NEW "INSPIRATIONS" IN PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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> The spirit, literally, is the breath; but figuratively, it is the temperament or disposition of man and all other breathing animals.
> (Abner Kneeland)[1]

Introduction

In this paper, we will discuss the human nature problem through an ecological, eco-critical, and non-reductionist (or integral) perspective. We call this perspective "inspiratory," echoing the interpretive framework proposed by Lenart Škof in his recent writings on the "ontology of breathing." This may appear prima facie to be an attempt to rehabilitate a philosophical standpoint in anthropology, which is not an entirely incorrect impression. Nevertheless, the general intent of this contribution is to fill a significant gap in contemporary ecological debate.

In the last few decades, especially within human ecology, the concept of human nature has often been limited to an ecologically and chronologically restricted set of properties.[2] However, looking at the network of interrelations that has emerged between human ecology and public debate in recent times, such an approach appears to be inadequate. The

[1] Aber Kneeland, preface to *A philosophical dictionary; from the French with additional notes, both critical and argumentative*, by Voltaire, trans. and ed. Aber Kneeland (Boston: J. P. Mendum, 1836), lii.

[2] For an introduction, see Maria Kronfeldner, *What's Left of Human Nature? A Post-Essentialist, Pluralist, and Interactive Account of a Contested Concept* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018).

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current climate crisis has indeed driven human and political ecology to extensively interpret reality, burdening it with considerable responsibility. In response, methodologies that combine prescriptive, descriptive, and predictive traits have been progressively developed within these disciplines, seldom embracing the broader framework of "ecological wisdom." This "wisdom" can be described as a set of theories urging decision-makers to pursue prudent actions within contextual ecological practices and urging researchers to restructure their own architectures, employing – at least theoretically – non-technocratic, indigenous, theological, and philosophical resources.[3] In light of the above, we assume here that a philosophical definition of human nature may be a *desideratum* of "ecological wisdom."

The immediate correlate of this definition is a new anthropological model, which is quite distant from the past theoretical attempts to define human nature in terms of "depth" (psychoanalytic) and "surface" (psychological, physical, sociobiological).[4] This model is rooted in both a strong commitment to the explanatory capacity of philosophy, the historical-critical and eco-critical examination of sources, and an archaeological excavation within 19th-century continental anthropological debate.

Within this grounding operation, we also drew the following distinctions: for *human nature*, we designed a set of human characteristics that are perceived as persisting core aspects of our existence; for the adjective *ecological*, we added that this set of characteristics should present the relationship between human beings and the environment, and, in a more speculative distinction, we implied that these characteristics should represent what immediately binds human nature to Nature itself. Furthermore, for *eco-critical*, we associated the theoretical findings of this anthropology with the practical aims of "ecological wisdom," and for *non-reductionist* or *integral*, we compel our anthropology to avoid the double *cul-de-sac* of anthropocentrism or biocentrism. Lastly, for *inspiratory*, we provided a comprehensive meaning to the aforemen-

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[3] See for ex. Rose Roberts and Lewis Williams, eds., *Radical Human Ecology: Intercultural and Indigenous Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[4] I take this distinction from Gordon Wheeler, *Gestalt Reconsidered: A New Approach to Contact and Resistance* (Cambridge: GIC Press, 1991), 203.

tioned adjectives, associating our interpretive framework with the "ontology of breathing" of Lenart Škof.

From the Ontology of Breathing…

As we have mentioned, our primary theoretical source is Lenart Škof's "ontology of breathing," which is grounded in the idea that everything that exists should be primarily considered as a "breathing body." The act of breathing thus becomes a proper philosophical object and the spontaneous and shared process of oxygen assimilation reveals itself as the shrine of a new ethics. We already take part in a "breathing atmosphere," but we are not consciously inhabiting it; we need to conceive and experience the act of breathing as an "autonomous, active and conscious breathing gesture."[5]

To enact this "living spiritual becoming," respiratory ontology has critically reviewed the Western philosophical and cultural tradition, addressing some key issues and locating philosophical antecedents. For example, in the somatological features of Feuerbach's anthropology, Škof found the cornerstone of "a new field" of research, which can be situated at the turn of philosophy and anthropology. On this very field, he built the "ethical anatomy of the body,"[6] which can be defined as a pragmatic cross-perspective that unifies the physiological and philosophical aspects of breathing, while serving as grounding for philosophy. Its stance is literally groundbreaking, inasmuch as it grafts the dimension of Nature (with a capital N) into the "otherwise merely solipsistic world of the Self."[7]

Without implying anything metaphysical, Škof built its new ethics mirroring the spontaneous act of breathing, thus reaching the domain of intersubjectivity as "breathing atmosphere." Such an approach seeks to avoid two fallacies, identified by Luce Irigaray within the history of Western thought. On the one hand, the fact that every single theory

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[5] Lenart Škof and Emily A. Holmes, eds., *Breathing with Luce Irigaray* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 217.

[6] Lenart Škof, *Breath of Proximity: Intersubjectivity, Ethics and Peace* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 1.

[7] See Škof, *Breath of Proximity*, 79ff.

on the subject has (always) been created and appropriated by a male subject, and, on the other, that ethics had been persistently avoiding the body as a "system of gestures."[8]

Within his theory of intersubjectivity, Škof has also addressed human nature. He observed that we always encounter a conflictual element in the history of humankind, which seems to portray the human desire for (violent and egoistical) affirmation. The breathing body, as a place of spiritual becoming, represents an answer to such evidence, inasmuch as it aims to be a place of pacification both within the human being and in the relationship between human and non-human beings. This is the primary meaning of the "ethical anatomy" proposed by Škof: to conceive of our body as an "inter-corporeality" that is able to bear "the old understanding of the world as the interconnectedness and interdependence of elements (air or breath, water, fire, and earth) within the entire cosmology of microcosm and macrocosm."[9]

Thus, the body is seen as a "part of space that breeds ethical gestures" coexisting with the natural and the spiritual environment, called the *mesocosm*. The concept of the *mesocosm* can indeed be considered one of Škof's key concepts: it connects the microcosmic dimension of the body and the self with the macrocosmic dimension of the "adjacent world" where nature and the "space of otherness" subsist, enlightening that region of space – the one we placed earlier between philosophy and anthropology – opened up by the ethical-anatomical perspective. The mesocosm shows itself as a medium for mild gestures ("compassion, tender-heartedness, care, attention") gaining the potential to connect intersubjective levels of our existence.

Our aim here is indeed to draw some anthropological variations from this mesocosmic vision, addressing the enigma of human nature. As we mentioned, the "inspiratory" variation that we are about to present will prevent us from falling into the double *cul-de-sac* of anthropocentrism or biocentrism, but it will also provide the mesocosmic structure with an anthropological antecedent that already seems to murmur within our being.

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8 Škof, *Breath of Proximity*, 5.
9 Škof, *Breath of Proximity*, 4.

...To the "Inspiratory" Standpoint

The starting point of our "inspiratory" framework is provisionally settled within the notion of individual temperament. Being substantially innate and layered, temperament appears to be a natural candidate for an ecological and philosophical standpoint. However, this human feature immediately presents itself as a complex object, insofar as it is not a "thing." Such complexity has often been a thought-provoking factor, but scholars have always proceeded in spite of this. For example, in a now-classic paper from the late 20th century, American psychologist Robert B. McCall stated that the lack of a shared definition of temperament was not a real issue, mentioning that intelligence lies in the same situation.[10]

Obviously, the state of the art is much more advanced today,[11] but there remains a fundamental *datum* that we need to discuss, using McCall's comparison between intelligence and temperament. It can be easily seen that the former lines up more with human abilities, while the latter is closer to its idiosyncrasies. Indeed, even in contemporary definitions, temperament still appears as something alien that we harbour within ourselves. To be fair, intelligence was treated in a similar way in ancient times, as in the *natura addita* of platonic *Nous*. And yet, centuries of thinking have managed to hand the notion over to human subjectivity; temperament, on the contrary, resisted under its "long shadow."[12]

This is because, in our judgment, the structure of temperament always implies something beyond itself, as if constantly signalling the presence of a nature within us, which differs from the nature that we are. We have called this "something beyond" the temperament's *inspira-*

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[10] See Harold H. Goldsmith, Arnold H. Buss, Robert Plomin et al., "Roundtable: What Is Temperament? Four Approaches," *Child Development* 58, no. 2 (1987): 524, https://doi.org/10.2307/1130527.

[11] See for example Rebecca L. Shiner, Kristina A. Buss, and Sandee G. McClowry, "What Is Temperament Now? Assessing Progress Temperament Research on the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Goldsmith et al.," *Child Development Perspectives* 6, no. 4 (2012): 436–444, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2012.00254.x.

[12] See Jerome Kagan and Nancy Snidman, *The Long Shadow of Temperament* (London: Harvard University Press, 2004).

tion, picturing both the "spiritual" process by which something propagates out of us, passing through us – which is normally the dynamic in which we situate temperament – and the physiological act of inhaling air into our lungs. The latter represents a somatological expansion of temperament's semantics, which may appear confusing. But if we think, for example, of newborns, we will see that their discovery of the world begins together with their first breath:

> All exists as sensations rather than as perceptions of determined things or objects with their own existences and qualities. For example, the newborn can perceive a colour, the sensation of which becomes inscribed in itself without its capacity for identifying to what or to whom this colour relates or assigning a place to it in the global structuring of a consciousness.[13]

As expressed by the philosopher Luce Irigaray, the child immediately begins to feel something, "running the risk" of being overwhelmed by a mass of sensations that it cannot yet organize. Since it does not yet have a consciousness in the proper sense, the first glimmer of light comes from the variation of intensity between emotions. This difference represents the first imprint of temperament in the infant and it will accompany it for the rest of its life.

This example appears simple and straightforward, but closer examination soon reveals it to be quite complex again. On the one hand, temperament appears immediately as something that separates us from one another, inasmuch as it makes us feel different. On the other hand, temperament appears as something that takes us together, since these differences in intensity, though particular, do not appear as unique but as recurring within humankind. Also, temperament links the totality of our acts back to our inner nature, testifying that Nature itself has left a lasting imprint on us. To endure these apparent aporias, we had to introduce *inspiration* as the phantasmatic "double" of temperament, which now requires philosophical investigation.

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[13] Luce Irigaray, *To be Born: Genesis of a New Human Being* (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2017), 10.

The "Faculty of Inspiration"

Quite surprisingly, Galenic medicine in the 2nd century AD already featured a similar dyadic system based on temperament and breathing. Obviously, it is not possible here to account for the extreme richness and complexity of Galen's theory and posterity. Nevertheless, we can rely on two fundamental concepts: *pneuma* and *krasis*. *Pneuma* is a Stoic-derived concept, which Galen conceives of in a rather nuanced way as an "airy matter" found in the brain. It could represent the instrument by which the soul operates or even the soul itself, should it be mortal. *Pneuma* presupposes, for its operation, a mixture (*krasis*) of the four fundamental elements (hot, cold, dry, and wet) in the living being.

Krasis represents a specific proportion according to which the relevant bodily factors are related to each other. Each bodily part has its own mixture, meaning that in bodily parts that house capacities of the soul, the soul's performance is affected by variations in this mixture. The particular declension and balance of these same four elements in each is also what forms temperaments. Furthermore, these dynamics are replicated at a physiological level: breathing activity in living beings replicates this balancing function, contributing to the stabilization and nourishment of *pneuma*.[14]

This holistic, philosophical, and somatological, dimension would accompany the breathing-temperament relationship throughout the Hellenistic period and would remain stable, *mutatis mutandis*, even between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, thanks in part to the significant contribution of Arab-Persian culture.[15] With the so-called

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[14] On this, see for example Philip van der Eijk, "Galen on Soul, Mixture and *Pneuma*," in *Body and soul in Hellenistic philosophy*, eds. Brad Indwood and James Warren (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 62–88; and Anthony A. Long, "Pneumatic Episodes from Homer to Galen," in *The Life of Breath in Literature, Culture and Medicine: Classical to Contemporary*, eds. David Fuller, Corinne Saunders, and Jane MacNaughton (Cham: Palgrave McMillan, 2021), 37–54. Where posterity is concerned, it is also necessary to cite Jerome Kagan, *Galen's Prophecy: Temperament in Human Nature* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

[15] One of the many examples could be that of the physician and philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna). See, for example, this passage from his *Canon of Medicine*: "The primary vital faculty is not sufficient by itself to enable the breath to respond to the other faculties but needs an appropriate temperament first. The physicians also claim that this faculty, besides paving the way for life, itself initiates the movement of the attenuated spiritual substance (the breath, that

scientific revolution, and especially with the rise within it of strictly descriptive and conscientialist assumptions based on the machinic manipulation of reality, this union has crumbled inexorably, albeit leaving some debris. We must now examine the extent of these through the notion of "inspiration," looking into modern religious (charismatic inspiration) and aesthetic (artistic inspiration) occurrences.

An eminent case is that of the 18th century Scottish school of common sense. It is well known that the forefather of this school, Thomas Reid (1710–1796), built up his theory based on a set of intuitive judgments called "principles of common sense." These were "necessary to all men for their being and preservation," and therefore were "unconditionally given to all men by the Author of Nature." These principles are self-evident in such a way that they are "no sooner understood than they are believed." The judgment necessarily follows their "apprehension," so they are not exactly carried out by reasoning, but are rather felt or experienced.

More precisely, Reid says that according to these principles, we are forced to believe – at least at first – in the evidence of our senses in a way that is very similar to the "evidence of testimony." But in believing based on testimony, we have to rely on the authority of the one who testifies, and since we do not find such authority in ourselves, we have to rely on the authority of "the Almighty." Reid concludes, therefore, in typical Presbyterian fashion, that we are "inspired" by Nature to believe in such principles, in such a way that our firm belief is an "immediate

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is) towards the various members (organs) and is the agent which brings about the contraction and expansion of respiration and pulse. In that it assists life it is passion; in that it assists the activity and functions of mind and pulse it is 'action'." Ibn Sina, *The Canon of Medicine*, trans. Oskar Cameron Gruner (London: Becember, 1929), 121. See also Corinne Saunders, "From Romance to Vision: The Life of Breath in Medieval Literary Texts," in *The Life of Breath in Literature, Culture and Medicine: Classical to Contemporary*, eds. David Fuller, Corinne Saunders, and Jane MacNaughton (Cham: Palgrave McMillan, 2021), 87–110; and Carole Rawcliffe, "A Breath of Fresh Air: Approaches to Environmental Health in Late Medieval Urban Communities," in *The Life of Breath in Literature, Culture and Medicine: Classical to Contemporary*, eds. David Fuller, Corinne Saunders, and Jane MacNaughton (Cham: Palgrave McMillan, 2021), 131–153. Furthermore, it is not possible here to discuss the continuation of this tradition within the valuable – yet ambiguous – case of traditional Persian medicine, which makes the notion of temperament a real cornerstone of scientific research. See Maryam Yavari, ed., *Hot and Cold Theory: The Path Towards Personalized Medicine* (Cham: Springer, 2022), esp. 21–38.

effect of our constitution," which shows a peculiar faculty of "inspiration" or "suggestion."

This view was expressed in Reid's famous *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764),[16] but it was also expanded some years later in further works and in his advanced courses at the University of Glasgow. Here, he talked extensively of temperament, generally describing it as "what is involuntary in a man's active powers."[17] Nonetheless, he also added that temperaments should be seen as a tool of "the wisdom of Nature":

> The Wisdom of Nature has provided a Succedaneum, to supply in some degree the want of real virtue among Men. The Succedaneum is Temperament, by which Men who have little or no real Virtue, who have no higher end in view than to gratify their own inclinations, are led to fulfil the purpose of the divine Providence and to go to rounds of Social Duty.[18]

A man that has no virtue, still yet common sense; deepening his view on the human "constitution," Reid now seems to imply that temperament represents a critical junction for the aforementioned faculty of "suggestion" or "inspiration," as it represents the seed of Nature's inspiration.

In general, Reid seems to recover the notion of temperament in typical Enlightenment terms. He designates temperament as a seed implanted by Providence, functional to the progress of humanity but also indicative of a fundamental relationship of inspiration between Nature and humankind. This relationship, indeed, does not present the features of a progressive intellectual understanding, but of a real set of experiences, in which our body's thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, and emotions show us the way.

Not long after this, a similar view would emerge again among the 19th century Romantics, coincidentally among those "Anti-romantic

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[16] See Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, ed. Derek Brookes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997; first published 1764 by Cadell-Bell and Creech (London and Edinburgh)), 13ff and 328.

[17] Thomas Reid, *On Logic, Rhetoric, and the Fine Arts: Papers on the Culture of the Mind*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 86.

[18] Reid, *On Logic, Rhetoric, and the Fine Arts*, 86.

Romantics"[19] who had learned a great deal from British empiricism and particularly from the Scottish school. We are referring here to two Danish philosophers, Henrich Steffens (1774–1845) and Frederik Christian Sibbern (1785–1872), both sensitive to German Romanticism but also philosophically autonomous.

More specifically, Steffens discusses temperaments in the context of a theodicy, as he seeks – in his *Anthropologie* (1820–22) – to show that "human races" are all part of an eschatological design. In his holistic and romantic view, the presence of temperament in the human constitution represents the spiritual trace of a deep connection with Nature. The emergence of temperament demonstrates that the apparent subservience of some races to certain climatic conditions can be overcome through the spiritual development of the individual.[20] Indeed, this very subservience is already overcome forever, inasmuch as each human being carries within it the capacity to forge itself a character and a personality, thanks to the planted seed of temperament. A natural connection with all things, which was once separated from consciousness, now appears among the races and rises to a higher truth.

Later on, with Frederik Christian Sibbern, a generation younger than Steffens and his self-styled pupil, as we move close to the shoals of positivism, we find the first attempt at a scientific-psychological definition of temperament: "[temperaments are] dispositions or fundamental moods (*Grundstemninger*) in regard to the emotions and to the whole manner in which one is affected by things, by which whereby certain particular inclinations to certain kinds of feelings are connected."[21] In other words, temperaments represent the first and foremost semblance

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[19] See Nina Witoszek, "The Anti-Romantic Romantics: Nature, Knowledge, and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Norway," in *Nature and Society in Historical Context*, eds. Mikulas Teich, Roy Porter, and Bo Gustafsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 209–227.

[20] "The quiet order of the inner and outer life is combined, and the fourfold direction, which has developed in a distorted form in the races, we recognize again in humans, but as tempered elements, as 'temperaments'." Henrich Steffens, *Anthropologie*, 2 vol. (Breslau: Max, 1820–1822), vol. 2, 440.

[21] Frederik Christian Sibbern, *Psychologie, indledet ved almindelig Biologie* (København: Schulz, 1856; first published 1843), 447.

of "nature in man according to its effects"[22] (*Naturvirkningen i Mennesket*).

Moreover, in a manner that is certainly romantic yet surprisingly close to Reid, Sibbern returns to the idea of temperament as a place of inspiration. The occasion is a disquisition with an apparently aesthetic interest in the source of artistic ability to convey emotions. On this matter, Sibbern answers as follows:

> we always carry in our innermost being this common ground of all mankind, from which in nature and reality all characters are lifted up, this is obviously what makes the poet try so vividly and with so much truth to reflect nature, and that he feels the living drive to do so, since he feels his own innermost being powerfully touched and addressed by nature.[23]

The so-called artistic inspiration is here understood as an immediate outburst of sensation that is excited by Nature. More precisely, this process reaches up through the "root" of the character, which is temperament. But what is noteworthy here is that this kind of inspiration is represented by the excitement of a faculty that is dormant in everyone, despite emerging only in (artistically) trained characters. In other words, Sibbern presents artistic character as the developed capacity to spontaneously revive within oneself the common structure of humankind. However, at the same time, he is also postulating that the artist with this stance mimics the inspiratory disposition of Nature itself, aimed at that seed of human character that we call temperament.[24]

Overall, this temperament-based approach seems to have disappeared as early as the late 19th century, although a last trace of it can be found in some of Sibbern's students. However, they were already fully caught up in the categories of positivism, which will undermine, as we are about to see, a full understanding of this "inspiratory" model.[25]

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[22] Sibbern, *Psychologie*, 447.

[23] Frederik Christian Sibbern, *Om Poesie og Konst* (København: Tengnagel, 1834), 31; when the translator is not indicated, the translation is ours.

[24] "Everything that ever gives human nature a peculiar character, a peculiar form in any individual, everything that ever stirs in human beings and sets them in motion, can come forth in the poet and relive him." Sibbern, *Om Poesie og Konst*, 31.

[25] It is worth mentioning here as an example the well-known Harald Høffding, who was sincerely devoted to his teacher Sibbern. Not surprisingly, in his empirical psychology, we find

The Beginning and End of Philosophical Anthropology[26]

We now need to explain why this temperament-based anthropology was submerged by the tides of time in the late 19th century. As a matter of fact, between the first and second half of the 19th century, a sharp separation between philosophy and the new so-called human sciences occurred. Subjects such as anthropology or psychology departed from the more traditional and academically affirmed philosophy. Philosophy and human sciences thus began to follow separate and often conflicting paradigms, clashing destructively.[27]

Around 1830, the first glimpses of experimental science and the great volume of ethnographic and geographical discoveries were about

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a fundamental distinction between the "formal self" and the "real self," where the first is the inner coherence of the life of consciousness, which is a result of consciousness striving to summarize its content. The second is indeed the constant features of an individual's psychic constitution, i.e. their temperament and character. In particular, with regard to temperament, he stated: "Both talent and character are determined by the temperament, just as feeling occupies a central position in relation to cognition and will. Temperament is determined by the organic constitution, and manifests itself in the vital feeling, the fundamental mood which controls the mind independently of definite external experiences. It is one of the most important constituents of the real self, the feeling-regulator of the individual. As a background given from the beginning, it determines the mode in which all experiences are received by the individual, and consequently the mode in which the individual reacts upon the external world." Harald Høffding, *Outlines of Psychology*, trans. Mary E. Lowndes (London: McMillan, 1893), 394.

[26] This debate mainly concerns Germany or at any rate German – romantic – categories. Clearly, the French and English contexts also cannot be left out, although in the field of anthropology, their continental influence was relatively limited, at least in the early 19th century. Conversely, German authors such as Immanuel Kant or Alexander Humboldt were known all across Europe. For context, see for example Harold I. Sharlin, *The Convergent Century: The Unification of Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Glasgow: Abelard-Schuman, 1966); and Faustino Fabbianelli and Jean–F. Goubet, *L'homme entier: conceptions anthropologiques classiques et contemporaines* (Paris: Garnier, 2017), 7–231.

[27] It will come as no surprise, then, that the Danish expat in Germany Henrich Steffens was indeed mocked and considered outdated by almost all his contemporaries, regardless of which school they belonged to. We may mention here some exemplary critiques of Steffens' *Anthropologie* like that of Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841) ("Rezension von Henrich Steffens, Anthropologie," *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 12, eds. Karl Kehrbach and Otto Flügel (Langensalza: Beyer & Söhne, 1893), 189–211), that of Johann Christian Heinroth (1773–1843), somehow close to *Naturphilosophie* (in *Lehrbuch der Anthropologie* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1822), 383, 392); and that, of course, of Hegel (in "Fragment on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit (1822–1825)," trans. Gilles Marmasse, *Archives de Philosophie* 77, no. 4 (2014): 600, https://doi.org/10.3917/aphi.774.0585).

to make an impact. The academic debate appeared to be divided into two opposing trends: on one side were "Proto-positivists," who were methodologically pushing philosophy and anthropology (together) toward a more "scientific" praxis based on empirical observations, and, on the other, "Late-romantics," who remained barricaded in traditional accounts.[28] As early as around 1850, both those trends would be cast aside as "unscientific" by a new generation of scholars who saw the separation of anthropology and philosophy as natural. Romantic science became a generic and fanciful doxa, in which schools and differences were meaningless.

Using a *reductio ad absurdum*, the new generation of the late 19th century made a *major canon* out of Romantic science: the human being represented for them an absolute subject that was opposed to an absolute object, which was Nature.[29] They even somehow embraced this canon as a mindset, calling for an "anthropocentric" reform of the human sciences (through cultural anthropology, empirical psychology, etc.) while creating a separate "biocentric" field of work (that of biology, ecology, etc.). From an eco-critical point of view, Proto-positivists and Late-romantics were only apparently at odds, as they represented the two sides of the same coin, both leading to a separation between human beings and nature. Proto-positivists explicitly introduced the idea that the subject is capable of shaping nature,[30] while the Late-romantics implicitly thinned the spiritual dimension of the human being to the point of disappearance. Ultimately, the poor reception of this debate

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[28] On this cf. Udo Benzenhöfer, *Psychiatrie und Anthropologie in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Hürtgenwald: Pressler, 1993); Gerlof Verwey, *Psychiatry in an Anthropological and Biomedical Context: Philosophical Presuppositions and Implications of German Psychiatry (1820–1870)* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1998); and Stefano Poggi and Maurizio Bossi, eds., *Romanticism in Science: Science in Europe, 1790–1840* (Berlin: Springer, 2013).

[29] Accordingly, we can place distant thinkers such as Jakob Friedrich Fries (1773–1843) and Johann Christian Heinroth (1733–1843) in the "anthropocentric" set, and Ignaz Paul Vital Troxler (1780–1866) or Lorenz Oken (1779–1851) in the "biocentric" one.

[30] In general, this perspective can be associated with a broader cultural nationalistic movement, rooted in the idea of a subject capable of changing the fortunes of history (which Steffens himself has foreshadowed and criticized). See for example George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: Fertig, 1975), 191ff.

has sanctioned a "poisonous" anthropocentric/biocentric polarization, excluding every alternative.

Meanwhile, the notion of temperament quickly became outdated and ambiguous, being employed progressively less and less. Around the first half of the 20th century, temperamental theories were incorporated by the more up-to-date characterology, especially in Germany.[31] However, even this discipline had to gradually give way to new trends in psychology, experimentally based and prone to refuting any assertion that was not strictly descriptive with respect to the data.[32]

At about the same time, thanks to the great minds of thinkers like Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner and Arnold Gehlen, Philosophical Anthropology defined its own status and mission for the first time. But Philosophical Anthropology – with capital letters – was not just a "modern" version of centuries-old philosophical research on human beings, since it was very much engaged in redefining philosophy against the crossfire of "hard sciences" and "new human sciences." While walking autonomous paths, Scheler, Plessner, and Gehlen took "the process of life" as a common starting point,[33] proposing their new subject as a frontier between philosophy and sciences and thus basically setting aside any earlier tradition.

It wasn't until the late 20th century that a fair amount of interest in temperament began to revive, especially thanks to the social scientist and Harvard psychology professor Jerome Kagan (1929–2021), who attempted the path of a theoretical and psychobiological approach, also

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[31] Some examples are William Stern, *Differentielle Psychologie* (Leipzig: Bart, 1921); Gottfried Ewald, *Temperament und Charakter* (Berlin: Springer, 1924); Abraham A. Roback, *The Psychology of Character: With a Survey of Temperament* (London: Trench & Trubner, 1931); Erwin Schrödinger, *Science and the Human Temperament*, trans. James Murphy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1935); and Ernst Kretschmer, *Körperbau und Charakter: Untersuchungen zum Konstitutionsproblem und zur Lehre von den Temperamenten* (Berlin: Springer, 1944).

[32] A good overview of characterology at the turn of the century can be found in Hubert Rohracher, *Charakterkunde* (Wien: Urban & Schwarzenberg, 1975).

[33] Joachim Fischer, "Exploring the Core Identity of Philosophical Anthropology through the Works of Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner, and Arnold Gehlen," *Iris* 1 (2009): 168. On this, see also Odo Marquard, "Zur Geschichte des philosophischen Begriffs 'Anthropologie' seit dem Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts," in *Schwierigkeiten mit der Geschichtsphilosophie: Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 122–144.

contributing a considerable amount from a historical perspective.[34] Fast forward to the present day and, while the notion of temperament has begun to affect cross-cutting areas of research,[35] the original mission of philosophical anthropology has basically been abandoned, on the one hand employing some of its insights in related fields (such as ethics, sociobiology, historical anthropology, biopolitics, philosophy of culture, sociology of knowledge, hermeneutics, critical theory, etc.), and on the other hand, hypostatizing the discipline in a metaphysical sense. In both cases, the rush to find arguments to justify the awkward or atypical placement of the discipline can be observed, often having to resort to a "transcendental justification."[36]

A New "Inspiratory" Shift

Despite the recent revival in temperament studies, no one, to our knowledge, has considered what temperament can represent within a philosophical framework. In this last section, we intend to demonstrate that a new "inspired" philosophical anthropology could find a new centre of gravity, providing a temperament-based definition of human nature.

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[34] See for example George Rousseau, "Temperament and the Long Shadow of Nerves in the Eighteenth Century," in *Brain, Mind and Medicine: Essays in Eighteenth-Century Neuroscience*, eds. Harry Whitaker, Christopher U.M. Smith, and Stanley Finger (New York: Springer, 2007), 353–370. More generally, see Jan Streleau, ed., *Temperament: A Psychological perspective* (Cham: Springer, 1998); or Marcel Zentner and Rebecca L. Shiner, eds., *Handbook of Temperament* (New York and London: Guilford, 2012).

[35] Recent theories speak of temperament even for animals or plants, looking for an explanatory framework with a clear ecological vocation. See for example Denis Réale, Niels J. Dingemanse, Anahita J. N. Kazem et al., "Evolutionary and Ecological Approaches to the Study of Personality," in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 365 (December 2010): 3937–3946, https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2010.0222; Richard Karban and Patrick Grof-Tisza, "Consistent Individual Variation in Plant Communication: Do Plants Have Personalities?" *Oecologia* 199, no. 1 (2022): 129–137, https://doi.org/10.1007/s00442-022-05173-0; and Jennifer Khattar, Paco Calvo, Ina Vanderbroek et al., "Understanding Interdisciplinary Perspectives of Plant Intelligence: Is it a Matter of Science, Language, or Subjectivity?" *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 18, no. 41 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1186/s13002-022-00539-3.

[36] See for instance Gershon Weiler, "Philosophical Anthropology as Mere Critique," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 10, no. 2 (1980): 201–207, https://doi.org/10.1177/004839318001000207.

Indeed, both Henrich Steffens and Frederik Sibbern had already offered us two brilliant contributions on this side, one more suggestive and the other more schematic. Steffens found the scope of his temperament-based anthropology in "sinking into nature" without "getting lost in it."[37] Similarly, Sibbern stated that, through temperament, the human being "does not take itself too close to the world," but also that it "yet takes itself duly close to it."[38] This middle position, skilfully described by both these authors, derives from a philosophical understanding of temperament, as it embodies our bond with Nature both as an innate determination and as the seed of future development.

Such an awareness, as we have seen, seems to be lost towards the end of the 19th century, though the "long shadow" of temperament has continued to reappear sporadically. Various insights could be cited as evidence of this, such as William James' well-known idea that the history of philosophy can be seen as a "clash of temperaments."[39] Nonetheless, in our judgment, the most interesting example is to be found in Georg Simmel's fortunate phrase "philosophy is a temperament seen through a picture of the world,"[40] which echoes Elemir Zolla's idea of art as "a corner of nature seen through a temperament." What is foreshadowed here but not yet grasped is that temperament is not just a functional structure, but a true philosophical "thing," in the same sense in which we think of the word *nature*.

To the discerning eye, it will come as no surprise that one person who came close to recognizing the philosophical scope of temperament was Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977), a Dutch philosopher moved by the need to constitute a philosophical system inspired by the wisdom of Reformed Christianity. Indeed, terms such as temperament, character and talents are recurrent in Reformed theology, in that they structure the community of believers according to their vocations. On Simmel's dictum, Dooyeweerd expressed himself as follows:

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37 Steffens, *Anthropologie*, vol. 1, 10.

38 Sibbern, *Psychologie*, 369.

39 William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975; first published 1907 by Longman Green and Co (New York)), 11.

40 Georg Simmel, *The Problems of the Philosophy of History: An Epistemological Essay*, trans. Guy Oakes (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 23.

The genuine life- and world-view has undoubtedly a close affinity with philosophy, because it is essentially directed towards the totality of meaning of our cosmos. A life- and worldview also implies an Archimedean point. Like philosophy, it has its religious ground-motive. It, as well as philosophy, requires the religious commitment of our selfhood. It has its own attitude of thought. However, it is not, as such, of a theoretical character. Its view of totality is not the theoretical, but rather the pretheoretical. It does not conceive reality in its abstracted modal aspects of meaning, but rather in typical structures of individuality which are not analyzed in a theoretical way.[41]

However, in a typical Reformed fashion, Dooyeweerd raises an important point here: the very notion of temperament calls for a different, "integral" point of view. With his critique, Dooyeweerd emphasized the pre-theoretical plane, directly questioning the "structures of individuality." Nevertheless, after he established that a certain religious viewpoint (in his case, a Neo-Calvinist one) was to be considered the original source of meaning even in philosophy, he did not deepen his analysis any further, partly due to his death before he could complete some works on philosophical anthropology.

What Dooyeweerd had glimpsed may be considered here to be the spiritual significance of temperament. It was not by chance that, before becoming a medical doctrine with Hippocrates and Galen, temperament had represented the ancients' – e.g., Empedocles' – way of reuniting with the four elements of the Earth, which were to be found in the blood (and later in the *krasis*) of human beings.[42] In this sense, temperament needs to be seen primarily as a symbol "that rests in itself."[43] As it represents nothing but itself, any attempt to make it into a structure of explanation irretrievably separates the explanation itself from the simulacrum that temperament represents, as it becomes altogether manipulatable and conditioned by the culture in which it operates. However,

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[41] Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Collected Works, Series A – Vol. 1, trans. David H. Freeman and William S. Young (Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1984; first published 1953 by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company (Philadelphia)), 128.

[42] See for example Maria Michela Sassi, "Parmenides and Empedocles on Krasis and Knowledge," *Apeiron* 49, no. 4 (2016): 451–469, https://doi.org/10.1515/apeiron-2015-0005.

[43] This terminology comes from Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Versuch über die Gräbersymbolik der Alten* (Basel: Bahnmeier, 1859).

by representing nothing more than itself, it can draw on the aura of Nature, simultaneously annihilating and germinating.

If any, Gaston Bachelard seems to have been the one who most closely reached this awareness through the notion of "oneiric temperament." In fact, according to Bachelard, the elemental forces of ancient cosmologies (fire, water, earth, air) are still present in our imageries and have the faculty of animating a dual motion. Those forces allow the subject to fantasize (to enter the *rêverie*) and the material object (e.g. a certain stream of water) to be fantasized about. This happens because between each material element and its cosmological image operates a fundamental "oneiric temperament," which somehow belongs to the "fantasizing" subject as well.[44]

Despite being rooted in distant phenomenological and psychoanalytical suggestions,[45] Bachelard's notion of "oneiric temperament" still represents a considerable source of meaning here. His "post-critical" method, which comes from a "second naiveté" that grants him the faculty of imagination, corresponds to our eco-critical vision, which draws on that "ecological wisdom" from which we started. The "hormonal"[46] function that the elemental sphere has toward imagination in Bachelard's work becomes for us an "ecosophical" horizon within which to place our inspiratory perspective. Temperament, just like its oneiric double, does not belong entirely to the subject who feels it inside itself, since it is also attached to Nature (the elemental side of the *reverie* in Bachelard). As we mentioned, by its very nature, temperament is ontologically complex: it certainly belongs to us, but we do not have *possession* of it. Its very notion implies a constant superfetation of the "real self," in a way that haunts our "formal self," showing that we are always *in the presence* of Nature.

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[44] See Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Edith Farrell (Dallas: The Pegasus Foundation, 1983), 5ff.

[45] His "ascensional psychology" indeed represents "the other side of the coin" of psychology and psychoanalysis, inasmuch as it takes advantage of the openings in these disciplines to embark on a new "aerial voyage," thus becoming a true source of "inspiration" for us. See Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*, trans. Edith Farrell and C. Frederick Farrell (Dallas: Pegasus Foundation, 1988), 11ff.

[46] Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 11ff.

Conclusions

In light of these arguments, our circle closes and we return to where we started: the wake-up call of *ecological wisdom* directed at human and political ecology. Through this "inspiratory" shift, philosophical anthropology can make this call its own, aiming to eco-critically address how we conceive the nature we harbour inside and the nature that we inhabit. Moreover, it can initiate a confrontation with all those wisdoms that have long been trying to communicate its legacy, while often being spiritually, economically and ecologically depauperated. The absence of a common ground for this debate often reflected the desire to preserve our ideas of human nature, society and resource exploitation.[47]

Admittedly, the aim of this contribution was only to offer some justifications for an "inspiratory" regeneration in philosophical anthropology, strongly committing ourselves to certain theoretical *desiderata* of ecological wisdom. Many of the suggestions advanced here will have to be explored in greater depth elsewhere, but we hope that we have sketched out at least a meaningful horizon line, providing us with enough space to think and enough ground to continue our journey.

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[47] In the very last few years, however, some works are opening a new path. See especially Eduardo Kohn's pioneering *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2013).

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