an understanding of the world that is informed by modern science, in particular by the theory of evolution, which places the human being not *apart* from the universe – or *vis-à-vis* the world in a strange kind of mirror-like setting –, but defines it in the midst of it, not as a “counter-pole” to it.¹⁶

As we have explained elsewhere,¹⁷ the interpretation of the Kantian subject’s “transcendental structures” as part of the real (i.e. natural) world¹⁸ has serious implications for all positions of ontological – as distinct from epistemological – idealism that uphold the “purity” of consciousness and insist on its irreducibility to the “real” world:¹⁹

- (a) “What appears as absolute (in the sense of not being subjected to change in space and time, thus: *a priori*) is in actual fact relative to a phase of the biological evolution (a process that, by definition, is open-ended).²⁰

¹⁶ On the merits of evolutionary epistemology in terms of its supposedly having redefined the transcendental paradigm and having exposed its “idealistic” contradictions see the author’s paper: “Transzendentalphilosophie als Anthropologie? (Bemerkungen zum universalen Anspruch der evolutionären Erkenntnistheorie),” in: G. Lücke and H. Pfister (eds.), *Ivo Kohler in memoriam. Arbeiten zur Psychologie, ihren Anwendungen und ihren Grenzgebieten*. (Veröffentlichungen der Universität Innsbruck, Vol. 136.) Innsbruck: Universität Innsbruck, 1988, pp. 203-216.

¹⁷ In a lecture delivered at the Third International Conference of the International Academy of Philosophy in Glendale, Los Angeles, on 30 November 2007.

¹⁸ Georg Simmel was one of the first philosophers who had introduced this “realist” interpretation of the transcendental structures, long before the 20th century’s evolutionary epistemologists: “Über eine Beziehung der Selektionslehre zur Erkenntnistheorie,” in: *Archiv für systematische Philosophie*, No. 1 (1895), pp. 34-45.

¹⁹ Kant’s transcendental idealism must nonetheless not be confused with *ontological* idealism in the sense of the real existence of the Platonic ideas.

²⁰ See also Ludwig von Bertalanffy, “An Essay on the Relativity of Categories,” in: *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 22 (1955), pp. 243-263.

- (b) What appears as structure of the subject (as irreducible element of our immaterial mind [consciousness]) is in fact the property of an object, i.e. an objective structure of nature. (Lorenz interprets the Kantian *apriori* in the sense of a biological organ, referring to the physiological reality of the human brain. He very distinctly speaks of the ‘Organfunktion’ of the *apriori* and relates it to the preservation of the species.)²¹
- (c) The Kantian claim as to the *validity of knowledge* is declared without foundation; his non-relativistic program is considered [as] the futile effort of a philosopher unaware of the biological facts. Thus, Kant’s idealism is transformed into a new version of realism (‘hypothetical realism’)²² according to which the logical operating mechanisms of the human brain reflect the very structure of (natural) reality to which the brain as a biological organ has been adapted in the evolutionary process.”²³

This approach allows philosophy to transform what has been described as mere *Reflexionsdialektik* (the dialectic within an abstract consciousness that is set apart from the world) into a genuine *ontological* dialectic, which alone lets us comprehend the nature of reflexivity against the background of a cosmological “other” of which the subject itself is a part, namely an aspect of its “appearance” or self-realization (in the sense of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit). This reflective structure, in turn, creates what we earlier have called an “open horizon of unending existential self-

²¹ “Kants Lehre vom Apriorischen im Lichte der gegenwärtigen Biologie,” p. 166.

²² Konrad Lorenz, *Die Rückseite des Spiegels*, p. 26.

²³ Items a - c are quoted from the author’s essay: “Evolutionary Epistemology as a Problem of Metaphilosophy,” in: (International Academy for Philosophy, Yerevan [Armenia] / Athens [Greece] / Berkeley [USA]), *News and Views*, No. 18 (April 2008), pp. 26-40.

development,”²⁴ which is situated in a virtually infinite realm of space and time that must not be perceived as a mere product of the transcendental subject. What we have described as “irreducible interdependence” of man and world²⁵ can indeed only be understood in view of a “cosmological horizon” on the background of which “subject” and “object,” consciousness and matter, mutually define each other.

In such a context, philosophical anthropology essentially becomes part of a larger ontological project – and vice-versa.²⁶ What we have characterized as mankind’s “deeply rooted and emotional striving toward self-constitution and self-realization in an ‘intelligible’ world,”²⁷ cannot be seen in isolation from the “ontological reality” which modern physics and astronomy have increasingly made us aware of. Looking inward – in order to understand the nature of the human being – can only be a meaningful undertaking (particularly in terms of epistemology) if it is part of an outward-looking project of locating consciousness (“spirit”) in the evolutionary context of virtually infinite space and time. This opens a radically *new* – as compared to earlier anthropocentric paradigms – *existential* dimension of human self-reflection, because it makes the members of the human race aware of their “absolute” nature in terms of a cosmological process that unfolds before an “*endless* horizon”;²⁸ this process represents a “chain of events” of which the emergence of consciousness in different planetary systems is an integral part, and not simply a “metaphysical” end-point or a singular event brought about by a *deus ex*

²⁴ “The Relation of Man and World: Existential and Phenomenological Perspectives,” p. 285.

²⁵ Op. cit., p. 284.

²⁶ See also: Hans Köchler, *Der innere Bezug von Anthropologie und Ontologie. Das Problem der Anthropologie im Denken Martin Heideggers*. (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung, Issue 30.) Meisenheim a. G.: Anton Hain, 1974.

²⁷ “The Relation of Man and World: Existential and Phenomenological Perspectives,” p. 278.

²⁸ The author is aware of the paradoxical nature of the combination of these two words since the original Greek meaning of ὄριζων points to the very limitations of our visual field, which the adjective “endless” negates.

machina according to a belief system which Martin Heidegger, in his philosophy of Being (*Sein*), had characterized as “onto-theo-logical.”²⁹

In this sense, one can say that every human being represents in itself a “cosmic” dimension. The virtual infinity of the universe is incorporated in the concrete psychophysical reality of every individual. Human self-reflection is thus to be understood as *one*, and definitely not the final, stage of the “unfolding” of the universe. In this transcendental-ontological framework, the “absolute” nature of the human being is not merely conceived of in the sense of an abstract – or artificial – “pure” consciousness that is perceived as *ab-solutum* in the Latin sense of the word (namely as separated from the real world and, therefore, not affected by any developments *within* that world). In contrast, ontological idealism that isolates the subject from “objective” reality nurtures a false sense of exceptionalism that always goes along with an anthropocentric, and effectively anthropomorphist, worldview.

As an unintended consequence, the “integrative” understanding of the reality of the human being – outlined here on the basis of the transcendental-ontological paradigm – may inform an entirely novel “cosmological” perception of civilization.

(II)

Overcoming the anthropocentric approach

Anthropology and ontology are intrinsically connected, they are indeed interdependent systems of reflection on one and the same philosophical

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*. Pfullingen: Neske, 4th ed. 1957. – For a detailed analysis of Heidegger’s critique of “onto-theo-logy” see the author’s paper: “God in the Thought of Martin Heidegger,” in: S. A. Matczak (ed.), *God in Contemporary Thought. A Philosophical Perspective. A Collective Study*. (Philosophical Questions Series, No. 10.) New York: Learned Publications; Louvain: Editions Nauwelaerts; Paris: Beatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1977, pp. 751-773.

problem, namely that of reality as such (or *Sein*). In terms of human self-comprehension, what Immanuel Kant had envisaged as “the escape of men from their self-imposed immaturity”³⁰ can only be achieved against the background of an “ontological redefinition” of the relationship between man and world. Such an approach will eventually do away with the anthropocentric paradigm and with the related illusion of a mind that came “out of nowhere,” but nonetheless can supposedly provide to the material realm (*materia* or ὕλη) a chance to become *form* (μορφή) – as “object of reflection” – and thus to exist, while, in actual fact, the mind (consciousness, spirit) cannot be defined by way of “abstraction” from the real world.

As Martin Heidegger has aptly explained in *Sein und Zeit*, the question as to the real (actual) existence of the “outside world” makes no sense because the *conditio humana* is tantamount to, and can only be understood as, *In-der-Welt-sein* (being-in-the-world).³¹ Heidegger is eager “to point out why *Dasein*, as Being-in-the-world, has the tendency to bury the ‘external world’ in nullity ‘epistemologically’ before going on to prove it. [...] After the primordial phenomenon of Being-in-the-world has been shattered, the isolated subject is all that remains, and this becomes the basis on which it gets joined together with a ‘world’.”³² It is along these lines that, for Heidegger, the question about the nature of the human existence is identical with the question as to *Being as such*. What, by many, had been misunderstood as a “subjectivist” project of existential anthropology was, from the very beginning, designed as *Fundamentalontologie* (fundamental ontology). In Heidegger’s own words: “ontological analysis of existence [*Dasein*] as such constitutes fundamental

³⁰ “Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit.” Immanuel Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* (Berlinische Monatsschrift Dezember 1784), in: *Akademie-Ausgabe*, Vol. VIII (Abhandlungen nach 1781), p. 35.

³¹ *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 11th ed. 1967, pp. 206f.

³² Quoted according to the first English edition of “*Sein und Zeit*”: *Being and Time*. Malden, MA [USA] / Oxford [UK], 1962, p. 250.

ontology and, therefore, actual existence fulfills the function of a mode of being [*Seinsweise*] that will have to be questioned ... as to the inert quality of its being [*Sein*].”³³

It follows from this existential-ontological positioning of the human being in the context of the “life-world” (which, in our analysis, ultimately includes the universe) that “anthropology and ontology – when comprehended in their metaphysical implications – are ... nothing but two aspects of one and the same philosophical approach.”³⁴ The dialectical relationship between man and world is to be extended *beyond* a mere “inner-worldly” (or even “planetary”) perception and towards a truly global – or cosmological – understanding that goes beyond the horizon of human history. The hermeneutics of the “life-world,” as elaborated by the later Husserl in particular, has to be transcended towards an approach that interprets the human being against the background of a virtually infinite – or open – horizon of perceptions that are attributed to “reality as such” – what Kant had referred to as *Ding an sich*³⁵ and what Heidegger had described as *Sein* (Being).

In structural terms, the subject-object dialectic, which is at the roots of human self-awareness (or reflection), also applies to man’s positioning himself against the infinite horizon of the universe. In order to adequately understand the relation of man and world, we thus have to transcend the idealistic confines of traditional “transcendental” philosophy and perceive the “other” – in distinction from which man constitutes himself as a *subject* (an animal that is aware of itself, a ζῷον λόγον ἔχον) – as the *world as*

³³ *Sein und Zeit*, p. 14. (Translated by the author.)

³⁴ Emerich Coreth, “Was ist philosophische Anthropologie?” in: *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, Vol. 91 (1969), p. 273. (Translated by the author.)

³⁵ See Erich Adickes, *Kant und das Ding an sich*. Hildesheim etc.: Olms, 1977. (Reprint of the 1924 edition.)

such, namely the universe, thereby integrating the subject with its object of perception in analogy to the dialectical structure of self-reflection.³⁶

This unfolds a virtually unlimited spatial and temporal dimension of self-perception through which man should be able to emancipate himself from the “anthropocentric constraints” of traditional belief systems and “metaphysical” objectivizations, indeed from all those futile efforts at “reducing” reality as such to a system of abstract notions that especially Martin Heidegger had criticized as *Onto-theo-logie* (which tries to subordinate the totality of beings, indeed Being as such, to the human subject).³⁷ The universal hermeneutics we envisage opens up a horizon of world perception *beyond* the history of the human race and *beyond* the confines of the planetary system where the human race has originated; it, thus, creates the basis for a new conceptual framework that integrates human sciences and cosmology and locates man – human civilization – in a realm *beyond* the traditional geocentric-heliocentric dichotomy.

The historical departure from dogmatic *geocentrism* in terms of astronomy has to be complemented by a departure from *anthropocentrism* in regard to our *Weltanschauung*, a paradigm shift that is necessitated not only in the field of philosophical ontology, but of anthropology proper, but that has met with strong resistance over the centuries (due to the almost irresistible human tendency towards *objectivization* in the sense of explaining the world as mere object of the “superior” human mind and volition). Through the earlier paradigm shift in the 16th century, astronomy has contributed to the widening of the spatial and temporal horizon of man’s understanding of the universe and has helped the human race to

³⁶ On the dialectical structure of consciousness see the author’s analysis: “The ‘A Priori’ Moment of the Subject-Object Dialectic in Transcendental Phenomenology,” loc. cit.

³⁷ *Identität und Differenz*. – For details see Hans Köchler, *Politik und Theologie bei Heidegger. Politischer Aktionismus und theologische Mystik nach “Sein und Zeit.”* (Veröffentlichungen der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Wissenschaft und Politik an der Universität Innsbruck, Vol. VII.) Innsbruck: Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Wissenschaft und Politik, 1991, pp. 31ff. – Cf. also: Hans Köchler, *Skepsis und Gesellschaftskritik im Denken Martin Heideggers*. Meisenheim a. G.: Anton Hain, 1978.

emancipate itself from doctrinary positions that, to a large extent, were rooted in “vested interests” of the guardians of the traditional, institutionally entrenched, metaphysical messages.

Transcendental philosophy, if it develops towards a comprehensive analysis of the “conditions of possibility” (*Möglichkeitsbedingungen*) not only of cognition (as in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*), but also of the *ontological identity of the subject*, will make the classical mind-body distinction³⁸ – namely their juxtaposition as two distinct entities (in the sense of ὑποκείμενον, substance) – obsolete (which is, among others, the basic insight of evolutionary epistemology).³⁹ The comprehensive approach we have outlined here, applying the subject-object dialectic to the interdependent relationship of man and world,⁴⁰ teaches us that human consciousness is itself an aspect of the universe’s self-realization.

The civilizational impact of a comprehensive ontological approach

An unintended consequence of man’s identity being “taken out” of a system of reference exclusively *defined* by a “geocentric life-world” (the parameters of which for many centuries had been set by the advocates of an ontological dualism of body and soul, matter and spirit) and *redefined* in relation to the *universe*, may be what can be characterized as the “*domestic*” *unifying aspect* of a cosmological understanding of man. This perception is rooted in what we have tried to describe here as “ontological anthropology” or “anthropological ontology.” Inter-civilizational conflicts would thus be perceived as mere intra-civilizational differences in a wider (cosmological)

³⁸ For an analysis of this distinction on the basis of a realist approach see Josef Seifert, *Das Leib-Seele-Problem und die gegenwärtige philosophische Diskussion. Eine systematisch-kritische Analyse*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2nd rev. ed. 1979.

³⁹ Cf. Konrad Lorenz, *Die Rückseite des Spiegels*; Gerhard Vollmer, *Evolutionäre Erkenntnistheorie. Angeborene Erkenntnisstrukturen im Kontext der Biologie, Psychologie, Linguistik, Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie*. Stuttgart etc.: Hirzel, 8th ed. 2002.

⁴⁰ For details see the author’s earlier analysis: “The Relation between Man and World: A Transcendental-Anthropological Problem,” loc. cit.

context. One practical consequence of this unifying effect, and an important contribution to global peace, could be mankind's commitment to the exploration of space as part of the civilizational *bonum commune*, uniting all civilizations on planet earth in a common undertaking that subsequently may also reduce the potential for armed (intra-civilizational) conflict.

Transcending the traditional "exclusivist" understanding of the human race opens up an entirely new dimension for *genuine dialogue* among the different civilizations existing on planet earth, an approach that may finally do away with Samuel Huntington's famous paradigm of the "clash of civilizations."⁴¹ In the context of the awareness of the universe, mankind may eventually be able to overcome the antagonisms that are inherent in a worldview that puts "man" in opposition to the "world" and imposes upon him the duty to shape the world according to his own image. This sense of "cosmic exclusivism," indeed an ontological "denial of reality," has all too often been mirrored in a kind of "civilizational exceptionalism" that juxtaposed one civilization against another and mobilized energies for conflicts that will appear futile as soon as human beings realize their "real" ontological identity.

The ontological broadening of man's self-awareness along the lines of an essentially transcendental-philosophical approach may indeed give a new lease of life to a "dialogue among civilizations" insofar as it is based on a *common* understanding (self-perception) of mankind in its relation to *reality as such*,⁴² bearing in mind the *common* fate of all civilizations on

⁴¹ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" in: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49. – For a critique of Huntington's paradigm see Hans Köchler, "The Clash of Civilizations Revisited," in: Hans Köchler and Gudrun Grabher (eds.), *Civilizations: Conflict or Dialogue?* (Studies in International Relations, XXIV.) Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1999, pp. 15-24.

⁴² On the philosophical precepts of the "dialogue of civilizations" in the traditional "planetary" context see the author's paper: *Philosophical Foundations of Civilizational Dialogue. The Hermeneutics of Cultural Self-comprehension versus the Paradigm of Civilizational Conflict*. Occasional Papers Series, No. 3. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1998.

this planet not vis-à-vis, but *within*, the universe, including other “civilizations” as yet unknown “self-reflections” of reality in a virtually infinite continuum of space and time. The interdependent (or dialectical) relationship of man and world, which we tried to explain here, necessarily implies a “cosmological redefinition,” or “reinvention,” of civilization. Contribution to this awareness can be considered, at least in philosophical terms, as the lasting civilizational impact of cosmology and astronomy.
