

EUGEN FINK: ETHICS IS ROOTED IN PHYSICS¹

Eva Dědečková

ABSTRACT: In addition to stimulating disparate scientific debates, the Anthropocene era has influenced philosophy itself in a fundamental way. It is here that we return to the question of understanding man and his relationship with the world. Is humanism and its ethics and morals adequate for the situation in which we find ourselves? The devastation of the environment, the evident decomposition of traditional values, increasing injustice, and inequalities mutilating the interpersonal sphere are all testimony to the fact that our current philosophy of education is inadequate. What if we look at this problem from a cosmological perspective? Eugen Fink's philosophy, which creatively follows Friedrich Nietzsche, presented the surprising fact that ethics is rooted in physics. In this essay, I will try to introduce this aspect of Fink's philosophy and create a preliminary outline of what possible philosophical (and social) consequences this concept opens up.

KEYWORDS: Anthropocene; Cosmological philosophy; Eugen Fink; Friedrich Nietzsche; Ethics; Philosophy of education; Cosmos; Physics

INTRODUCTION

Learn gradually *to discard the supposed individual!* Expose the mistakes of the ego! Recognise *egoism as a mistake!* The opposite is not to be understood as altruism! That would just be love for *other supposed* individuals! No! Get over "*me*" and "*you*"!

Feel cosmically!

— Friedrich Nietzsche

The German philosopher Eugen Fink (1905–1975) begins the eighth part of the

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first chapter of the work *Natur, Freiheit, Welt* (1992)² with this provocative formulation: “Ethics is rooted in physics” [*Die Ethik gründet in der Physik*]. This does not imply some kind of arbitrary adherence to psychological naturalism. Anyone feeling affronted might ask where this feeling of scandal comes from, and this immediately shows how metaphysical truths concerning the superiority of reason over nature are deeply embedded within us.

It is upon this basis that the concept of European “humanism” – along with its values, ideals, and morals – developed from a kind of Christian Platonism, as Friedrich Nietzsche quite simplistically stated.³ By criticising this one-sided relationship of man to the world, resulting from a certain historical interpretation in favour of logic and reason that makes us fanatically transform nature into a realm in which the human being plays the central figure, Fink makes a radical demand for a rethinking of all ideals and morals, nurturing the idea of man as an ontologically *isolated* and *morally superior* island in the World⁴ as a whole.⁵ Morality already implies an *interpretation* of the World,⁶ transmitted by the community through education, and it is “the way how Dasein exists in the World” (Fink 1992: 65). There is also the requirement of a cosmologically oriented education, which already perceives man and his moral world as being intrinsically and organically incorporated into the *physis* – i.e. the natural connection of all things as a whole.

² In Fink’s bibliography, the title of this work cannot be found since it is a posthumous edition of a 1951/1952 lecture series entitled *Philosophie der Erziehung*. Despite the seeming time contradiction, it appears certain that this work is a more concrete form of what Fink later formulated in his well-known work *Sein, Wahrheit, Welt* (a 1955/1956 lecture series published in 1958). In this case, it is about understanding the philosophy of education in a cosmological sense, whereas *Sein, Wahrheit, Welt* is more focused on cosmological philosophy itself.

³ On how and why Fink thought that Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics were reinterpreted by the Christian worldview and what that meant for the philosophy of education, see Eugen Fink, *Metaphysik der Erziehung im Weltverständnis von Plato und Aristoteles*, Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1970.

⁴ Fink’s philosophy possesses a characteristic “cosmological difference” that distinguishes between beings and the world. It is therefore necessary to understand the distinction between the cosmological meaning of the “World” (with a capital letter) as an independent and all-transcending force and a cosmic whole, and the existential meaning of the “world” (with a lowercase letter) as a sphere of intra-worldly beings, including our highly functional idea of the world as a storehouse of things, complex intra-mundane relations, and so on (Cf. Fink, 1990: 19). Having said that, it is very hard to strictly hold on to this difference because both ways of the understanding of the world “shimmer” through one another (Cf. Fink, 1987: 192).

⁵ Eugen Fink, *Natur, Freiheit, Welt. Philosophie der Erziehung*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1992, p. 59.

⁶ Eugen Fink, *Existenz und Coexistenz: Grundprobleme der menschlichen Gemeinschaft*, Würzburg: Königshausen u. Neumann, 1987, pp. 200–201.

Following Nietzsche and Heraclitus, Fink seeks to point out that the Greekness admired by us has its roots in a tradition that does not know the vertical hierarchisation of being according to the measure of the share of rationality, which we can systematically find in Plato. Later, in European history, this hierarchisation directly resulted in the separation of soul and body as well as reason and nature. Ultimately, morality became the sphere of reason, thus confirming its power over blind nature. (We can find the peak of this metaphysical heritage in Kant and Hegel.)⁷

IN THE SHACKLES OF METAPHYSICAL HERITAGE

To be fair, cosmological sensibility was also natural for Plato and Aristotle. Plato's Myth of the Cave metaphorically expressed the seriousness of *paideia* and its socio-political consequences, instantiating the *principle* requirement to understand the humanity of man precisely through his relationship with the World; however, according to Fink, what needs to be taken critically is Plato's conception of the World as the domain of an exclusively reasonable and spiritual principle. Having said that, the *cosmological* dimension of morality in Platonic-Aristotelian metaphysics⁸ has been overlooked in the course of history with rational interpretations of the construction of the World being privileged. The reason is obvious, although Fink wonders "how there could have been a detachment of physics from ethics at all."⁹ Indeed, the emphasis on the rational principle, the ontological elevation of its superiority in terms of exclusive and direct contact with the deity, is a motive that increases the sense of man's power over everything else that exists. Perhaps somewhere here we can identify the characteristics of a deficient relationship with the World resulting from an adherence to the (fabricated) image of one's own chosen-ness rather than from an authentic

⁷ For more, see Eva Dědečková, *Kozmologická filozofia výchovy Eugena Finka* [The Cosmological Philosophy of Education by Eugen Fink], Prague: PedF UK, 2018, pp. 27–53.

⁸ Of course, Aristotle's metaphysics seems to be more oriented towards earthly things; however, reason and logic are still the main indicator of the "value" of life. For the nuances of Fink's understanding of the cosmological motive in Plato and Aristotle, see Fink, *Metaphysik der Erziehung im Weltverständnis von Plato und Aristoteles*.

⁹ Fink, *Natur, Freiheit, Welt*, p. 64.

acceptance of foreignness and otherness.¹⁰ The value of others – and of the world itself – arises from this dominating schema. Then everything else, including interpersonal relationships, falls into the categories of useful/useless or meaningful/meaningless. What can sometimes radically distort this self-centred illusion is precisely nature itself in the form of various phenomena (e.g. *aurora borealis* reminds a person of his incorporation into a world subjected to cosmic phenomena), but most often this is in the form of a catastrophe. This is when man stands face to face with unbridled elements; he is frightened by the movement of the Earth's crust under his feet, moving air currents, surging ocean waters, and volcanic eruptions ejecting glowing magma from the veins of the Earth. Suddenly, the *hidden harmony* of the cosmos, the unexpected motion, and the life of the “inanimate” are apparent. A person realises for a moment his insignificance and indissoluble incorporation into the happening of the *physis*. Man inherently lives amidst a sense of threat, of foreignness, which he tries to repress through reason, clarifying interpretations simply by the pursuit of “truth” and the adoption of a rational attitude. This is illuminated by Fink's cosmological view of the question of morals, interpreted from a cosmological perspective as the way in which man *temporarily* “takes root” in the alienation of the Whole (Fink, 1992: 65).

In other words, only in the sense of the groundlessness of being can a person create and find his place in the here and now. But the problem is when, by this “rooting”, the original feature of being (groundlessness, baselessness) is forgotten and suddenly one believes in an unchanging, stable, and fixed picture of the world – in absolute truth and all-ruling reason. Morality is then understood as an inviolable and indisputable inheritance (Creon's law of the community). Man does not need to self-search anymore, much less *create* values, because morals have become rigidified into a rule of life to which one must simply submit; here one literally *calculates* with the unchanging structure of the World, which has far-reaching socio-political consequences.

In history, however, we can find many cults and mysteries which do not perceive nature as something indifferent – a mere object upon which our moral superiority is to be attested. It is enough to mention the Greek festivities

¹⁰ This means that man loses the cosmological understanding of the World from his perspective and sees only “the world” in an existential meaning, i.e. exclusively in an anthropocentric and anthropomorphic form, absolutely ignoring the “hidden” harmony (Heraclitus) that goes far beyond human reason and logic.

honouring the god Dionysus, which, according to Fink, in their bacchantic intoxication precisely expressed the identification of Dionysus with Hades, i.e. an initiation into the mystery of the identity of life and death. Regardless of how the modern understanding of the Dionysian principle was formed,¹¹ “this simple historical fact of the Dionysian cult may be a motive for a question, namely, whether the existence of morality is to be thought only from the world relation of man to the spirit – or whether there can and must also be a ‘moral’ instruction of ‘the forces of nature’”.¹²

Let us ask, therefore, if morality always implies the interpretation of the World and the fundamental form of interpretation of the existing entities as a whole: do our Platonic-Christian morals, although refined with Aristotelian virtue ethics, and the humanistic education based on them, express an authentic relationship with the World? Are they authentic in the sense of *autos einai*, i.e. in providing the opportunity to be oneself? Does present-day education allow us to grow out of our own *physis*? And what is actually meant by *physis* anyway? The Czech philosopher of living nature, Zdeněk Kratochvíl, who literally incorporated the archaic spirit of Greece, characterises this question as follows:

Physis is everything that goes through procreation and dying and through emergence and extinction. Nature includes change and transformation; however, nature also includes relation and context. Nature hides itself in its relationships with other natures. Through these relationships, it relates to the whole – to the connection of everything. And this is what makes nature natural. At the *physis* level, (the fact that) “everything is related to everything” applies. (Kratochvíl, 1994: 22)

How then does *physis* relate to the concept of *cosmos*, from which we base our reflections on cosmological education? *Cosmos* expresses order and formation – not in the manner of a dry statement but rather as a loving and fervent admiration of the most inherent nature of *physis*. It creates “the most beautiful cosmos from a pile of things poured out at random” (Heraclitus, B 124); this relationship is expressed even better by Fragment B 54: “The invisible harmony is stronger than the visible.”

¹¹ For the formation of the understanding of the Dionysian myth and what we somehow understand today as “the Dionysian” in Nietzsche, see Břetislav Horyna, “The History and Theory of the Dionysian Principle ‘Das Dionysische’ in Literature and Philosophy Before the Classical Formulations of Fr. Nietzsche,” *Felsefē Arkívi – Archives of Philosophy*, 55 (2021): pp. 1–16. DOI: 10.26650/arcip.991376.

¹² Fink, *Natur, Freiheit, Welt*, p. 67.

Here the human being directly touches the enigmatic nature of the World, the apparent ordering, and the layout of things, for example, the constellation in the night sky, by its visible arrangement, reminds us of the non-visible order, allowing the visible to stand out. We are looking at Ursa Major, but a million years ago that constellation of stars looked completely different and will change again in the future. Everything flows, and everything is in motion. Just for the brevity of our lives, we dream the dream of “stability”. Importantly, however, man has long known that without respect for that “non-obvious” harmony, he will not survive. In the night sky, people saw patterns but also instructions for survival, agricultural activities, and religious rites. They noticed the harmony between the movement of the stars and the transformations of the earth; the soil was responding to the celestial forces.¹³ Geometric figures seen in the sky, which were indicative, carried messages relating to subsistence, prompting man, thanks to his cognitive capacities, to envisage mathematics as a royal and divine science and as the very principle of the *cosmos*. Perhaps this is where we can see how short the path from the stomach to the gods really is.

Although we consider ourselves the heirs of Greek culture, we usually admire the Hellenic world in a kind of idealised and “Christian” way; however, the driving principle of this culture was the all-pervading *agon* as the struggle and the gradation of life as a force. There was no equality for all but rather a democracy without hypocritical pathos that was openly built on slavery. Today it is no different, but our supposed Christian humanism somehow does not allow us to look at things as they are. We do not admit our own nature, because we understand it from our fabricated “world” – a system that purposefully and institutionally creates social inequality.¹⁴ This mechanism also feeds other different forms of inequality (be it based on gender, race, or class) while, paradoxically, this happens against the background of the idea of equality, which becomes the object of marketing as a legitimacy tool. At this point, capital immediately seizes the question of the identity of an individual or a group and radically contributes to the deepening of inequality by creating an atmosphere of

¹³ For more, see Fink, *Natur, Freiheit, Welt*, pp. 64–67.

¹⁴ See, for example, Simon Charlesworth’s interesting works on the phenomenology of the working class experience and on the problem of higher education and its philosophical, sociological, and psychological consequences.

market struggle among people from different groups actually affected by social disadvantage. Instead of solving the real problem at its roots, mutual hatred is kindled among the unequal themselves.

THE PROBLEM OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

As humanity we exist at the expense of everything living and inanimate, and, even more so, we become like an instrument in the “household” of our *polis*. Aristotle posited that if tools could do the necessary work, there would be no need for slaves. We are amazed to find that the more functional devices we have, the more we become slaves ourselves. *Physis* is a relationship to immensity, but does man today know of any “immensity”? He certainly and exclusively does in connection with the belief in his (seemingly) unlimited intellectual abilities. What can a living and honest relationship with the World today grow from? What “education” can bring a person to the “uneducable”¹⁵ in him if the current philosophy of education is exclusively the servant of the market?

Ethics is rooted in physics. This sentence sounds provocative. It obviously contradicts a long Western tradition, which assigns to humans a rank that fundamentally distinguishes them from all other living beings and elevates them above plants and animals; (...) Regardless of whether the humanity of human being is determined by the salvation of the soul, by speech and reason, or by culture, by freedom or by the state, by labour and technology, any defining feature of this kind always constitutes a segregation, a separation of the human being from plants and animals. The anthropological definition is one that isolates. Human beings are claimed to be something of a very unique kind.¹⁶

With this cosmological perspective, Fink distances himself from philosophical anthropology and makes a radical break with the traditional phenomenological understanding of the problem of human existence. However, Fink’s radical position is opposed, for example, by his long-time friend Jan Patočka, who is downright offended by the idea that a person’s life should be fundamentally

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 129. My long-term research suggests that Fink must have been fascinated and deeply influenced (not only) by Nietzsche’s critics on education, which appears to have been the main motive behind Nietzsche’s greatest writings – from *Untimely Meditations* to the great *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

¹⁶ Fink, *Natur, Freiheit, Welt*, p. 68.

similar to the “flowering and perishing of a lily of the field”!¹⁷ Nonetheless, as Fink points out:

Even the catchword of “existence” is no solution but rather a formula for the problem. As long as we perceive “existence” merely as a human’s *own* state of being, the fundamental anthropological attitude of “humanism” has still not been abandoned. “Humanism” is basically the defining feature of humanity in distinction from other entities. However, humanism is overcome where it is not the distance to other beings but the relation to the World that decisively comes into view. The Western tradition of the determination of the human being was not “humanistic” at its Greek origins. Even in Plato, as we have already said, the constitution of the human being is understood from the constitution of the polis, and this, in turn, from the constitution of the universe. Ethics was still rooted there in physics. However, physis, the being in the whole [das Seiende im Ganzen], is already there in an interpretation that has had world-historical consequences, and in which the origin of “humanism”, not least of all, is to be found. (...) Ethics being rooted in physics means for us neither the thesis that the realm of customary morality [das Reich des Sittlichen] rests on the realm of nature, nor does it mean the naturalistic contrary view that customary morality [das Sittliche], in truth, without its moralistic pathos, would be nothing more than a field of sublimated and perverted instincts – a kind of degenerate nature. Ethics being rooted in physics means that humanity as a whole is determined by the way in which the human being dwells in the whole of beings [im Ganzen des Seienden], in the World. We called such a dwelling a “set of morals” [die Sitte]. Such a set of morals [die Sitte] completely surrounds the human Dasein, leaving nothing outside, no neutral sphere. In the totality of his life, a human being is determined by customary morality [die Sitte] and by his dwelling in the World as a whole.¹⁸

From a cosmological perspective, it follows that:

In morality, Dasein is held by relation to the open “Day”, where everything that exists is distinguished and fixed in certain contours, appearances and an individual imprint. But it is also held by a darker relation to the “Night”, where everything is one; in such a twofold relationship, the world relation of morality is only formed. (...) Man can only experience home, protection and shelter because he is inherently exposed to the universe and because he “stands out” [*hinaussteht*], “waits out” [*hinauswartet*] into the infinite and “desires higher” [*hinaussehnt*] into such openness

¹⁷ Jan Patočka, *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin* [Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History], in *Péče o duši III. Sebrané spisy. Sv. 3*, Praha: Oikoyemenh, 2002, p. 80.

¹⁸ Fink, *Natur, Freiheit, Welt*, p. 69.

of the World, which Nietzsche called the “Great Desire” in Zarathustra.¹⁹

Fink understood education as *being integrated* into what is real,²⁰ refusing to characterise education as “science” or pedagogy, because the question of education always leads to the labyrinth of the World. Fink’s concept of education is transformed into a never-ending joint life reflection, illuminating the deep meaning of intersubjectivity: a community that, especially in crises, consults (not only) on education’s purpose [*die Beratungsgemeinschaft*].²¹ For Fink, the issue of morals and ideals is fundamental, and it is within this that the true relationship of man with the world is reflected. It is essential for Fink that a human being, constantly seeking his measure among varieties of being, with their order and hierarchy, experiences the tension between the consciousness of his own finite imperfection and that of participation in the infinite and creative *cosmos* (something which is beyond our moral values) and thereby comes to understand that it is from this *tension* that the possibilities of his own freedom derive. This will allow him to understand that his hunger for measurement is the true core of his relationship with the World, which is without measure – indeed un-measure-able, inestimable and incalculable.²² This is the Dionysian joy of living, experiencing a sense of natural participation and incorporation into the universe.

Of course, these cosmological horizons are extremely broad, making the representation of a particular pedagogical issue difficult. In defence of Fink, it should be noted that this comes from a living and nihilistic situation characterised by indeterminacy and uncertainty; these are symptoms that are discussed in Fink’s thinking about the problem of education. Indeed, his formulation of

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 70–71. For a more detailed explanation of how and why Nietzsche’s philosophy affected Fink’s cosmological philosophy, see DĚdečková, *Kozmologická filozofia výchovy Eugena Finka* [The Cosmological Philosophy of Education by Eugen Fink], 2018, (to be translated into English soon).

²⁰ “Erziehung ist Einfügung in das Wirkliche.” Cf. Fink, *Natur, Freiheit, Welt*, p. 178. The English word “integrated” comes from the Latin word *integer*, which means “whole”; “integrate” thus means “to make whole”.

²¹ Fink puts an emphasis precisely on Aristotle’s *eubolia* and *phronésis*. See, for example, *Metaphysik der Erziehung im Weltverständnis von Plato und Aristoteles*, p. 214; *Natur, Freiheit, Welt*, p. 44; and *Erziehungswissenschaft und Lebenslehre* (1970), p. 184 ff. Also see his short essay entitled “Phronesis und Theoria”, in *Die Welt des Menschen – Die Welt der Philosophie. Festschrift für Jan Patočka* (edited by Walter Biemel, Haag: Nijhoff, 1976). For a more detailed insight into the cosmological understanding of society, see Fink’s work *Existenz und Coexistenz*. According to Fink, this concept of “Beratungsgemeinschaft” (a consultative community) can arise upon the basis of the pedagogical concept of “Frage-Gemeinschaft” (a questioning community).

²² See Eugen Fink, *Grundfragen der systematischen Pädagogik*, Freiburg: Verlag Rombach, 1978, p. 88.

educational aporias shows the uneasiness of the situation.²³ Perhaps this awareness of uncertainty can serve as a “mapping” of our boundaries, which ultimately reminds us of the world’s character of beings; however, in the sense of a “therapeutic” teasing of human consciousness in the face of the immensity of the *cosmos* – beyond good and evil – one can be released into the positive and creative tension of this “in-between”. The cosmological philosophy of education thus becomes a kind of Cosmo–logo–therapy; however, we can criticise Fink for his philosophical rigour since, in his search for a cosmological starting point, he oriented himself almost exclusively towards the history of philosophy. Actually, many of the best-known modern physicists (including Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, and Erwin Schrödinger) had something *philosophically* relevant to say about what the modern revolution in physics actually meant in terms of the need to change the nature of our relationship to the world. This has had consequences for the philosophy of education as well.

When truly understood as *ens cosmologicum*, man is grounded in knowing that his wisdom for living is both rational and non-rational. Worldliness as such “appeals” to an imperfect being with the immensity of poetics. In the end, the link between *physis* and *poiesis* is the most original one. It was only thanks to the wonder of the beauty, sound, smell, and touch of the totality of the World that the first artistic expressions were created. At the heart of proto-art is an unceasing bias towards the world and its phenomena. From there came the exploratory impulse for human existence, which today takes the form of the natural sciences: astronomy, astrophysics, and cosmology. Their research is mathematical poetry. And that is their beauty. Nowhere are there any definitive truths; in their place there are simply conscious interpretations and theories. It should be emphasised that these are always human theories. Perhaps we are currently looking for a meaningful and creative relationship with a new – this time scientific – symbol of the World. Anyone who has experienced nihilism to the core will never be the same again; instead, one becomes “sighted”.

GAY SCIENCE AND THE DAWNING

Regardless of whether philosophers like it or not, man currently understands

²³ Cf. Fink, *Natur, Freiheit, Welt*, pp. 11–19.

himself “scientifically”. The problem is that the system of education cannot put particular scientific subjects into context. At present, philosophy has a strange position in society: either it is completely ignored by the public, or it is viewed as analogous to a secret religion that might reveal mystical truths.²⁴ Instead of going out into the world to criticise the current social state and question the capitalist philosophy of education (including the implementation of its values ignoring the limited resources of nature), philosophy digs deeper into itself and, astonished, always finds itself as the only possible excuse for the culture of Europe.

What if we change perspective? Wouldn't that be the only possible “accusation”? Perhaps if philosophy – this “mother of the sciences” – listened to her “daughters” without the pathos of “omniscient maturity” or formal authority, it could be a natural and authentic authority in service to the elucidation of everyday social phenomena. Philosophy could thus fulfil the Greek ideal of an essential link with the *polis* and the *cosmos*. Only then do philosophical theories really gain life meaning for man and society. This is why Fink heads to the open horizons of Nietzschean and Heraclitian philosophy.

What outrages philosophy, especially phenomenology, about science? That it abolishes the ontological-axiological vertical of being? That it equates man with everything that exists? But this is where an important opportunity arises to open the cosmic context of our *physis*. The unpreparedness of educational structures necessarily translates into gross interpretative reductionism, which rightly irritates philosophers; however, this is not the fault of science. Modern mathematical science did not merely deliver an objective picture of the world that was sufficient to enthral the masses with the wonders of contemporary technology. This historical transformation – like any other – has brought with it certain demands on man, precisely in the field of education; a challenge to overcome the previously “too human” and exclusively “moral” framework of self- and world-interpretation. The one who noticed and fully understood the seriousness of this

²⁴ The power of religious truths was gradually weakened with the development of science and technology; however, since the philosophy of education has not yet been reconsidered, people are looking for reassuring “truths” where there are none – and cannot ever be – given the nature of the disciplines themselves (philosophy and science). The problem is the very philosophy of education, which does not teach us to live in an unstable stream of questions and theories. The stabilising framework of the world that was in force until the natural sciences revolution in the seventeenth century is long gone; however, this fact has not been fully reflected in the philosophy of education. Indeed, the picture of the world as an economic unit persists.

educational challenge was Nietzsche. He understood that the breakthrough to the *cosmos*, which science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had made with its emphasis on the issue of motion,²⁵ would require a rethinking of all values and the entire metaphysical fabrication of the “beyond-world” in order to test our ideals with a hammer and ear; that which does not resonate to the sound of the cosmos and does not increase within us an unconditional love for life itself must be helped to its demise.²⁶ In this context, Nietzsche had already understood the importance of focusing on the problem of education in his early writings because it is usually just an instrument through which young souls are purposefully formed into conforming human resources.

Phenomenologists usually despise scientists-physicists because they are not capable of self-doubt, are not capable of a deeper reflection on the meaning of their work, and are so absorbed in their “partial” problem that they miss the whole; however, those who take the effort to read the works of natural scientists, physicists, and astronomers (and others) in the midst of a crisis (something identified and discussed also by Edmund Husserl) will understand that the situation touched them deeply humanly because they naturally felt that their relationship with the world did not depend solely on *ego cogito* and that this relationship never represented an “absolute truth” but was always “just” an interpretation. *Physis* itself prompted physicists to “rethink the Cartesian subject-object splitting (...) and modern claims of logic, knowledge, causality,

²⁵ Note Nietzsche’s posthumous Fragment 2[127] from 1885: “Seit Copernikus rollt der Mensch aus der Centrum ins x.” It must, however, be clear that, for Nietzsche, science itself is seen as a very useful *tool* (but nothing more) for removing the remnants of the metaphysical tradition. Having said that, there is no need to deify science. It itself arose from metaphysics, and, moreover, continues to cultivate some “harmful” principles in itself. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay, § 25.

²⁶ This also has a lot to do with the problem of “meaning”, the “purpose” of everything, and even our very existence. This is precisely why such physical theories were interesting to Nietzsche. They were able to elegantly explain the state of things without the need for any special “human meaning”. Roger Boscovich’s theory of atoms as “force centres” was also such a concept. For Nietzsche, Boscovich and Nicolaus Copernicus represented a “big turning point”. It was here that Nietzsche found the renewed impulse of Heraclitus’s dynamic philosophy. See more in Günter Abel, *Nietzsche: Die Dynamik der Willen zur Macht und die ewige Wiederkehr*, Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1984, pp. 85–90. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, § 12, we can see the complexity of Nietzsche’s thinking when he sees the deep connections between metaphysics, science, and the philosophy of education.

explanations, or possibilities and conditions of observation.”²⁷ Quantum theory revealed an extremely broad contextual interconnectedness of phenomena, which “directed” the classical deterministic view of the structure of the world into just a “special case” of the description of the world. With quantum physics, perhaps the most essential feature of the relationship between *physis* and man – an intentional interdependence as a living and dynamic interactivity – came into play, and it was precisely the new situation in physics that “so impressively reminded us of that old truth – that we are both spectators and actors in the great drama of existence.”²⁸ Not to mention the fact that the new physics philosophically coped with Cartesianism as well as with the Galilean approach (e.g. Heisenberg’s complementarity). This means that *physis* itself – because it is inherently ungraspable – has disproved the fundamental scientific assumptions that still remain at the heart of philosophical critiques of science,²⁹ which are intended to show its dogmatism. (Of course, another issue is the impact of institutionalised systems, especially in the case of natural and computational sciences, through which economic and political interests are primarily promoted.)

One of the most famous modern physicists was Heisenberg, who, in his work *Physics and Philosophy*, points out that scientific idealisation is only part of human speech and that this is as a result of the interaction between us and the world. It is an artistic relationship based on the principle of indeterminacy, *playfulness*, and conceptual conditionality; therefore, “it will never be possible by pure reason to arrive at some absolute truth.”³⁰ These ideas resonate with Fink’s thinking about the play as a symbol of the world, and even in his eponymous work one can understand how deeply Fink was influenced by Nietzsche. In addition, in his archival notes from 1940 to 1944, one can find (among others) a remarkable

²⁷ Filip Grygar, *Komplementární myšlení Nielse Bohra v kontextu fyziky, filosofie a biologie* [The Complementary Thinking of Niels Bohr in the Context of Physics, Philosophy, and Biology], Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 2014, p. 274.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

²⁹ In the central European context, the usual reproaches of phenomenologists towards scientists – probably as a result of their uncritical acceptance of ideas from Heidegger, who argued that “science does not think” – are borne precisely in the simplistic spirit that their worldview is distorted by the Cartesian-Galilean prism and that they are responsible for the current crisis of values. I’m trying to suggest that this is not the case and that modern physicists have actually been going back to the Greek roots of understanding *physis*.

³⁰ Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958, pp. 81 and 92.

comment that in Nietzsche he is explicitly interested “only in his metaphysics of play” [*allein seine Metaphysik des Spiels*].³¹

Throughout his life, Niels Bohr tried to show that “quantum mechanics has given us a general or epistemological lesson that transcends the field of physics and sheds light on even more complicated, essential questions encountered in other disciplines.”³² The relativistic speech of *physis* itself, which Husserl was so dismayed by,³³ brought the requirement of a total rethinking of our relationship with the world and thus of the concept of education, which has, in fact, hitherto stood upon the ethics determined by vulgar Platonism, where morality eminently means the expression of a subjective spirit rising above unreasonable nature to its objective form of active freedom.³⁴

In his work *Mind and Matter* (1958), Schrödinger himself recalls that although in everyday life we have become accustomed to using subject-object thinking, in philosophical thinking we must abandon this habit because the world is only one (it is not existing first and then perceived).³⁵ “The barrier between them [between the subject and the object] cannot be said to have broken down as a result of recent experience in the physical sciences, for this barrier does not exist.”³⁶ Schrödinger saw no sense in the knowledge of a specialist researcher but rather saw purpose in the *synthesis* of professional perspectives “with all the usual knowledge and thinking, acting and striving, and only as long as in this synthesis it carries Plotinus’s question: Who are we?”³⁷ At the same time, he characterised the actual crisis in science quite naturally in a philosophical manner as “the need to revise its fundamental questions to the deepest layers”, fully reflecting the

³¹ Eugen Fink, Über das Wesen der Eremitie. Aphorismen aus einem Kriegstagebuch 1940-1944. In: *Nachlass Eugen Fink, sign. E015/103, Aphorism no. 73*, Universitätsarchiv der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg.

³² Grygar, *Komplementární myšlení Nielse Bohra v kontextu fyziky, filosofie a biologie* [The Complementary Thinking of Niels Bohr in the Context of Physics, Philosophy, and Biology], p. 158.

³³ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Trans. David Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970, p. 14.

³⁴ This Hegelian tendency is also present in Husserl’s reflections on the crisis of the European sciences, thus showing an incredibly solid philosophical and historical chain through which metaphysical heritage is transmitted.

³⁵ These are surprisingly consonant words with Fink’s expression. See Eugen Fink, *Existenz und Coexistenz*, p. 202.

³⁶ Erwin Schrödinger, *Mind and Matter*, London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1958, p. 51.

³⁷ Erwin Schrödinger, *Naturwissenschaft und Humanismus: die heutige Physik*, Wien: Franz Deuticke, 1951, pp. 11–14.

Greek character of our science. In addition, he saw its value, its goal, and its purpose in the Delphic saying γῶθι σεαυτὸν: “Know thyself”. It is with these examples that Husserl and his followers seem to have missed a unique opportunity to start a fruitful dialogue and cooperation with the natural sciences.

LOVE TO THE FURTHEST AND FUTURE ONES

Perhaps it was just this aggravated bias that might lead us to a breakthrough and to the original rift. If this is the case, then, from the point of view of the cosmological philosophy of education, this means that there is a challenge to overcome (*die Überwindung*) ethics as a simple set of rules, transcending the moral dereliction of obligatory forms – not in a sense of another “foundation” (since we are essentially in motion) but perhaps as a “profession” of ethics that no longer knows the buck-passing contradictions between thinking, ideals, and real living. There is no need to be ashamed of yourself anymore, Nietzsche says. No more the “I should have to” of the comfortable and well-known moralist but rather the “I want to” that springs from a blind infatuation with life itself (*amor fati*), to which we can say a Dionysian “Yes”, because, as cosmically conscious beings, we recognise that everything “bad” and “good” has its place here. Indeed, it is ultimately the creative impulses that allow us to be who we are. My non-extractability from the World, as the quantum revolution has shown, means my deep entanglement in its structure and my inalienable affinity with all living and inanimate things both near and far. Of course, this is without any excessive claim to a self-centred uniqueness and the “higher” meaning of our own existence. This consciousness transforms a person. Obviously, we are entering territory where we can no longer rely on divine authority to determine our *telos* or the meaning of our lives; however, the terrible freedom that has spread itself before us is not an instruction to any anarchism or Dostoevsky’s “cannibalism”.³⁸ While being just, would not such an understanding of the whole problem of “cosmological ethics” after the collapse of all values also be (too) human and another slave symptom? The need for a Master over myself so as not to be a “beast”? This is a misunderstanding of the essence of one’s own dignity that flows directly from our essential belonging to the World. The *cosmos* adjusts, it sounds with silence, and

³⁸ See Peter Nezník, Boris Markov, et al., *Dostojevskij a Nietzsche. Apoteóza nezakorenenosti. Za a proti [Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. An Apotheosis of Groundlessness, Pro et contra]*, Košice: FF UPJŠ v Košiciach, 2017.

the beasts become tame – this is what Orpheus caught in the strings of his lyre. Understanding the deep connection among *cosmos*, *physis*, and *poiesis* means transformation.³⁹

The challenge is tough and “non-humanistic”. The cosmological philosophy of education does not proclaim “love for one’s neighbour” but rather the Nietzschean “love for the furthest”. This is because, thanks to the automatically indoctrinated neighbourly ethics so far, we are paradoxically the most furthest away from each other – that is, without relation to our environment or to those connections that are precisely original and unifying.

In the posthumously published lectures *Zur Krisenlage des modernen Menschen* (1989), Fink acknowledges the need to acquire knowledge of the sciences, but it is impossible to do so unless we take seriously the idea that education has to be a path to self-understanding via self-actualisation. The cosmological concept of the philosophy of education makes the issue of freedom important, and cosmological education has to create “a bridge between scientific research and the modern school system, the awakening of free will and creativity; these are the three tasks that urgently face the science of education of our time.”⁴⁰

Fink’s bold statement that ethics is rooted in “physics”, i.e. in respecting the *physis* as it manifests itself, is actually a question of humanism. It is an immanent criticism of the anthropological concept and the metaphysical character of European humanism, which is based on the principle of separation from the rest of beings. With his cosmological philosophy, Fink wants to see man as an active participant who knows that he is a co-creator because he is a participant and co-player in the great “counter-play” of the moments of the World. Man emerges into openness with astonishment and insight into all that is, realising that the possibility of encountering a thing at all is not his performance but rather the manifestation of the reign of the World. A man as *ens cosmologicum* knows that he cannot be represented in his freedom to meaning creation by anything else – not even by any god nor by the seemingly de-theologised “Truth of Being”. There is no reason, no meaning in itself, in which man can see the cosmic necessity of his

³⁹ See Eugen Fink, Orphische Wandlung, in *Philosophische Perspektiven. Ein Jahrbuch*. Hrsg. Rudolf Berlinger und Eugen Fink, Bd. 4, Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1972, pp. 87 f.

⁴⁰ Eugen Fink and Franz-Anton Schwarz, *Zur Krisenlage des modernen Menschen: Erziehungswissenschaftliche Vorträge*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1989, p. 109.

own existence. The play of the universe is without a player; the universe itself is – symbolically expressed and expressible – a play that does not play an “illusion” but rather an appearance of being itself; however, “...appearance is a mask, behind which ‘no one’, behind which nothing, is – precisely as the Nothing.”⁴¹ Here, however, in this nihilistic sobering, Fink sees a *practical opportunity* to actively participate in the creation of meanings and purposes. Human being is understood here (in Nietzschean sense) as an “existing freedom” itself [*existierende Freiheit*]. The lens of every thought and action is life itself.⁴² But it is precisely against the background of the consciousness of one’s own finiteness and mortality that this leap over man can be made. Then man, understanding himself from a *cosmological perspective*, knows that his morality arises from his ontological relation to the World; he knows that ethics is rooted in “physics”.

This does mean not in any way that we will build other “fixed” and “definitive” frameworks or concepts based on the cosmological education. On the contrary, nihilism teaches us that nothing but happening itself has an eternal duration; there are no absolute truths, and we need a special feeling of distrust when they are presented. We will never be able to get rid of the restlessness arising from the sight of the night sky – as mortals we always live in distress (the question of being), but we transform it into “an explicit schedule of the world [*Weltentwurf*] of humanity, which can take place as poetry, as thought, as religion, as science and technology, and also as what has already taken place with varying emphasis throughout our history.”⁴³ The question of being, according to Fink, does not disappear. It is the condition of man that resembles Sisyphus; our schedules of the world stand, so to speak, on water or in the flow of time. This metaphor is the most fateful⁴⁴ because it resonates with the question of motion and thus with the very nature of *physis*.

⁴¹ Eugen Fink, *Play as Symbol of the World and Other Writings*, trans. Ian A. Moore and Christopher Turner, Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016, p. 215.

⁴² This does not mean a kind of biocentrism. On the contrary, this motive only has to “stimulate” the relationship with the World through the consciousness of one’s own definitive mortality. The meaning of our life depends only on us, since there is no cosmic necessity for (our) human existence at all. “There were eternities during which it did not exist. And when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened...” (For more, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Falsity in Their Ultra-moral Sense* (1873), *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. II, ed. Oscar Levy, New York: Russell & Russell, 1964.)

⁴³ Fink, *Existenz und Coexistenz*, p. 96.

⁴⁴ Eugen Fink, *Sein, Wahrheit, Welt*, Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1958, p. 137.

CONCLUSION

The cosmological perspective makes it possible to see the traditional understanding of man in a surprisingly more credible colouring. Although he usually declares himself *zoon logon echon*, he cannot communicate meaningfully with others; or is he *zoon politikon*, although he is not particularly interested in politics, and then ultimately *homo sapiens sapiens*? As much as man emphasises his superiority over other animals and things, how much foolishness has this “divine reason” invoked? Despite declaration of soaring, compassionate, and peaceful ideals, he murders his fellow humans, tortures animals, loots, and poisons the planet. “Humanity as a geological-climatic entity is now facing the growing instability and unpredictability of the geological-climatic era of the Anthropocene, in which climate change and the sixth mass extinction of plant and animal species in the history of life on our planet are only the most visible manifestations of a collapsing ecosphere.”⁴⁵ Instead of changing the relationship to our only home, humanity is looking for possible escape routes in the near extra-terrestrial environment; however, the joy of astronomy and physics, as Nietzsche already sensed, lies precisely in their ability to see everything on one ontological level and in the ability – to offend a person, if today someone is even able to respond to such a delicate touch. The reproach that these sciences cannot answer the question of the meaning of our lives is completely aberrant, since it is not within their competence. Scientists themselves humanly recognise this.

We have become accustomed to living in given truths, foreign interpretations of meaning, and, suddenly, we live in a neurotic vacuum and in a state of permanent insecurity, threatened at the level of our most basic livelihood. From day to day, this one-dimensional economic “world” is able to formally deprive us of dignity by eviscerating our capacity for public existence as that is economically and publicly mediated. But all of us are guilty because, in our silence, we only legitimate this system. We live like donkeys harnessed to hauling the System along, and we are not able to perceive the World as an independent and eternal force. The economy needs us only as long as we are a usable human resource and a payer of taxes and levies. No mutual relations can be built in this way. We have

⁴⁵ Richard Šťáhel, Aktuálnosť Dostojevským sformulovaného problému človeka a sveta [The Currency of the Problem of Man and the World Formulated by Dostoevsky]. In: Peter Neznik, Boris Markov et al., *Dostojevskij a Nietzsche. Hľadania človeka. Za a proti...* [Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: Searching for Man – Pro et contra], Košice: UPJŠ v Košiciach, 2016, p. 291.

become accustomed and have the idea that this is the only possible and “God-given” social order. From the perspective of the *cosmos*, one has only to think of how silly panic appears in capitalist society when markets fall. This is because this perspective is the only real one. It is therefore time to start a serious discussion about changing the very philosophy of education.

eva.dedeckova@savba.sk

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