

Toward a New Enlightenment: Metaphysics as Philosophy of Life

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Abstract In Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka’s various studies, one finds a specific focus to her work: she brings to light a new concept of the transcendental, understood no longer as an abstract concept of traditional phenomenology, but as a characteristic of living in which the human being actively participates through its “intellectual spirit” that we call the Transcendental of humanity. In our opinion, based on the creative activity of this spirit, it becomes possible to restore to philosophy a new vitality; it need no longer be seen as abstract or ideological, but as human, social. Philosophy becomes the human ground for a metaphysics of life, for a way of thinking that deals with the “great and ultimate” questions, to borrow from Husserl’s turn of phrase (Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge* in *Husserliana I*, ed. B. Strasser [Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950], p. 299). One can examine these questions in a straightforward human fashion, from the vantage point of the human being in her concrete and particular reality, who lives in the world. In its critical capacity, the “intellectual spirit” becomes the precondition for the constitution of a metaphysics that no longer has the abstract character of a science of being, understood as the intangible; rather, it configures itself as a personal, concrete human understanding of the universe with a particular focus on meaning for everyday life.

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“The Human Being and Its “Livingness”

Life and the Human

If philosophy has some vested interest in saying something that may be useful for humanity, for its very living, for its existential problems, it has a duty to seek to comprehend that humanity is living, rather than reflecting on itself or its variegated subfields that signify in “empty formal structures.”¹ Philosophy must necessarily abandon its odious intellectualising activity, the very “calculative thinking” that Heidegger² spoke about. It must cease to operate in a logically calculating or critical fashion—a philosophy that works on valid, formal concepts that are, in the end, useless for living.

Philosophy must return to its fundamental task: to illumine conscience as to its own values, literally in the sense demanded by Enlightenment thought, which reflects the very thought of Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. In other words, philosophy has the task of re-appropriating the role, drawing from psychology and the other sciences (i.e., anthropology, psychoanalysis, etc.) of being the “indicator of the sense or meaning” of living or, as Aristotle said, to teach one to reach that which is generally called wisdom.

Even the question of being, viewed from the perspective of the ontological difference, with which Heidegger thought he had definitively resolved the ontological problem, thereby defeating classical, abstract and dogmatic metaphysics, must remain primary and must serve as the principal existential argument of metaphysics. Here, we have to ask: What kind of metaphysics? Certainly not the kind that Heidegger wanted to overthrow for it is completely empty and useless when it comes to the question of the ground and of existence.

The problem of a new ground for metaphysics has been much discussed and does not simply concern the forgetting of being, which, in its unpredictable “happening”, configures itself again as an abstraction. The problem, rather, concerns the forgetting of the telos and sense of “being there”. In our opinion, humanity did not forget being, as Heidegger says, but what is forgotten is its true significance, the sense of every single living being in the world that surrounds being. The problem of being, therefore, remains a metaphysical problem, but not as one stemming from an ancient or dogmatic metaphysics that turns emptily upon concepts, nor as a metaphysics

¹Edmund Husserl, *Der Encyclopaedia Britannica Artikel. Erster Entwurf in Phänomenologische Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1925*, in *Husserliana IX*, hrsg. V. W. Biemel, (Den Haag: M. Nijhoff, 1962), 253. It is for this reason, in our opinion, that the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, which already laments this problem in the early 1900s, is the science that “rejects every metaphysics that moves from empty formal structures. Like all authentic philosophical problems, all metaphysical problems refer back to the phenomenological terrain and find there their form and authentic, transcendental method, forged by intuition.” *Ibid.*

²One sees the relation between calculative thinking and technique in the collection of essays and talks as found in Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1957).

that has no bearing on practical life. Here, rather, we are speaking about a new metaphysics that *directly talks to and about life*. If we wish to avoid falling into that inauthentic metaphysics that Heidegger denounced, we must turn to speak about neither being nor its sense, understood in an abstract sense, but of the concreteness of life.

In this regard, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka gives us the possibility that in the human being there exists a creative power, an onto-poetic logos that is at the basis for our comprehension of the universe. Here, we must begin in order to be able to conceive a possible renewal of philosophy as well as a “new Enlightenment” of human reason in relation to its being in the world.³

Anguish and Dehumanisation

The problem of dehumanisation, understood as the forgetting of the person and not being, is, in our age, the general character of our existence. “One” lives, we live carrying out the most varied activities while abandoning the interior dialogue and the significance of the non-repeatable individuality that is our own. One does not follow one’s own telos, that which the singular and absolutely unique personality displays from “within” each of us; rather, we follow that which attracts us “from the outside”, which does not call into question our true and deep individuality. In our view, this is the process of dehumanisation that lies at the base of anguish or dis-ease, both of which characterise our generation.

The question of anguish is hardly a problem abstracted from or foreign to everyday life, which must only be considered by psychologists or philosophers as something that signals the limit of “non-normality.” On the contrary, here we are dealing with a *wholly real* problem that involves humanity at its very *constitutive level*. It actually emerges with great force in its characterisation as a malady that must be cured or resolved, as something that impedes the person from effectively living in the actual present, according to “externally” imposed rhythms. And, so, daily anguish, imposed more by external time than by internal solicitations, becomes a pathology.

It should be remarked that, in the past, anguish also characterised humans, but it was “lived” in a natural fashion, as a normal fact of life, as something that signalled the growth of a person. The person would follow her own inclinations (from within); one encountered others and the situations of life. Today, this natural process does not seem to proceed in the same, spontaneous manner; rather, anguish is largely characterised as a malady that needs to be cured in the quickest way possible.

³Tymieniecka’s investigations of this theme are well known throughout the world. For a comprehensive understanding of her thematic inquiry please see the study of J.S. Smith, “The Cosmo-Tymieniecka’s New Enlightenment”, in *Phenomenological Inquiry*, vol. 35 (October 2011), pp. 17–24.

What has changed from not so long ago? First, as humans have resolved key problems concerning bare survival, and certainly this is the case in wealthier countries (where, in fact, anguish is recognised as a pathology⁴), anguish has been displaced from the natural level to an unnatural one. We no longer have to worry about the necessities of life insofar as these are already given. Now, we face the problem of superabundance. In fact, that which is no longer a necessity for life has become one, much like a neurosis, namely, to be “in synch” with others. Anguish refers to that which is lacking but which is not *effectively* necessary. Momentarily, turning away from the psychological and social implications, it is interesting to see how this lack of the non-necessary leads us to a non-natural anguish and pathology by which a human being loses meaning. Anguish becomes the substrate of the human being because each thing is lived as frustrating, given that the natural plane of attribution of meaning has been displaced onto things. Since one gives value to that which is not necessary (insofar as that is already given is in need of no other searching), the attribution of value is conferred on to that which is not necessary. And this is wholly unnatural, contrary to human nature. The relation to things and with others is consequently lived in a negative way (unnaturally) with much anguish because one expects from life a gift that is nothing natural, but artificial. Artificiality, then, becomes the focus of an anguish-ridden living. One seeks pleasure, objects, realities, situations that are not necessary for positive living (read natural) and one forgets singular, unique human destiny, one forgets one’s own belonging to being animated by a naturalness that seeks integrated parts from nature.

Another cause of pathological anguish and, therefore, dehumanisation, is connected to the forgetting of one’s own “interior voice” in favour of listening to the various solicitations that come from the outside. This attitude contains a displacement of personal equilibrium that renders almost impossible the achievement of a syntony between the self and the consciousness that flows from one’s own personality and one’s own will. Anguish, the actual state that once was considered a momentary dis-ease that characterised processes of settlement in the surrounding world and the growth of personality, has become an important and insistent dis-ease that is difficult to manage. This is the case because its root is not within, but is, instead, lodged in a wanting to adapt to external claims, ultimately neglecting following the telos indicated by one’s own personality. This attitude leads to that which we define as the process of dehumanisation.

Natural “Livingness” and Unnatural Madness

Life has become an unnatural race toward that which does not count and we have completely lost the message that comes from our human tradition of living

⁴In many “Third World” countries, that which is understood by us as a psychotic subject is, on the contrary, honoured as belonging to the province of the shaman.

naturally according to our own telos that guides us from within or, in other words, our common sense. Pathological anguish, then, characterises our existence. How do we get back to “normal”, if at all possible, or to natural living?

Living abnormally, following that which calls us from the outside, has become normal, whereas normal life, natural life, seems to have become abnormal. The person who lives in an anguished state, following outside rhythms and full of stress, is recognised as a true living being, as one who intensely lives her life and who knows how to live actively, whereas the individual person, who lives free from stress in a natural fashion, is recognised as a fish out of water, one who does not know how to live and who has “slowed down”, who is abnormal. The dialectic of abnormality and normality has turned upside down to such an extent that there has been an inversion of the meaning of related emotional states.

Treatment for our psychic dis-ease (anxiety, anguish, depression, etc.), things that everyone defines as normal today, are already integrated parts of our living. No one really worries very much if one sees in oneself the symptoms of a nervous disorder. Psychologists have taught us, in fact, that it is normal that we suffer from one of these disorders in today’s world. Psychotherapy teaches us that such nervous disorders are a reaction to the stress of our daily collective lives. And even if we accept this normality, it still does not give us any possibility of positing any remedy to an illness that does not have pathological roots, for the malady is only an effect, although cultural and, above all, socio-economic. One could even say that this “problem”, the “dis-ease of our civilisation”, is not only due to our present-day culture and to the values of our contemporary society but also to human nature, which have all led us to a certain level of development through adapting to the environment, reacting to behaviours that with respect to the past can be considered pathological.

Theories may continue to develop and give rise to further interpretations of the problem, but the situation does not change. In fact, what remains inexplicable is the level of suffering that humanity imposes on itself in order to live in a world that it itself built bit by bit. Given that we are living unnaturally in our world, we no longer ask questions except those that seem to satisfy the exigencies of the moment. Long-term, however, this does not help us, nor does it help when we “normalise” an abnormality, the anomaly of everyday living.

If a mad gene surreptitiously overtook the world,⁵ transforming the cosmos into pure chaos such that if an extraterrestrial were able to observe it from on high, one could suppose that we constantly live under the influence of a self-destructive drive. And such a “transvaluation” of values, including suicide, which is usually held to be a negative value because it is a negation of life, changes and becomes a positive self-determination of a will of life that imposes itself and wishes the negation of an unnatural life contrary to natural living.

⁵This is a theory postulated by recent scholars of memetics. They draw from the work of Richard Dawkins as elaborated in his 1976 work *The Selfish Gene*.

But does it make sense to want to live in an “abnormal” manner in order to be able to feel oneself normal? If we were to become aware of this reversal of sense, how is it possible to stop this perverse logic and overcome the anguish-filled encounter with the “must live” outside of our human nature?

The Proposal of a New Enlightenment

Metaphysics as the Philosophy of Life

It is incumbent upon philosophy to respond to these demands. To construct a metaphysical response is to build a new metaphysics, a science that is capable of offering a conceptualisation of the concrete objects of living: *metaphysics as the philosophy of life*.

What use is philosophy if not to help the human being live? It is inconceivable to think philosophy otherwise. It does not make sense to think that philosophy can be other than learning how to think in order to live well. But what is life? In what does this existence that accompanies each living being consist?

Life is the whole of the conditions by which an individual is active. Its components, including reason, will, instinct, culture and sensibility are in “movement” or “functioning”. Every human being acts in relation to her rationality, will, instinct and principal needs. Sensation and internal force push the human being according to seemingly non-manifested movements subjected to the human being’s very existence. There are also hidden components that act from within.

Life, therefore, is the satisfaction of these demands. But if we reflect on living itself or if we complete a metaphysics of life, we will see or, better still, *feel from within* that life is also something other. Life is not only the satisfaction of our needs or what is demanded of us but also a continuous journey that lets us see all of the active operators or unconscious supports of life. We “feel from within”, one used to say. But what is feeling? How can we arrive at such a situation of abstraction such that we are able to understand the meaning of our personal life? Is this feeling a feeling that characterises everyone or can only a few access it?

Feeling, understood as that sensation of one’s own interiority, occurs only when one is conscious that one is no longer conscious of feeling, when that which lies before the anguish of living “decides” to let being be. Feeling, then, means to record a weakness on the part of the human being and to understand that there is a part of us that is not containable by reason. It is only in this way that we can see that this part can come under the gaze of reason. Are we, then, giving a space to the irrational, the unconscious, to that which the psychiatrists call hallucinatory fantasy?

The flow of life is signalled by an infinity of moments that do not only not follow one another in a chronological fashion but that also do not even have the rigour of an internal dialectical logic. A drive or a sensation can discharge absolutely unforeseen voluntary actions, given determined conditions. But all of this is not

exempt from “internal” being, that is, rationality. There is reason even in the most unreal fantasies. But this is not exclusively the case. Rationality has its own support and its own source from that which is most properly irrational in the individual: emotional feeling.

This field, this absolute domain of drive and emotion, has a structure that is always in formation but which also has a basic structure. There is a certain form that contains all the sectors of emotion and which moves to fill them, much like any liquid in a container. Sensation is, we said, the forceful feeling of the presence of a similar territory in oneself and in others. It means empathy, understood as the force that from within us calls us to recognise the other and, as Edith Stein says, through the other we recognise ourselves.⁶

The Transcendental as the Critical and Poietic Tool of the Human Being

The personal telos of life is recognisable only by a philosophy that is constituted as a science that is attentive to a singular interiority, but that is not confused for the investigations of contemporary psychology. This philosophy, founded on a new metaphysics or on this system focussed on the sphere of interior sensibility, must have its a prioris and, in our opinion, these are based on the recognition of an intuitive force, the “intellectual spirit”; these a prioris penetrate the human structure or, even better, offer tools to everyone to reach one’s own I and to listen to one’s own interiority such as to render the self syntonic with the world.

On the basis of phenomenological science, which is, in our opinion, most capable of giving us tools for the constitution of a similar metaphysics, we call this “intellectual spirit” the transcendental of humanity. In light of this constitutive structure of each single individual, which everyone must learn to make function in order to understand each single part in itself, it becomes possible to think of “re-humanisation” and, therefore, of a new re-appropriation on the part of every single personality of one’s own life and one’s own telos.

To constitute a metaphysics as a science that makes this telos its own object or to think of a philosophical reflection that is completely turned toward life and its meaning offers us the possibility of rethinking the human and to rethink her existence as a true return to authentic existence—to an existence that does not speak of being as a stranger that encounters us and that “happens” (*Ereignis*), but as the being to which we are and in which we participate insofar as we are single personalities endowed with our own interiority and, above all, our own telos that gives form to life. Following our own telos and listening to the voice that calls us from within to become conscious of that which we are and to which we want and must reach, this means contributing to the re-humanisation of the human and the reconstitution

⁶Edith Stein, *Zum Problem der Einfühlung* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1927).

of meaning and the natural rhythm that the human being herself is called to make evident and discipline through her reason.⁷ In this regard, following the reflections of Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, we can speak of a new Enlightenment, understood as a new light, a great gust of wind of coherence that brings the human being to self-understanding within the horizon of meaning in which the human being participates and for which this human being is constitutively responsible.

⁷Tymieniecka speaks of a “critique of reason” and explains its characteristics and the forms it must have. See her *The Passions of the Skies* in *Analecta Husserliana*, vol. CVII (Dordrecht: Springer), p. xii.