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## **Nature as “Art’s Other”: Plato and the teleological view on nature**

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The ongoing discussions under the label “anthropocene” is not a recent historical event, for the first attempts to classify the current epoch as “anthropic” could be dated as early as the 19th century (cf. the concept “l’era antropozoica” in: Stoppani, 1873, p. 463). However, due to the common usage of the word “nature” in these discussions, it might be overlooked that both the word and the image of natural was itself once “naturalized”.

In Book 10 of his *Laws*, Plato argues that natural philosophy is one of the sources of the moral decay of his time (see Naddaf, 2006, p. 1, pp. 32–33). He accuses not only his contemporaries, but the whole tradition of ‘peri phýseōs’ scholars of developing a nature-art (Physis–Techne) dichotomy, in which the “material”, “mechanical” and “random” Physis (nature) is considered more “primary” than purposeful art (*Laws* 10.889c).

Plato questions the legitimacy of the term “nature” (Physis) and claims that “Techne” is both logically and chronologically prior to Physis (*Laws* 10.892b). This claim resembles the traditional view on the order of time or Ananke (fate). The central aspect of the ritual “art” of farmers was the “termination” of each part of the work with a name of a deity, that represents the “model” for each particular piece (cf. Usener, 2000, p. 76). This termination is a constitutive part of the teleological time order, that E. Cassirer calls “time as fate” (2010, p. 156).

Similar teleology is present in the Ionian natural philosophy, which Plato holds for “atheistic” and “materialistic”. The principle of guilt resp. necessity (to chreōn) (Anaximander, Heraclitus) and “uncorrupted” (aphthartos) Whole or “apeiron” (Anaximander, Anaximenes, Anaxagoras) is interpreted there as a lawful force that distributes the Moirai or things (ta khreēmata) according to the order of time. This view leads to the dualism between the godly Nous or rational soul and the body, governed by it.

Plato’s thinking stands in line with the natural philosophy that he tries to criticize. The original element of his thought is the creationist cosmogony and the strict division of material and mental things. Plato accomplishes that, which was arguably aimed by the most of the “physiologoi”, namely the conception of a non-sensuous, divine principle, which governs and “deals out” the sensual things of the material world.

Plato tries to put nature “in its place” as a material stuff in the possession of the Divine Reason (Laws 10. 897b). Thus, he *others* nature and the body, creating a hierarchical, anthropocentric worldview, which is based on the divine teleological cosmology. Aristotle, although not a supporter of a strong mind/matter dualism (cf. Aristotle’s hylomorphism), still thinks of nature in a strictly teleological way, which makes his system subject to anthropocentrism (see Sedley, 1991).

One of the rare ancient philosophical schools that questions the teleological approach is Epicureans. It’s Lucretius’ and Epicurus’ view on the non-utilitarian nature of the body (cf. De rerum natura, 4, 833) and the priority of the sensual (cf. D. L. 10.1.63) which singles them out from the majority of the tradition and makes the case for returning the nature its due place and agency in the world order, in which humans and the divine play no exclusive part. Instead of *othering* nature and conceiving it as belonging to a “primitive” material sphere, Epicureans question the very concept of the “incorporeal” (asōmatos), which allegedly connects humans with the “divine”. Such questioning, which targets both cosmological and ontological aspect of the human-nature relationship, can provide a still lacking philosophical foundation for the discourse on anthropocene.

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## Thinking about how we think about the Other

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In my essay, I wanted to experiment with tools of the analytic tradition while consulting and responding to a continental question: How do we think about 'the Other'?

The first tool is from philosopher of mind Peter Geach (1962), asking the memorable question: how do we think about thinking? Geach is interested in the relation of language to reality. In trying to understand how we think, we can understand how language responds to the mind – which gives us a fundamental insight in our relationship with the Other. I will adopt this approach of thinking about thinking about something in order to single out what this can tell about the relationship at hand.

After having explained the first part of the question “how do we think about thinking about the Other”, let us turn to the Other: this matters because the Other is the counterpart relation where the level of the social exists. Language is a large part of the connection between these nodes of the social. Therefore, thinking about how we think about the other can help us understand language, and in turn how the other is constituted. This is an amalgam of continental and analytic traditions.