

TENTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GREEK PHILOSOPHY:  
*Philosophy and Ecology: Greek Philosophy and the Environment*; Samos –  
 Fourni, 23–28 August 1998.

In the organization of The International Association for Greek Philosophy (IAGP) was held The Tenth International Conference on Greek Philosophy in the Aegean islands of Samos and Fourni (23–28 August 1998) on the topic of "Philosophy and Ecology: Greek Philosophy and the Environment". It was pointed out that the aims of the Conference would be to survey the sources in Greek thought that would yield a picture of how the Ancient Greeks viewed nature and the environment and the relationship of man to these and to the cosmos, then, to ascertain whether there exist principles and unifying perspectives in Greek thought which would aid us in our quest to bring modern man into harmony with nature and, to subject modern environmental theories to a critical philosophical examination from the standpoint of Greek thought. In the Conference took a part philosophers, specialists in Greek philosophy and environmental professionals from many countries in the world.

Professor K. Boudouris (University of Athens), the President of IAGP and President of the Organising Committee, opened the first Evening session with the ascertain that the ever sharpening ecological crisis of our times has deep roots and that environmental problems have already arisen in Ancient Greece. According to Greek traditional view, the ecological crisis has its origins in the unquenchable thirst of man for continuous satisfaction of his needs, from a desire for unjust or inordinate "gain", what the ancients called τὸ πλεονεκτεῖν or πλεονεξία which, when elevated to a primary and governing value, is a sign common to all deviant political constitutions. The Greeks offer a way out of this vortex of mindless consumerism by what they call "life according to virtue". Of course, this solution of the problem is in the field of ethics, but the deeper causes of the ecological crisis are complex; they are of a moral, political and metaphysical texture. The papers submitted on the Conference confirmed the attitude mentioned above.

Evangelia Maragianou from University of Athens ("The ecological content of early Greek myths") showed that environmental problems, which are object of discussion during recent years, were not unknown in Ancient Greece. There are a number of myths that convey the examples of natural disasters which were ascribed not only to natural causes, but also to the rash behaviour of man towards nature. As the most important of them are: the myth of Erysichthon, the myth of Phaethon and the myth of Actaion, the son of Apollo.

H. Yamakawa from St. Andrew's University in Osaka, turned to the Presocratic philosophers (the title of the paper submitted on the Conference, "The environment as the place of life. Presocratics' viewpoints", is not identical to the title of the Summary). He maintains that the Greek concept of the κόσμος included in itself three cardinal concepts: *Order, Harmony and Justice*, which may be regarded as the key-concepts of the ecological philosophy. Greeks located the concept of justice as a principle of *symbiosis* on an intersectional point between 'nature' and 'life'. In his analysis of Anaximander, Heraclitus and Parmenides he explains that Presocratic philosophers did not separate the human being and the natural world.

On the contrary, S. Arntzen from Telemark College, Norway ("Is presocratic philosophy of nature a source of man-nature dualism?"), believes that the earliest Presocratic philosophy can be regarded as one source of the dualistic

view of man and nature that has become prevalent in the Western thought. This is the view that a specifically human realm, namely, that of reason or intellect, is separate and essentially distinct from a non-human, natural realm.

V. Mitevski from University of Skopje, Macedonia ("Discovery of harmony in the nature in early Greek philosophy"), investigates the different appearances of the idea of balance in the nature as presented in Anaximander (religious-ethical definition of the equilibrium as a keeping justice), Pythagoreanism (aesthetical concept of the balance conceived as a symmetry) and, Heraclitus (harmony as an naturalisation of the idea of balance in the world). The notion of measure is essential connection between them.

The *Timaeus* of Plato is analysed in the next two papers. According to J. Pietarinen from University of Turku, Finland, ("Plato and biodiversity") Plato's view is very interesting from the point of current arguments for biodiversity. In the *Timaeus* he states that our world consists of all possible living things and it forms a self-sufficient whole like a perfect ecosystem supplying its own waste for its food. The requirement of protecting the diversity of the biosphere is based on the idea that the world is somehow the better the more species it contains.

T. M. Robinson from University of Toronto ("The cosmic environment: some implications of the *Timaeus*") discusses the Gaia hypothesis which first appears in Platon in terms of the entire cosmos: 1. We, as living creatures, are an integral part of a cosmos that is itself alive. 2. As rational creatures, we possess rational souls that are made of the same stuff as the soul of the cosmos. 3. The world around us is good, and is indeed the best world that Demiurge could possibly have made. 4. The universe is a never-ceasing source of instruction on everything important, including the basic features of the good and rational life.

It was said (C. Athanasopoulos from University of Athens) that the teleological-anthropological view of nature, as it is developed in modern times has origin in the philosophy of Aristotle. Its main attitudes are: nature is object for the use and exploitation; nature and the beings which are freely developed in it have no rights or have rights of a lesser value and importance than those of man; nature has the purpose of servitude to man's purposes and uses. Examples for the above: forest exploitation, cold blood killing and torture of animals and other living organisms for dress, medicine and fun of man...

But, Lee Keekok from University of Manchester ("Aristotle: towards an environmental philosophy") showed that there is possibility of developing a non-anthropocentric environmental philosophy which may be said to be quasi-Aristotelian. Aristotle's anthropocentrism is passive compared with the modern variant and, therefore, does not have the policy implications in terms of environmental disruption which contemporary anthropocentrism has, aided and abetted by a very powerful modern science and technology.

Laura Westra from University of Windsor, Canada ("The significance of 'causation' and 'limit' in Aristotle and the new Earth Charter"), explained that Aristotle's causality has an important role which is supported and validated by scientific observation. For instance, mutualism and autocatalysis in living systems can be seen as the "most common manifestation of formal agency". Also, the modern attitude that "no system can grow and develop without limit" is also Aristotelian. His notion of "natural limit" has scientific and moral aspect and they are inextricably connected. It is because of limits and the functioning of natural systems that humankind today must recognize and accept the need for limits to their activities and choices, in order to protect all life.

V. Pratt from University of Lancaster readed the paper written with J. O'Neill ("Aristotelian ethics and post-Aristotelian biology. On recent objections to an Aristotelian environmental ethics") and outlined how Aristotelian essentialism about species might respond to the modern genetic theory.

D. N. Blakeley from California State University ("Neoplatonic cosmology as a kind of deep ecology: Plotinus and the environment") in his reading of the Plotinus' *Enneades* gauges the extent to which the worldview of this philosopher can serve as a resource for environmental thinking today. Blakeley stresses the characteristic features of the cosmos-nature-environment for Plotinus: the cosmos, as a whole, is a living, interactive organism or being, in unity with itself; as a living community, the material cosmos is sustained by the formative powers of Soul (life), Intellect (Ideas), and the One (source of all); cosmos is organized according to principles that express the general values of goodness, beauty, and justice to all things, states, processes... So, the environment, for Plotinus, should be understood holistically and it leads to the principle of ecospherical egalitarianism, i.e., that all things equally have value in the affairs of nature and are required for the ongoing flourishing of the ecosystem as a whole.

Philippe Crabbé from University of Ottawa ("Biblical and ancient Greek thought about natural resources and the environment and the latter's continuity in the economic literature up to the Physiocrates") considers that except for the Fall and consequent Redemption, the Bible and Classical Greek thought hold surprisingly similar positions about the environment. The Bible offers a theocratic view; after the Fall, the harmony was broken in the world; it is now unfinished and mankind must harmonize it with the divine order. According to Xenophon and Aristotle, mankind can improve its relationship with the physical environment to render them more harmonious. This improvement results more from husbanding than from entrepreneurship because nature only create wealth. This latter idea at the core of the primacy of agriculture as an economic activity in both Roman and Physiocratic thinking can be retraced directly to Xenophon's "Way and means" which was appended to contributions by British Cameralists in the seventeenth century.

This review of the papers submitted on the Conference is restricted one and, of course, subjective. But, it was evident that the organizer was led by the idea to achieve a serious, versatile and profound access to the ecology seen from the standpoint of ancient Greek philosophy. Without doubt, this aim was achieved thanks also to many other eminent specialists who took a part on the Conference: J. Anton, E. Bourodimos, Lisa Wilkinson, G. Boger, J. Duncan, K. Junker, A. McMichael, J. Marshal, J. Gericke, T. Kuwako, J. Poulakos, Joan Leach, J. Reedy, J. Waugh...

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