

BOOK REVIEW

Ecology: Welcome Home

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In *Ecology: Welcome Home*, Algis Mickūnas and Žilvinas Svirigis, two Lithuanian philosophers of different generations, present a subtly argued view that a sensitive, nurturing, and caring relationship with our natural home, which includes both non-human nature and other people, can only emerge if we radically change our entire behavior and thinking. In order for such a new relationship with one's native home—a relationship that we might term both familial and domestic—to become possible and to be sustainably established, technological solutions alone are not enough. Technology is a short-term, superficial, and palliative solution that does not change the human heart and fails to capture the essence of the deep processes taking place in the world. A new relationship between humans and their natural environment can only be formed when we ourselves—supposedly the masters of the natural environment, yet at the same time ordinary members of the family of all natural beings—return to our own natural home. Such a return would become possible if each of us not only realizes the necessity of a radical transformation of his or her entire thinking and behavior, but also consistently carries out this transformation at all levels of his or her life.

The subtitle of the book is very eloquent—*Welcome Home*, which can be read in several different ways, all implying and reinforcing each other: “Welcome *back* home,” “Welcome *to your* home” and “Home is the place where you are welcome,” or in other words “hospitable home.” The different readings of the book's subtitle create a wonderful play of meanings that allow us as readers to realize the most important thing: until we once properly return to our own homes and become hospitable to them, they themselves will never become hospitable to us, and we will never be welcome in them.

The authors of the book accordingly testify that concern for the Motherland—which is not only one's native homeland, but also the entire planet Earth and the entire Native Cosmos—is universal: it goes beyond the framework of generations, cultures, and their specific beliefs. Both authors of the book, writing in a slightly different way but resonating with each other, reveal that philosophers' attention to ecological topics is far from just being a new fashion of the time. Instead, ecological self-awareness is inherently characteristic of every authentic philosophy, especially if we perceive ecology itself not narrowly, but much more broadly—fundamentally, from the basics. After all, any really authentic philosophical thinking is a philosophical *logos* that must have its own “home,” its own *oikos*. In other words, it must be existentially established and preserved, and thus *ecological* in the broadest sense.

It is only when we become sensitive and attentive to the “home” of our thinking, to its authentic natural place, that we will be able to become sensitive and attentive to the place of our authentic existential experience, and thereby to its entire natural and natural context. It would also be

correct to say, inversely, that it is only when we become sensitive and attentive to the “house” of our existential experience, with all its human and non-human inhabitants, that we will finally learn to think more deeply and authentically—indeed, to think as philosophers at all. A philosopher’s concern for the fate of the world, for what is natural and inherent in it, is not merely a diversion of thinking from “eternal” and “fundamental” philosophical topics, a detour provoked by contingent problems of the present, forcing the philosopher against his or her own will to study some temporary and passing things. On the contrary, the ecological challenges of the present, and the necessity for thinkers to respond to them, paradoxically return philosophical thinking to its natural *oikos* and *topos*, arousing hope for the revival of philosophy itself. For a long time, philosophy seemed to be “synthetic,” as if it were made of glass and plastic, remaining excessively abstract and lacking any connection with the real world. Now, however, it can finally become ecological and organic—not in the sense of the “organic” food fashionable these days, but in the sense of the organicism cultivated by philosophers who are committed to a holistic approach to reality.

Both authors of the book constantly emphasize the importance of our responsibility for the common house in which we live. We still do not fully understand how closely authentic philosophizing is connected with responsibility and a sense of responsibility: understood in a Socratic sense, philosophy is the right raising of questions and the right answers to them, and serious and truly binding answers can only be given to the serious questions that are raised by reality itself. By becoming responsible, we set ourselves up to provide serious answers to the serious and real questions posed by reality, so that our very commitment to being responsible almost automatically makes us philosophers—or makes it much easier for us to become philosophers.

Finally, the book fascinates the reader with many different planes of polyphonic sound. For example, the second part, written by Žilvinas Svigaris, seems a perfect echo of the first part of the book, in which we hear the philosophical voice of Algis Mickūnas. But there are other registers of polyphonic ringing in the book that testify to a successful attempt to combine classical and modern philosophy, traditional Eastern wisdom, and Socratic Western thought. This book sets forth the modes of responsibility both of those who are able to think philosophically in the “home” of their authentic thinking and of those who are simply able to live wisely in their native homes of ordinary everyday life, offering hope that after fundamentally changing our lives and our thinking, we too will finally become hospitable for the houses in which we are destined to live. And, in gratitude for the hospitality, we have shown them, these houses will themselves become hospitable to us and await our return.

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