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Thinking nature as home: from transcendental homelessness to oikeiosis

In response to the outbreak of World War 1, Georg Lukács, one of the forerunners of the Frankfurt School, penned a work titled *The Theory of the Novel*, in which he claimed that the modern world is characterised by “transcendental homelessness” and that this situation is reflected in the form of the modern novel, as opposed to the epic form of earlier ages. The present paper takes up Lukács’s notion of transcendental homelessness and applies it more widely than literary theory to analyse the homeless condition of modernity as manifest in the way nature is conceived and treated in strict parallel to the way colonised peoples and territories are treated. The analysis of capitalism and colonialism in terms of ontological homelessness raises the question as to the possibilities for homecoming beyond the state of ontological homelessness. Can there, amid the current justified wariness of sedentary and colonising metanarratives, be a non-naïve conception of homecoming? Can nature in contemporary thought non-naïvely and non-reactively be symbolised in terms of home and homecoming? In response to these questions the paper concludes by considering the Stoic notion of *oikeiosis* and its implications for interacting with nature as a kind of non-sedentary homecoming.

Keywords: transcendental homelessness, modernity, capitalism, colonialism, Stoicism

Introduction

A well-established body of critical theory exists that connects modernity, capitalism and colonialism with a certain way of treating the natural world. According to a genealogy often present in expressions of this line of thinking, important aspects of European colonialism can only be understood in the light of the logic of capitalism, which, in turn, can only be understood against the background of the development of Western modernity since about the 17th century.¹ The lens afforded by the connection of modernity, capitalism and colonialism highlights the intimate relation between the treatment of colonised peoples and territories and the extractivist treatment of the non-human, natural world. Human bodies, human labour and whole societies are treated as resources in strict parallel to what befalls the ground, the trees, the oceans, and the animal populations of the earth.

While the modernist mindset that enables the logic of capitalism has been characterised in terms of anthropocentrism, and the well-known dichotomy between human freedom and deterministic nature, in this paper I connect it to the notion of transcendental homelessness as set out by Georg Lukács in his *The Theory of the Novel*. In the mid-20th century Martin Heidegger made the notion of ontological homelessness central to his characterisation of the modern condition, and I take Lukács's earlier notion of transcendental homelessness to be closely related to Heidegger's characterisation of ontological homelessness². To interpret the full breadth of Heidegger's understanding of homelessness and homecoming however falls outside the scope of this paper. I will therefore concentrate on Lukács's notion of transcendental homelessness, which I take to be ontological homelessness, and bring this to bear on the fate of nature in the epoch of modernity, capitalism and colonialism.

The notion of home, and the associated notions of homelessness, homecoming and homemaking thus play a central role in this essay. To express something of the reality of nature using the word "home" and to use this notion and its derivatives

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- 1 See Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture – The ecological crisis of reason* (2002), Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the web of Life* (2015), Jeremy Walker, *More Heat than Life: The Tangled Roots of Ecology, Energy and Economics* (2020), Malcolm Ferdinand, *Decolonial Ecology – Thinking from the Caribbean World* (2022). Holleman H. 2017. De-naturalizing ecological disaster: colonialism, racism and the global Dust Bowl of the 1930s. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 44(1), 234–260.
 - 2 The notion of homecoming is arguably the Leitmotif in Heidegger's later writings (see Mugaeruer 2008). First thoughts on comparing Lukács's and Heidegger's respective characterisation of ontological homelessness may involve noting that while Lukács highlights the abstraction of the modern subject from the rest of nature, Heidegger focuses on the inauthenticity of Dasein's being in the world as a kind of homelessness.

as a critical lens to understand the contemporary crises of “nature” is obviously to use the word “home” in a symbolic manner. Following Suzanne K. Langer, who herself was building on the work of Ernst Cassirer and Alfred North Whitehead, one could say that a symbol leads to the conception of some kind of reality in the mind of the one that interprets the symbol (Langer 1954: 52). In contrast to a sign that signals the *presence* of some kind of reality, a symbol evokes a *conception* of some reality or another in the mind of the one who interprets the symbol. Symbol making and use thus afford humans an extraordinary capacity to express abstract realities, or realities that are wider ranging and more universal than can be grasped in simple, concrete instances. If this is so, the question becomes: what intuition – the experience of what reality – are we trying to get at when we use the word “home”, or conversely, “homelessness” symbolically in connection with nature?

The modern scientific discipline of ecology received its name from the German zoologist and natural philosopher Ernst Haeckel, in 1866. Etymologically the name ecology derives from the Greek word *oikos*, with a semantic domain that includes what is signified by the English words “house”, “home” and “household”. Whereas Haeckel, an early follower and populariser of Darwin, coined the term ecology to speak of “the place each organism takes in the household of nature” (Haeckel 1866: 287),³ it is ironic that the themes of home, homelessness and homecoming remain underdeveloped in contemporary ecological discourse. In fact, as Walker has observed, even though “ecology” bears the notion of *oikos* or home in its origin, the nascent discipline of ecology from the start attempted to “invest the new science firmly in the scientific materialism of the late nineteenth century” (Walker 2020: 215). In response to this observation, I argue that the theme of the home must philosophically not be dismissed as merely metaphorical. Following Lakoff and Johnson it must be realised that metaphors play a constitutive structuring role, even in conceptually rigorous enterprises such as philosophy and the natural sciences (Lakoff and Johnson 2008).

The analysis of capitalism and colonialism in terms of ontological homelessness raises the question as to the possibilities for homecoming beyond the state of ontological homelessness. Can there be, amid the current justified wariness of sedentary (onto-theologically comfortable) and colonising metanarratives, a non-naïve conception of homecoming? And can nature in contemporary thought non-naïvely and non-reactively be symbolised in terms of home and homecoming? In response to these questions the paper concludes by considering the Stoic notion of *oikeiosis* and its implications for interacting with nature as a kind of non-sedentary homecoming.

3 <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/15099443>

Lukács and transcendental homelessness

The Theory of the Novel (1971) is one of Hungarian philosopher and literature critic Georg Lukács's earlier works, written in 1914–15 before his turn towards Marxist analysis. Under influence of the so-called “intellectual sciences school” to which he subscribed at the time, “[t]he idea put forward in *The Theory of the Novel* [...] is that] the problems of the novel form are ... the mirror-image of a world gone out of joint” (1971: 17). In other words, the approach, structuring, and typical problematic of the modern novel as a type of literature can tell us much about the state of the modern world – a world “gone out of joint,” according to Lukács.

The analysis of the disjointed state of the modern world, as mirrored in the novel as literary form, unfolds by way of a comparison with the epic form, paradigmatically found in ancient Greece, as expression of a different way of being in the world. In this regard, the lyrical first sentences of the first chapter of *The Theory of the Novel* are worth quoting in full:

Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths – ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars ... (1971: 29).

The cultural moment of ancient Greece, as evinced for instance in the Homeric epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and later in tragic drama, was according to Lukács a time when humans felt ontologically at home in the world. To be at home in this sense implies that meaning is all around and ever-present. Whereas the individual hero must find their own place within the meaning of the world, the meaning itself does not have to be sought after. “The soul goes out to seek adventure; it lives through adventures, but it does not know the real torment of seeking and the real danger of finding ...” (1971: 30). In characterising the classical Greek worldview in this way, Lukács was doubtlessly conversant with Hegel's suggestion in his *Philosophy of History* that the homeless spirit first emerged in Western thought with the public appearance of Socrates in 5th century BCE Athens (Hegel 1991: 268,269). For Hegel, the Western spirit was homeless ever since Socrates introduced the principle of a subject that can conceive of itself separate from the *polis* and its unifying laws. Lukács by contrast characterises homelessness as a specifically modern phenomenon, even while he also compares this with the pre-Socratic Greek view of the world. Whereas Lukács's utopian characterisation of ancient Greece must be challenged, perhaps with the suggestion that the human condition always involves both a sense of home and a sense of not (yet) being at home, the point that he makes nevertheless comes across: we must appreciate the acute sense of homelessness that pervades the

modern world compared to, for instance, the sensibility of ancient Greece. This sense of homelessness is mirrored in the modern form of the novel.

For Lukács, transcendental homelessness means that nature and life no longer furnish the structuring conditions that ensure that human life is meaningful and fitting. Nature and life are no longer experienced as home, and in the modern novel this emerges in the portrayal of the protagonist as someone who must define themselves over against the world. According to Lukács, “[I]n modern drama, the essence can manifest and assert itself only after winning a hierarchical contest with life ... [E]very figure carries this contest within himself as a precondition for his existence or as his motive force...” (1971: 44). The main characters of the modern novel are thus people faced with the problem of making their own essence. They are all individually an I turned in on itself; an I that has become a discrete, isolated point in space and time⁴. In Lukács’s words, “[E]ach of the *dramatis personae* can be bound to the destiny that gives him birth only by his own thread; ... each must rise up from solitude and must, in irremediable solitude, hasten, in the midst of all other lonely creatures, toward the ultimate tragic aloneness...” (1971: 45). In this situation, the characters of the novel are compelled to project their own meaning on to their world – a meaning that, for each character, is necessarily fragmented and narrow (1971: 53; 71).

Lukács characterises the situation manifested in the modern novel as one of removal to a position of remoteness, in other words, of abstraction:

Only when a subject, far removed from all life and from the empirical which is necessarily posited together with life, becomes enthroned in the pure heights of essence, when it has become nothing but the carrier of the transcendental synthesis, can it contain all the conditions for totality within its own structure and transform its own limitations into the frontiers of the world (1971: 54).

The abstracted horizon of the self thus becomes the frontier of the world, a world that in the modern novel can henceforth only be systematised in abstract terms (1971: 70). In characterising the transcendental homelessness in the novel form as the result of abstraction, Lukács accurately diagnoses the modern human condition of ontological homelessness. In its own conception of being, modern humanity has literally drawn itself out or away (*abstrahere*) from the rest of existence so that it seems to float over against it. In its extreme Kantian expression, human freedom becomes a radical, noumenal kernel over against a phenomenal nature governed by deterministic laws.

4 Charles Taylor in *The Sources of the Self* (1989) describes this as the development of the punctual self.

Abstracted, everything becomes brute fact

The situation of ontological homelessness described by Lukács is discernible beyond literary theory in virtually all areas of the modern world. The modern worldview received paradigmatic expression in Descartes's distinction between extended substance and thinking substance. Extended substance – that which lies over against the human mind – has solidity and extension in space, but nothing more. As suggested by Descartes's earlier contemporary, Galileo, and later more explicitly by John Locke, so called secondary qualities like colour, taste and smell are all abstracted from now dead, mechanistic matter and located in the human mind. Value itself is abstracted from material nature so that what remains are brute facts that are describable in a neutral and quantified manner. Alfred North Whitehead, who in his *Science in the Modern World* (1948) characterised the intellectual developments of the 17th and 18th centuries as the bifurcation of nature, elsewhere describes the notion of a mere fact, so common in the contemporary world, as “the triumph of the abstractive intellect” (Whitehead 1968: 9). From a transcendental vantage point, the modern mind abstractively conceives of natural entities as measurable, quantifiable and universalisable.

As has already been hinted at in the earlier discussion of symbol, Whitehead was aware that the human mind functions by way of abstraction and that that is precisely where much of its phenomenal power lies. However, Whitehead cautioned against the fallacy of misplaced concreteness: we must not uncritically attribute reality to our abstractions and must always be vigilant about them (Whitehead 1948: 52, 59). Whitehead scholar Isabelle Stengers, speaking about the knowledge of movement in the natural world, points out that the modern natural scientific worldview is nevertheless primed to focus on those kinds of entities that move impartially. The movement of a body that falls, for instance, can be observed and measured and from there the law of gravity may be abstracted. She goes on to note that other entities, however, are far from impartial toward their environments. The development of a plant is towards the sun and the nutrients in the soil, for instance. But natural science in the modern worldview gives precedence to impartial movements, and even living entities are constrained by very specific experimental conditions imposed on them in order to render lawlike behaviour. Along these lines there is a natural affinity between the impartial movements favoured in the knowledge of nature and the mathematical abstractions that the human mind is capable of (Stengers 2023: 112–115).

The concrete experience of the world and of nature that accompanies the abstractive approach of modern natural science is, significantly, not of home, but of homelessness. Following Michael Schillmeier (2014), the concrete experience of the world of many modern people may be compared to the experience of a

dementia patient that has been moved from their home to a room in a nursing home. Abstracted from their home, the newcomer to the nursing home room is confronted with their surroundings as brute facts: things without any felt value that connects them to the inhabitant. The things have no meaning, and this increases disorientation and anxiety. In the words of Whitehead again: nature becomes a world of static futility (Whitehead 1968: 79,80). Significantly, such a mechanistic nature is then also a *terra nullius*, a world open to colonisation, which is precisely what happened throughout the 18th and 19th centuries in the era of the European industrial revolution.

Modern capitalism and colonialism

The success of natural science and its application in modern “thermoindustrial” society (Walker 2020: 5) led to it becoming the strongest cultural force in the modern world and the paradigm to be emulated for other sectors of intellectual and social life. Importantly, this is visible in the abstract character of modern capitalism, the economic worldview that emerged in strict parallel to the abstraction that characterises the natural sciences and that, perhaps even more so, expresses the ontological homelessness of the modern human condition. In his 1989 study, *More Heat than Light*, Philip Mirowski demonstrates that the history of neoclassical economics is intimately intertwined with the development of the physics of energy in the later 19th century. In his 2020 *More Heat than Life: The Tangled Roots of Ecology, Energy and Economics*, Jeremy Walker takes up Mirowski’s work and extends it into a comparison between the development of ecology and economics under the influence of the physics of energy.

The physics of energy came into its own in the middle of the 19th century with the formalisation of the first law of thermodynamics. Scottish engineer William Rankine was an early pioneer who defined energy as “a capacity of any sort for performing work” (as quoted in Roche 2003: 187). It was, however, the German physiologist Herman von Helmholtz who provided the first precise formulation of the first law of thermodynamics. According to Walker (2020: 128), “Helmholtz posited a relationship between heat, light, chemical affinity, mechanical force, electro-magnetism and bio-physical phenomena by treating them all as manifestations of a continuous field pervading the entire universe...” Along this route Helmholtz arrived at the conclusion that heat is a form of energy and that heat energy cannot be created or destroyed – it can only be transferred from one location to another or converted to and from other forms of energy.

According to Walker, the convertibility of energy influenced the understanding of economics during the latter part of the 19th century: “[t]he neoclassical synthesis of the 1870s consolidated the style and claims of orthodox economics,

as its founding authors ... appropriated the mathematical format of the law of the conservation of energy in their portrayal of 'market forces' operating according to law-like principles of general equilibrium" (2020: 7). Under the influence of the thermoindustrial revolution, Adam Smith's "hidden hand" of the market was reinterpreted into the mechanism of supply and demand that would, in ideal circumstances, automatically regulate the market in the same way that forms of energy are completely convertible in the ideal situation of the first law of thermodynamics.

Whereas the first law, formalised in 1847, worked with an ideal, frictionless world of matter and energy, the second law of thermodynamics, formalised two decades later in 1865, dealt with the inexorable dissipation of energy. The second law is the famous law of entropy, the irreversible movement towards disorder, depletion, and degraded states of energy. To give a simple example: in a mechanical engine, the energy produced from the combustion of fuel is never completely converted into kinetic energy; some energy is lost to the environment in the form of heat. The important point that Mirowski, followed by Walker, makes in this regard is that neoclassical economics embraced the first law of thermodynamics while completely disregarding the second. Whereas modern, abstracting natural science works with a mechanistic, energetic nature but cannot bypass the finitude and process-like character of nature as expressed in the second law, economics tries to emulate natural science, but "the actual physics content of economics is zero" (Walker 2020: 10).

Neoclassical economics presents itself as the most scientific of the social sciences, but the way it follows physical science's thermodynamic principles is highly problematic. Furthermore, in its abstraction of value, neoclassical capitalism exemplifies the ontological homelessness of modernity in a particularly vivid manner: the economic system is abstracted from the so-called natural world and operates with ideas of a frictionless market mechanism and infinite growth. The abstract character of modern capitalism is clear when that most abstract of quantifiers of value is considered: money. The marginal utility theory of value, developed in the 1870s, proposed that value be considered not as a reality inherent in goods or services, but merely as the importance that people attribute to something for the sake of the satisfaction of their own needs. Money is a quantitative measure of utility, with the result that value collapses into price (Walker 2020: 139). In Walker's words:

Economics is restricted to price analysis, and this depends on positing a universal subjectivity which cannot be falsified with any extra-monetary knowledge of ecological phenomena.

Beyond money, nothing matters: money rules supreme over life and matter, of which it is separate and independent (Walker 2020: 139).

To the analysis of capitalist homelessness must be added the analysis of modern colonialism, because modernity, capitalism and modern colonialism express and highlight different aspects of the same situation of ontological homelessness (see Mignolo 2011). In this regard it is perhaps significant – a case of aptonymia – that the Latin word *colonia* is a translation of the Greek *apoikia*, literally meaning away from home. For, whereas migration and settlement in new places are as old as humanity itself, what characterises modern European colonialism – both in its plantation and settler variants – is the attempt to transplant the original way of life and worldview into the settled territories. Colonists do not integrate into the environment where they arrive but violently impose the world that they come from on to the new environment. In the eloquent words of Charlotte in Marianne Wiggins's novel, *John Dollar*, “the British who were out in Burma were not engaged in new ideas, new books, new ways of being men and women ... They imported Life as They thought It Was, with confidence” (Wiggins 1989: 25–27). For extended periods many colonised lands were literally regarded as being part of the colonising country, as for instance Algeria in the case of the French and the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar still in the case of Britain.

Modern colonialism, as an outgrowth of capitalism, exemplifies its homeless character not only by a failure to meaningfully integrate in new territories, but also by treating colonised lands and peoples as mere resources. In his *Decolonial Ecology*, Malcolm Ferdinand speaks of modernity's colonial and environmental double fracture. Modernity fractured the world into colonisers and colonised. It also fractured the world into humans on the one hand and the rest of nature (the “environment”) on the other. But then modernity fractured these two fractures apart as well. In the modern mind it is as if the trauma of colonisation and the trauma of environmental degradation have nothing to do with each other (Ferdinand 2022: 3). To heal the double fracture Ferdinand proposes that we speak of the current epoch as the Plantacionocene, rather than the Anthropocene. From an eco-feminist perspective, and two decades earlier than Ferdinand, Val Plumwood also connected patriarchy with ontological homelessness by pointing out how patriarchal rationality as it were hovers over against the rest of nature and engages with nature in an instrumentalising and extractive fashion. In her *Environmental Culture – The ecological crisis of reason* she characterises the modern worldview as one of patriarchal, monological rationality. The scientific practice that manifests such a rationality is “sado-dispassionate”, ruthlessly objectifying and commodifying everything with which it engages (Plumwood 2002: 41).

The point is that the abstraction associated with transcendental homelessness leads to extraction. In the words of LSE economist Jason Hickel (2021):

[C]apitalist growth is intrinsically colonial in character, and has been for 500 years. Enclosure, colonization, mass enslavement, extractivism, sweatshops, ecological breakdown – all of this has been propelled by the growth imperative and its demand for cheap labor and nature.

Hickel then, like Plumwood and Ferdinand, goes on to explicitly link the extractivist practices of capitalist colonialism with a dualist ontology – that is, with ontological homelessness. Instead of being at home *in* the world, the human – now a disembodied, instrumentalising mind – hovers *over against* the world. What might be added in conclusion to this section is the observation that the ontological homelessness characteristic of the modern Global North, has among its many consequences in the Global South also led to actual, physical homelessness, displacement and millions of so-called economic refugees flocking to fortress Europe and fortress USA from what is regarded by liberal economics as failed states.

Thinking nature as home

The question that now confronts us is whether there is a future for the world beyond the ontological homelessness of humanity. Is there a way of being at home in the world, and what would the understanding of nature be in such a worldview? In his book, *Thinking Nature – An exercise in negative ecology* (2019), Sean McGrath traces various conceptions of nature throughout Western thought. In agreement with Lukács, McGrath identifies an early Greek understanding of nature as *kosmos* – an ordered world which can be a home for humanity and all other creatures. According to McGrath this understanding of the world is no longer a realistic option for us today despite Romanticism's attempt to revive it. The much-discussed disenchantment of nature that led to nature being regarded as mechanical, dead matter definitively removed the option of a naïve return to nature as a nurturing cradle. McGrath then examines various attempts to think nature in recent philosophical ecological works. A first option is that of simply revelling in nihilism. McGrath identifies this approach in Ray Brassier's work, *Nihil Unbound* (2007), that "positively celebrates the inevitable annihilation of not only the species, and not just the earth, but of the universe itself, because it allows for a speculative apotheosis of the limits of thinking" (McGrath 2019: 71). Next McGrath turns to so called Dark Ecology as expressed in the work of Slavoj Žižek and Timothy Morton (see Morton 2016). The latter approach emphasises that "nature" is a thoroughly human construct. It pleads for more, not less,

technological intervention in nature, but then a technology decoupled from capitalist economics. Also discussed is the political ecology of Bruno Latour that seeks to undermine the distinction between human culture and the rest of nature. McGrath eventually dismisses all these approaches and argues for a negative ecology, where the meaning of nature is not yet known: all that we can say at the moment is what nature is not. We are waiting for a nature to come (McGrath 2019: 104ff.).

While McGrath's sophisticated argument concerning nature in ecological thought must be appreciated, here I part ways with him and argue that a contemporary, non-naïve understanding of nature as home must, despite everything, be pursued. The interrelated human experiences of being at home, longing for home and homecoming are too basic to simply forgo and then remain with apophaticism as McGrath's negative ecology seems to urge. Importantly, any thinking of home, and any thinking of nature in terms of home, will have to hold on to both the sense of being at home and the simultaneous sense of not yet being at home, of being in search of home, or being on the way home.

Phenomenologically the experience of home is a value-saturated experience. It is the experience of concrete importance here and now. In other words, the experience of home is not abstract. Interestingly, in line with 20th century developments in theoretical physics, the experience of home insists that space and time are relative to the one that experiences. In terms of space, one could say that home is the experience of space as place. With home a sheltered hollow is carved out of the rest of the world, and the world then *ipso facto* becomes the *other*. But precisely this carving out of a sheltered hollow of whatever form necessitates a careful paying of attention to the terrain and the surroundings where home is established. This attention itself is an aspect of how space becomes place. Already hinted at with the reference to the other, is the reality that the experience of home institutes a dynamic interaction between interiority and exteriority. The relation is dynamic in that there are no hard and fast boundaries between interiority and exteriority when it comes to home, as witnessed for instance in the built structure of a conventional house that features doors, windows and various kinds of thresholds. But here it must be emphasised that, symbolically speaking, the experience of home is not restricted to conventional dwellings. Symbolically speaking the continuum between the human body as home, a dwelling as home, a town or city as home and even a country as home is well attested in popular as well as academic accounts of human experience⁵. In addition to the originary

5 According to Jäger (1985: 215), "[t]he house, body and city form a privileged unity of mutual implication". Jäger then goes on to investigate the intertwinings of embodiment, inhabitation and civilization. See also the related discussion by Richard Lang (Lang 1985) in the same anthology.

relationality of home – the interaction between interiority and exteriority that is home – it must be noted that home is neither merely material, nor completely immaterial. Home is value-infused materiality. In this sense the notion of home is closely related to what has been described as the phenomenon of flesh⁶.

In terms of the experience of time it can be said that home is the experience of time as rhythm and habit. Much maligned in much of modern thought as what is contrary to human freedom, there is of late a renewed interest in the metaphysics of habit⁷. For the purposes of the present discussion, it is enough to note that the experience of home links memories of a lived past to possibilities for the future in a living present. Apart from memory, or perhaps similar to memory, the past persists in the present in the form of patterns that may be described as habits. These habits also extend along a continuum from material to immaterial patterns of repetition. The spatiotemporal patterns that are habits carry with them a certain momentum which provides continuity into the future. Significantly the continuity is not completely deterministic but may rather be regarded as providing constraints that are also springboards for agency and action. It should be clear that such a speaking of home in terms of time becoming habit is closely related to the experience of selfhood. It is therefore not surprising that “home” has often symbolically been related to the experience of selfhood and subjectivity (see Cooper 1974; Marandiuc 2018).

What has here been described sequentially first in terms of space, and thereafter in terms of time can, of course, never be separated (abstracted) in reality. Experience is concrete, intertwined and processual. The move that now has to be made is to speculatively extend the concrete human experience of home towards other beings and groupings and ultimately towards nature as a whole. On the one hand, thinking of nature in terms of home will have to recognise and theorise the multitude of homes that constitute nature. Perhaps only in abstraction can “nature” be conceived as a whole that is also a home. *In concreto*, nature is always homes within homes within homes, and homes overlapping one another on all imaginable scales. Any attempt to think nature

6 See Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s notion of *la chair* which not only refers to the materiality of the body, but also to our embodied experiences, perceptions and intercorporeal relations with the world. In his unfinished work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty for instance says: “a sort of dehiscence opens my body in two, and because between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things” (1968: 123). This relates well with what has here been described as the dynamic interaction between interiority and exteriority that characterises the experience of home.

7 In this regard one may point to the work of the 19th century French thinker Felix Ravaisson who has recently been receiving renewed attention.

as home must further be connected to conceptions of selfhood or subjectivity. A self is a home, a point of orientation, a unique perspective on the world, that can nevertheless not absolutely be abstracted from the world: each home (each self) is constituted by many homes and also overlaps many other homes.

On the other hand, nature must be conceived as a multitude of processes of homemaking and homecoming. There is no final house and home that becomes the definitive point of orientation from which everything else may be categorised, organised and controlled. In this sense, thinking of nature in terms of homemaking and homecoming is not contrary to Deleuze and Guattari's plea for a nomadology instead of a sedentary image of thought (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 351ff). To be a nomad is not to be homeless and the proliferation of concepts as lines of flight espoused by Deleuze and Guattari may be understood as the way of life of the nomad that is at home on the journey, which is not the same as ontological homelessness.

Oikeiosis: widening circles of homecoming

In the final section of this paper, I want to draw attention to the ancient notion of *oikeiosis*, that might be regarded as an articulation of the ethical implications of thinking of nature as *oikos*⁸ – a home that is simultaneously always being made, and that is always also still a destination for us as humans⁹. While evidence suggests that the notion of *oikeiosis* goes back at least as far as the founder of the Stoa, Zeno of Citium, it is clearly addressed in the work of Chrysippus, the third leader of the Stoic School (Ramelli 2009: xxxiv ff.). In those early phases of Stoicism, *oikeiosis* was connected to the impulse of every living being towards self-preservation. Nature gives each being to itself; it makes each being its own and this ownness is a kind of primary familiarity with itself as a unique perspective on existence. Apart from everything else, nature in Stoic thought is thus the process that causes beings to appropriate themselves (*oikeio*) and to familiarise themselves with themselves. Ramelli explains that “[t]he first element that is [a being's] own and most familiar to every living creature, is its own constitution and the consciousness (*suneidesis*) it has of this, which causes it to reject whatever is harmful to it and to approach whatever is proper and familiar to it” (2009: xxxiv, n. 37).

8 The etymological relation between *oikos* and *oikeiosis* is evident.

9 Part of Stoic ethics, *oikeiosis* has received renewed attention since around the middle of the 20th century (Ramelli 2009: xxxii, n.33). It has also, for instance, been reflected in popular thought in the writing of Czech writer and politician Vaclav Havel (1991).

The point to be appreciated is that, using classical Greek nomenclature, the selfhood of a creature may be described as the homecoming of soul (*psyche*) in nature (*physis*)¹⁰. As witnessed in the perception of animals and the consciousness of humans, the selfhood of creatures is directed both towards external things, and towards the self, so to speak internally. This may again be brought into conversation with the notion of *oikos* in that each self may be regarded as a house that is a home – a dynamic interaction between interiority and exteriority. Importantly, the interaction between interiority and exteriority in Stoic thought did not imply a separation between facts (as out there) and values (as in here) as is the case in the modern bifurcation of nature. According to Ramelli (2009: xli, xlii) Hierocles the Stoic “treats the process of perception (*aesthesis*), even in the case of exterior objects, as always accompanied by interiorization, thanks to which a sense of satisfaction or danger can be associated with one or other sensation”. In the first place *oikeiosis* is therefore a homecoming into selfhood which is never completed, and which is a dynamic, material-evaluative interaction between interiority and exteriority.

The early intimation of *oikeiosis* was appropriated and disseminated in the subsequent tradition “to such an extent that an anonymous Hellenistic commentator on the *Theatetus* already called it *poluthruletos*, ‘very commonly used’ or ‘well known’” (Ramelli 2009: xxxviii). It was, however, in the work of the Roman Stoic, Hierocles (2nd century CE), that the important notion of *social oikeiosis* received a treatment that has been widely discussed in recent scholarship. I do not, however, think that *oikeiosis* and *social oikeiosis* have yet been brought to bear on ecology, and this in my view would be important. In Stoic thought there is a sophisticated understanding of nature that starts from the *proton oikeion* (“first ownness”) of the self, and that is not merely a naïve holding of nature as home as one might be led to think when only reading Greek epic literature and drama as Lukács did in his *Theory of the Novel*. Furthermore, in the sociable *oikeiosis* of Hierocles, this notion of familiarising is dynamic, in the sense that it is an ethical imperative to continuously enlarge the reach of familiarity. In his work, *On Appropriate Acts*, of which only fragments survive, Hierocles outlines his understanding of duty in terms of concentric circles. In the centre of the circle is the self (itself a process of homecoming). A next circle around the self for Hierocles would be one’s family, and the process of *oikeiosis* would be the familiarising of the self into this broader home. Whereas this is still fairly “natural” with regard to family, a next circle for Hierocles is one’s *ethnos*,

10 Both nature and soul for the Stoics were material.

or people, and eventually the entire human race. In this way the ownness of the self, with its accompanying sense of value and care, is extended in ever widening circles of familiarity so that eventually the whole human race becomes one's home (Ramelli 2009:xlirii, lv).

It is important to realise that this process of *oikeiosis* as envisioned by Hierocles and the Stoic tradition, is in many ways the opposite of modern colonisation and specifically the ontological colonisation that is rightly rejected in contemporary thought. Whereas modern colonisation involves an imposition of the self on the other (stemming precisely from a situation of ontological homelessness), *oikeiosis* involves a widening of the self that stretches the self towards the other so that the other is not completely *other* anymore but becomes more and more familiar. Modern colonialism, both in its literal, imperialist guise from the 15th to the 19th centuries, and in the contemporary guise of neoliberal globalisation, involves the forced accommodation of the colonised world to the subjectivity and way of life of the colonisers. In contrast, *oikeiosis* involves an expansion and enrichment of the subjectivity of the self to accommodate itself to an ever-broadening diversity and interdependence. In *oikeiosis* the self strives to become at home in an ever-expanding home of homes. This may be the true meaning of an ecological worldview.

If this notion of social *oikeiosis* makes sense, then I submit that it can and should be extended beyond the original anthropocentric boundaries in Hierocles's thought and understood as an approach to ecology – a veritable *oikology*. Nature is a process of selving that is a process of homecoming that is a process of homemaking into ever widening familiarity and being at home. *Oikeiosis* happens throughout nature at all imaginable scales: that of organisms, but also of species, ecosystems and biospheres. For humans *oikeiosis* constitutes a conscious, ethical task. Such a conception has important consequences for thinking about economics and decolonisation in the contemporary context.

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