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Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich on ecological revolution

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KLAUS MICHAEL MEYER-ABICH ON ECOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

1. INTRODUCTION

Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich refers directly to the postulate of civilizational revolution for the protection of endangered wildlife, understood in various ways, in the book of 1990 entitled *Aufstand für die Natur. Von der Umwelt zur Mitwelt*. The canvas of this book were sociopolitical changes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the late eighties and early nineties of the last century. Its main message was expressed in the call for the need of full use of these changes to complete the revolutionary changes with technocratic civilizational changes conducive to overcoming the threats described as “ecological crisis”. This book was relatively soon published in English in 1993 under the title: *Revolution for Nature: From the Environment to the Connatural World*. Subsequently, the book became the subject of a heated academic and political debate in many European and American countries.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE REVOLUTION

K. M. Meyer-Abich calls for a revolution for nature in order to stop fatal and destructive consequences of economic growth in developed countries¹. When asked why the destruction of the environment is progressing, K. M. Meyer-Abich says that not only are people practically implementing false targets, but they are also thinking wrongly, charmed by the imperfect Enlightenment. In this situation, “reason itself can save us from a rationale that is anything but reasonable”². This could only be achieved through the restoration of human consciousness based on knowledge about human affiliation with nature and a full sense of human life in nature as a whole. Then, the natural antagonism of nature and culture can be overcome. In fact, the culture can and must be a specifically human contribution to the history of nature. A world with man can be more beautiful and better than a world without man, if only the truth about the intrinsic value of the environment, understood as “connatural world” (*Mitwelt*), is respected. This, in turn,

¹ See K. M. Meyer-Abich, *Aufstand für die Natur. Von der Umwelt zur Mitwelt*, Carl Hanser Verlag, München-Wien 1990, p. 1.

² Idem, *Revolution for Nature: From the Environment to the Connatural World*, The White Horse Press, Cambridge 1993, *Foreword*.

forces to create a holistic ethics which should express the knowledge of the dimensions of guilt borne by civilized humanity “for life at the expense of another life”. Revolution for nature, paradoxically, is not a rapid change of human presence in nature. It should in fact be made in a process: first, at the level of thinking and consciousness of individuals and societies of the highly developed and developing countries, then at the level of changes in the approach of man to nature - the way of life and management of humans in the environment.

3. EXTREME SITUATION

History shows that an extreme situation always leads to a revolution, opening new perspectives for the development of man and mankind. K. M. Meyer-Abich is against the concept of nature as a resource and as a useful material, which underlies processes that led to the development of technocratic civilization and further to the ecological crisis. Also Konrad Lorenz claims that the crisis is mainly caused by “the deadly sins of civilized humanity” or “cultural epidemic diseases”, manifesting in both human devastation of the natural environment, and the destruction of humanity in man. This crisis manifests itself not only through the destruction of nature, but also through the destruction of the culture and of man himself.

4. THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The dramatic situation of modern civilization demonstrates by a number of hazards of human, social and natural world. The human experience of these hazards, on the one hand allows identifying nature, dynamics and range of these hazards, and, on the other hand, helps identifying the conditions of the “intolerable situation”, which is a necessity to overcome, mobilizing the intellectual and moral resources of humanity to secure the existence of its current and future generations.

Practical philosophy of nature calls for revolutionary work in this field, which is consistently irrevocable abandonment of technocratic civilization within science and technology, which is seen as an oppressor of delicate life of nature in favor of ecological civilization within science and technology, which would respect the delicate life of nature. Practical philosophy of nature also determines the perspective of human development funded by principles stabilizing the ecological ethos of its survival. K. M. Meyer-Abich says, about the principle of peace, which is the leitmotif of the ethos of ecological survival of humanity.

The principle of peace sets physiocentric conception of the world, which allows any living being or thing disclose its inherent value or dignity in nature as a whole. And this is not a return to the geocentric world view. In physiocentric picture of the world it is not about getting everything revolved around the Earth, but rather getting everything revolved around everything³. The principle of peace requires physiocentric peace with man.

³ See *ibidem*, p. 82.

5. PHYSIOCENTRIC PEACE WITH MAN

K. M. Meyer-Abich believes that overcoming the ecological crisis will not be possible if human society remains closed⁴. This means that a person can be truly human only if it is not limited to the life of the people, but the „natural community participates in the life of animals and plants, air and water, sky and earth”⁵. Then the non-human world, so far representing only human environment man’s the sphere around human (*Umwelt*), has become a participant in his life, namely his “connatural world” (*Mitwelt*). Thus, only when people find themselves in nature, that is, accept their allegiance to it, peace will be possible⁶.

Physiocentric man concept assumes that humanity derives from the natural history along with all the elements of animate and inanimate nature⁷. Thus, human is a part of nature, and his „connatural world” are also other people and his own body. According to the practical philosophy of nature, peace between human beings can be achieved by acceptance of their own nature, resulting from belonging to nature. Recognition of the same nature belonging to the other people opens the way to peace with them as individuals, as well as their current and future generations. As far as people of technocratic age focus their efforts solely on the knowledge of nature, in order to control it, they develop mathematical and natural sciences. Whereas, people of ecological age need to focus also on the knowledge of their own nature and to develop the Arts. In fact, they should encourage, as highlighted by Zdzisława Piątek, reassessment of values, determining the survival of humanity. Revaluation of values, that is change their hierarchy is the main condition for changes in the structure of human needs⁸. In order to consciously shape the human needs development of the Arts is necessary. In this context, Gernot Böhme says, for example, about the need to create ecological aesthetics of nature, which task is to remind that for a healthy living it is necessary to experience environment having certain aesthetic values. The basic needs of human life should not only include a general need for beautiful surroundings, but also the need of nature, something that exists by itself and what moves a man by his independent existence. Man has a deep need for something other than himself⁹.

⁴ See idem, *Dreißig Thesen zur Praktischen Naturphilosophie*, in: *Ökologische Probleme im Kulturellen Wandel*, eds. H. Lübke, E. Ströker, Wilhelm Fink/Ferdinand Schöningh, München 1986, p. 105.

⁵ Idem, *Praktische Naturphilosophie. Erinnerung an einen vergessenen Traum*, Verlag C. H. Beck, München 1997, p. 352; idem, *Dreißig Thesen...*, p. 101.

⁶ See idem, *Humans in Nature: Towards a Physiocentric Philosophy*, in: *Technological Trajectories and the Human Environment*, eds. J. H. Ausubel, H. D. Langford, National Academy Press, Washington 1997, p. 182.

⁷ See idem, *Dreißig Thesen ...*, p. 101.

⁸ See Z. Piątek, *Człowiek jako podmiot zrównoważonego rozwoju: konsekwencje filozoficzno-społeczne*, w: *Zrównoważony rozwój. Od utopii do praw człowieka*, eds. A. Papuziński, Oficyna Wydawnicza Branta, Bydgoszcz 2005, p. 21.

⁹ See G. Böhme, *Filozofia i estetyka przyrody w dobie kryzysu środowiska naturalnego*, transl. J. Merecki, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2002, p. 77-78.

Discovering one's identity determines the development of the spiritual man's sphere. In contrast to the economic sphere, it does not encounter any limitations imposed by the condition of harmonious coexistence with nature. As noted by Hannah Arendt, the development of the spiritual sphere is the only human activity that does not need anything else other than themselves, to be carried out. Developing a spiritual life creates the possibility of such a form of human self-realization, which could not threaten a symbiotic relationship with the natural environment¹⁰.

Therefore, the transition from technocratic civilization to ecological civilization requires work on the conversion of the human image. On this basis, it can (should) be a reconciliation of Homo economicus, who prefers the material needs into Homo oecologicus who prefers the immaterial needs¹¹.

According to K. M. Meyer-Abich, the process of expanding human self-consciousness is accompanied by a responsibility related to peaceful life and activities in nature. If someone follows the expansion of the circle of human responsibility, from total self-centeredness to acknowledgment of the intrinsic value of the connatural world within nature, he is a different person in the end, and a changed self-image will express in changed behavior. Moving from one level to a higher responsibility level not only changes the point of view of the world, but it is like being born into a new world - „connatural”¹². Widening the circle of responsibility of concentration only on oneself to recognize the intrinsic value of „connatural world” as a whole, is combined with the accompanying phenomenon of expanding human self-awareness.

At the beginning, a man identifies by his body. Then he becomes a son, a member of the community. The development of awareness expands identity of being attached to a particular country, which obliges the state to protect or prohibit the committing offenses against the public interest. Further man recognizes himself as a citizen of the world. Then the man starts to see himself as a man in a very general sense, who inherits identity from their ancestors and transfers it to their descendants. Who will reach the sixth and seventh level of widening circles of responsibility, understanding that human society is not a closed society, including animals, plants and other elements in the community of living beings, will also recognize himself as a being endowed with the will to live among other creatures wishing to live. Then there is no reason to destroy the human biosphere. The eighth and final level presents the experience of nature as me. Other identities are no longer as important. We can look spatially at this widening of personality. “People do not live only in their homes. Their homes are located in neighborhoods, regions, lands on Earth. Thus, today, people should feel like at home, thinking about the whole planet. Human identity does not end with the threshold of our houses - this threshold does not really exist”¹³.

¹⁰ See H. Arendt, *O myśleniu*, Wydawnictwo Europa, Warszawa 1989, p. 56.

¹¹ See Z. Łepko, *W sprawie polityki dla zrównoważonego rozwoju*, Seminare 29(2011), p. 86.

¹² See K. M. Meyer-Abich, *Revolution for Nature...*, p. 76.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 76-77. See K. M. Meyer-Abich, *Praktische Naturphilosophie...*, p. 401.

K. M. Meyer-Abich does not agree with the assertion that widening the circle of responsibility should be gradual. Human history shows that care only about the interests of the state in the end turn against him. Problems related to the entire globe. Therefore, even for political reasons, responsibility should be expanded simultaneously at all levels. At the same time he emphasizes importance of faith in people, that their lifestyle may change, that there is hope for improvement. Without this faith in humans, democracy would not be created, after all.

Therefore, K. M. Meyer-Abich sets hopes for the human reason. He refers to the thought of Immanuel Kant, according to which the reason is a gift from nature, which prevails over the human will¹⁴. Basics of humanity that make up the biggest difference between humans and animals, are the ability to think and the free will. People recognize the moral law by the reason. Man, free, thinking and a being able to act independently, is able to distinguish moral from immoral behavior. Kant emphasized that the source of moral values is the independent human will guided by reason, thus every person deserves respect. The final result of the practical application of the moral postulates of Kant is the creation of the kingdom, in which no one is being used by other people to achieve their personal goals. "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law"¹⁵. Followed by K. M. Meyer-Abich proceeding according to this principle is not externally imposed but it is dictated by human intuition. In addition, to consider our own interest means "not only our own interest but, by virtue of reason, the interests of the whole of nature, as it expresses itself in reason, nature's gift to humanity"¹⁶. Although the practical philosophy of nature does not follow the anthropocentric philosophy of Kant, it takes into account the anthropomorphism of human thought and the aim of determining the human will from nature¹⁷.

The answer to the question of how far the humanity should concern including other elements is quite different now than in the times of the French Revolution, which led to codify the new understanding of collective responsibility. Nowadays this kind of responsibility is not functioning properly. Industrialized countries do not recognize collective responsibility for poorer countries. Nowadays there is no collective responsibility for „connatural world". People of technocratic era behave like so the collective responsibility for the other elements of nature did not concern them. However, the essence of democracy is a collective responsibility and not putting power in the hands of a single ruler after all. In addition, today this kind of responsibility rests on the entire global community, which must take into account the personal and political relations. Aristotle considered the man a political animal, created to live in the state¹⁸. He saw in the political motivation acknowledgment of collective responsibility

¹⁴ See idem, *Revolution for Nature*..., p. 80.

¹⁵ I. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, transl. J. W. Ellington, Hackett, Indianapolis 1993, p. 30.

¹⁶ K. M. Meyer-Abich, *Revolution for Nature*..., p. 80.

¹⁷ See idem, *Praktische Naturphilosophie*..., p. 236-237.

¹⁸ See Aristoteles, *Polityka*, transl. L. Piotrowicz, in: *Arystoteles. Dzieła wszystkie*, eds. E. Głębička,

in the lives with others as a natural ability. In this spirit, ecological revolution should direct humanity to expand the community in order to fully cope with the problems of the industrial era, which interact much further than the borders of a single state. The goal of this revolution is justice for all elements through the peace with nature – peace of the parts with the whole¹⁹. In this way in man, nature attains language. In its terms we think beyond ourselves and within us it becomes political²⁰.

Man by nature is able to understand himself. Experiencing nature in the world is connected with the experience of harmony and integrity of human nature. A man can fully experience the nature of the outer only by reference to himself and his inner nature (inner nature in man)²¹.

At the same time, only human can recognize his inner nature by reference to the physical world. The process of developing circles of responsibility shows the holistic structure of human personality. People are not only sons or daughters, citizens and community members, they are also the members and elements of nature as a whole. At the same time, the whole of nature is not the sum of its individual components, but rather the elements are what they are, by their presence in its entirety. That is why a man can think and act in his interest only when he accepts global responsibility for nature, which is also himself. People are not „interplanetarians, but sons and daughters of the Earth”²². Everything works only in all things²³. Only when the human personality is equally integrated into the social and natural environment we can talk about the peace with a man, which arise from physiocentric view of the world.

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Summary

This article refers to K. M. Meyer-Abich's concept of ecological revolution mainly presented in his book "Revolution for Nature", where the author explained the idea of a holistic alternative to the Western world-view which remains under the questionable influence of the Enlightenment. The solution and termination of the so-called ecological crisis can only be achieved if people recognize their responsibilities towards all things in nature. Practical philosophy of nature determines such perspectives of human development, which are based on the principles founding and stabilizing the ethos of its ecological survival. K. M. Meyer-Abich talks about the principle of peace. This idea includes establishing peace with man, which is the first step towards establishing peace with nature.

Keywords: ecological revolution, practical philosophy of nature, physiocentrism

N. Szancer, t. 6, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1964, p. I, 1, 9.

¹⁹ See K. M. Meyer-Abich, *Revolution for Nature...*, p. 81.

²⁰ See ibidem.

²¹ See ibidem, p. 82.

²² Idem, *Praktische Naturphilosophie. Erinnerung an einen vergessenen Traum*, p. 11.

²³ See A. Meyer-Abich, *Zur Logik der Unbestimmtheitsbeziehungen*, in: *In Die Ganzheit in Philosophie und Wissenschaft – Othmar Spann zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. W. Heinrich, W. Braumüller, Wien 1950, p. 52.

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Abstrakt

Artykuł ten nawiązuje wprost do postulatu rewolucji cywilizacyjnej na rzecz ochrony wielorako zagrożonej przyrody, przedstawionego przez Klause Michaela Meyer-Abicha głównie w książce *Revolution for Nature*, gdzie wyjaśnia on holistyczną alternatywę dla światopoglądu Zachodu oczarowanego niedoskonałym Oświeceniem. Rozwiązanie i zakończenie tak zwanego kryzysu ekologicznego może przyjść tylko, jeśli ludzie uznają swoją odpowiedzialność wobec wszystkiego, co jest w przyrodzie. Praktyczna filozofia przyrody wyznacza takie perspektywy rozwoju ludzkości, których motywem przewodnim stają się zasady fundujące i stabilizujące etos ekologicznego jej przetrwania. K. M. Meyer-Abich mówi o zasadzie pokoju, w tym o pokoju z człowiekiem, który jest pierwszym krokiem na drodze do pokoju z przyrodą.

Nota o Autorze: Paulina Selmaj-Pomaska w 2013 roku uzyskała doktorat nauk humanistycznych w zakresie filozofii w Instytucie Ekologii i Bioetyki na Wydziale Filozofii UKSW, gdzie prowadziła badania w obrębie antropologii kulturowej, etyki ekologicznej, praktycznej filozofii przyrody oraz nauk prawnych i przyrodniczych. Jest także absolwentką kierunku ochrony środowiska na Wydziale Filozofii Chrześcijańskiej Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego (2007), studiów podyplomowych z zakresu Ergonomii, BHP i Ochrony Środowiska Politechniki Warszawskiej (2010), stażystką na Wydziale Inżynierii Budowlanej w Katedrze Gospodarki Odpadami na Bauhaus Universität Weimar (2008) oraz laureatką stypendium naukowego niemieckiej organizacji Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt.

Słowa kluczowe: rewolucja ekologiczna, praktyczna filozofia przyrody, fizjocentryzm