

# The Concept of the World in Modern Philosophy

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# *The Concept of the World* *in Modern Philosophy*

## **Introductory**

The question on the world, on its being and appearance, on its reason and meaning, on its order and ratio – the question concerning the cosmos and its logos is one of the most fascinating riddles that seekers of wisdom and truth have sought to solve for thousands of years worldwide, in the east and the west, in the south and the north. Philosophers inherited this fascination from primeval mythologies and religions, maintaining it with great care. Ancient Vedic texts on the revelation – which the sages, the Rishis, recorded as divinely ‘heard’ songs – describe a model of the world in which human beings, through their minds and knowledge as a microcosm, liken and open themselves to the universe as its image and mirror.

The myth of the creation of the world out of what was originally chaos inspired the early Hellenic wise men in their attempts to establish a beautiful order of all things based on the first principle, *arche*. Their teachings on the cosmos pervaded the early centuries of their reflections completely. They were persistent in their reflections on the reason why everything in the world could be traced back to an ultimate substance or a primal measure. It is from this that doubts arose whether the world was eternal or created, whether there was only one or many worlds, whether it moved or was at rest, whether it was in an ongoing process of change or remained immutable, whether it was finite or infinite, whether it was rational and well-ordered or a complete mess and chaos. In Western philosophy, such questions led to the thoughtful search for the primordial substance, primal ground, *arche*, logos, order and the truth of all things. What came into the focus of considerations after cosmos – was the human being, *anthropos*. This bond between the world and the human being has remained central in philosophy to date. The world has been elevated to the notion of homeland and *oecumene* of the human being, to the known and inhabited world.

In the modern era, once human beings sailed around the planet and globalisation was unleashed, the worldview changed significantly. The desire for the infinite dissolved the finitude of the world. Humans lost their privileged position in the world, and Earth was ‘displaced’ from the centre of the universe. After cosmological ideas were abandoned making way for a return to regulative ideas – which in Kant’s critical philosophy reflect absolute totality in a synthesis of phenomena – subsequent idealistic systems again tried to open the world to the absolute origin. Finally, Hegel produced his grandiose design of a universal world history whose movement was viewed rationally in the progress of freedom. This, however, was the swansong of the metaphysical epic of the world, thrown later into the jaws of positivism and nihilism.

Since the dissolution of metaphysics in the nineteenth century, the question of Being and Logos has been in a crisis. Nietzsche announced the coming of an era of nihilism in which traditional metaphysical concepts would lose their importance. In this context, the old metaphysical concept of the world also lost its validity. Husserl and his phenomenological successors searched for an explicit approach to a new reflection on the world and the lifeworld. Accordingly, Heidegger was right to state that this topic was discussed explicitly in the early twentieth century. In any case, it has since become a main subject of constant philosophical confrontation.

The three contributions that we are publishing in this thematic bloc on the concept of the world were presented at The Concept of the World in Philosophy conference at Matrix Croatica in Zagreb on the 6th and 7th of December 2018. In the first paper, Jan Levin Propach, who works at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and the University of Augsburg, examines the dual use of the notion of the world in Leibniz's philosophy. On the one hand, the notion 'world' refers to highly complex divine thoughts, that is, the idealistic realm in Leibniz's metaphysics. On the other hand, he describes the world as the realm of living beings, that is, of individual substances and monads. He first explains the ideal realm, which in Leibniz consists of three areas formed by combinations. These are simple ideas, then complex ideas, complete concepts and, ultimately, possible worlds. Propach's focus then moves on to monads, and their perceptions and appetites. In a final step, the author attempts to illuminate the connection between the two areas – the ideal and the monadic. He concludes that, in Leibniz's metaphysics, creation needs divine ideas. By contrast, the creation of the world appears to be a 'miracle' for Leibniz. The miraculous shows itself at the transition of dead combinations of ideas inside the divine reason to the living beings and spontaneous substances outside the divine ratio.

In his *The World as a Phenomenon* essay, Niels Weidtmann from the University of Tübingen presents his comments on Husserl, Heidegger and Rombach, and tries to offer a new phenomenological approach. He starts from the controversial question of whether the world is a phenomenon in the sense of philosophical phenomenology. In fact, according to Husserl's understanding, the world cannot be a phenomenon in its own right because every phenomenon appears in a referential context, that is, on a horizon. The world itself does not appear. The world is the ultimate horizon and cannot therefore refer beyond itself to another horizon. Accordingly, it is by no means self-evident that the world can be considered to be a phenomenon. In his contribution, the author goes beyond the assumption that the world is a phenomenon and tries to show that it is a phenomenon *par excellence*. In a sense, the world is the only phenomenon in general, because it not only lends its special meaning to everything that appears in it, but also – and this at the same time – manifests itself differently in accordance with this particular meaning. He shows this in particular in connection to Heidegger and Rombach. In doing so, he reveals some essential aspects of the phenomenological analysis of 'the world'.

In the last paper on *The Concept of the World in Recent Croatian Philosophy*, I introduce the development of research and discussions on the concept of the world in the second half of the twentieth century. I link the rise and history of the question on the world to the decline of the metaphysical question on Being and to the nihilistic crisis of reason. This crisis of the logos found its manifestations above all in the predominance of scientific positivism and a preponderance of worldview ideologies. My questions focus on the philo-

sophical trends of the second half of the twentieth century in Croatia. The depiction pursues, above all, the political attraction and intellectual influence of the controversial topic of the emergence of a pluralistic world of ideas and the democratic turn. It opens with the question of how philosophical reflections on the concept of the world corresponded to the opening up of the processes of democratic governance in society.

Based on the ideas presented in the three articles, we can conclude that the study of the world in various streams of thought in modern philosophy provides a dialogical and multi-perspectival framework. It birthed some very different and even opposed theoretical views and philosophical orientations in our approach to deliberations and debates about common aspirations. The question on the world seems to have, therefore, retained a pervasive effect of deliberation in the present, with which it can prompt further philosophical research missions and initiate new thinking adventures in the future.

**Pavo Barišić**