

## I. ARTICLES

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THE HUMAN WORLD AND ITS BOUNDARIES  
IN THE LIGHT OF LINGUISTIC DATA\*

One of the central notions, or even the key notion of ethnolinguistics is that of linguistic worldview. But whose view is it, who does the viewing? Perhaps it is language that “views” the world but the true subjects are human beings, the speakers of languages, whether using them as individuals or as groups. As perceiving subjects, humans leave their mark on the picture they apprehend, embellish it in their own peculiar way, accentuating this and that, adding their subjective judgements, bringing the world closer to themselves. This is obviously known as anthropocentrism. Let me quote a concise definition of the notion by Nina Arutyunova:

If God created us, then we preserved the way we view ourselves in language. Language acts as a mirror reflecting everything that we discover about ourselves and want to communicate to others. Through language we express our physicality, our internal states, our emotions, intellect, stance with regard to the material and non-material world, to nature, both earthly and cosmic, our actions, our attitudes to the community and fellow humans. We equip language with a potential for wordplay and creativity. We preserve our views in the names we give to natural phenomena, together with our utilitarian and aesthetic judgments. Each word reveals its human origin. Language is thoroughly anthropocentric. The human presence can be felt in every aspect of language, but mostly in lexis and syntax: semantics, sentence structure, and discourse organisation. (Arutyunova 1993: 3)

Anthropocentrism has had a long tradition and a rich literature, embracing not only works in language sciences but also in anthropology, philosophy,

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literary studies, and other human-centred disciplines. It is, however, a general term that demands specifying. Sometimes it is understood only as pertaining to the human perception of the world, through the narrow categories of **anthropomorphism** and **animism**.

A volume titled *Anthropocentrism in Language and Culture* has been published in Moscow recently.<sup>1</sup> It is yet another publication in the Moscow “red series”, inspired by the Lublin red series. We have tried to take into account various aspects and forms of anthropocentrism on the basis of, among others, linguistic data, folk texts, legends, and beliefs. Our aim was to define anthropocentrism more precisely, both from the inside and from the outside (i.e. to mark the boundaries of the phenomenon and the concept). I will merely touch upon this issue here in order to draw attention to “the other side” of anthropocentrism, i.e., to that with which it is juxtaposed, an issue so far somewhat neglected in academic debate.

Two directions or dimensions of the relationship between humans and the world can be identified: **from people towards to the world**, and **from the world towards the people**. In other words, we do not only absorb (“internalise”) the world, leaving our mark on it, but we also “compare” the external world to ourselves: we categorise, make judgments of ourselves and of others by referring to humans with the aid of the terms and concepts that we also apply to animals, plants, or artifacts. Nevertheless, whether in understanding the world in our terms or in understanding ourselves through the world’s categories, we *connect* with it.

Consider this idea by a scholar well-known in Poland, Vladimir Toporov:

We are judged not only in the top-down but also in the bottom-up perspective. We should feel the need to humanise everything that is lower than us, in all aspects of their development, from God to objects. (Toporov 2015: 150)

It seems obvious that we are judged from above by God and superior forces. But we are also judged from the bottom by those inferior to us, the kingdom of animals, plants, natural phenomena, and even objects.

Let us return, however, to anthropocentrism. What do we need to do to define the concept more clearly?

Firstly, we need to focus on the perceiving subject, i.e. the actual humans. What human features and qualities do we transfer to the surrounding world by using language as a categorising tool? It is interesting that names of human body parts are used for the purpose (as is widely discussed in the literature), aspects of human physiology and psyche (the senses of sight and hearing, speech, feelings), its characteristic actions, etc. The function

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the review by Antonenko in this issue.

can also be fulfilled by the person as a whole. One can see it as either anthropocentrism or animism, depending on which features, physical or psychological, are attributed to the elements of the external world.

Secondly, the object of the anthropocentric portrayal should be determined, in the sense of what elements of the world are being endowed with human features. The human world coexists with the world of flora and fauna, natural phenomena, the world of artifacts, supernatural phenomena, and the superior sphere of the Divine. Humans exhibit a certain stance towards each of these worlds. We can also function as both the subject and object of perception. On the one hand, we take ourselves as the reference frame for considering other worlds, on the other hand, we look at ourselves through the eyes of these worlds, comparing ourselves to them.

Anthropocentrism does not only mean that we “cognize” the world using our own “tools” (e.g. we measure space through ourselves, as in Russian *пядь* ‘span’, *шаг* ‘step’, *сажень* ‘fathom’, *локоть* ‘elbow’), but also the other way round: we separate ourselves from the world, juxtaposing what is human with what belongs to animals, plants, objects, etc. For instance, when describing ourselves we use the term *hand*, while describing animals we use the term  *paw*. In Russian *брюхо* ‘belly’ can be used only with reference to animals; *шерсть* ‘fur’ is used to talk about animals, while *волосы* ‘hair’ describes people. Similarly, *ногти* ‘nails’ goes with people and *когти* ‘claws’ with animals, *ребенок* ‘baby’ refers to humans and *детеныш* ‘young’ to animals. The same holds true for *дети* ‘children’ and *приплод* ‘litter’ or *потомство* ‘progeny; the young’ in animals, *пища* ‘food’ vs. *корм* ‘feed’. The distinction is also made in verbs: *говорить* ‘speak’ when humans communicate and *лаять* ‘bark’ or *ржать* ‘neigh’ when we talk about animals, *умирать* ‘die’ when referring to humans and *дохнуть* when we talk about animals, etc.

Yet another side of anthropocentrism is the teleological one, which says that the world has been designed especially for human beings, with a view to their needs and common good. Consider the comets, whose function, according to folk beliefs, is to communicate important events such as famine, war, or death of someone you know (e.g. ruler, monarch), etc. The sun and the moon exist in order to illuminate the world, the rainbow acts as a bridge to heaven but it appears unexpectedly so that people cannot find it and actually reach heaven (RKZhBN, vol. 5/2: 68, 210). According to some other beliefs, “frost, wind, grain, hail, mist, dew, hoarfrost, and blizzard were created by God for the sinful. If God permits, it will rain; if not, he will give us drought and we will all die” (ibid., p. 211). According to Polish folk tales, “fire was created by God for people and for their convenience” (SSSL, vol. 1/1: 284–285, from Motycz); “Fire? It was also created by God for people”

(*ibid.*, from Krasiczyn). The same belief was found in Russia, near Vologda, where they treat fire with respect and call it *batiuszko* ‘daddy’: “What is fire and what are its origins, people do not know and were never curious to learn; simply God gave it to people for their convenience” (RKZhBN, vol. 5/4: 149). In the region of Kaluga, “God created the Earth flat and smooth so that people could ride horses and not make them tired” (*ibid.*, vol. 3: 18).

Anthropocentrism also has a genealogical aspect. People’s relationship with the world is such that the world’s elements come from people and *vice versa*. This can be found in etiological legends, widespread in all Slavic and non-Slavic folk traditions, giving testimony to the origin of some animals, plants, natural phenomena, to be found in people or in the human body. Those legends also speak of people being transformed into animals, plants (a tree or a flower), celestial bodies, etc. (cf. Zowczak 2000; Belova 2004; Belova and Kabakova 2014).

Anthropocentrism embraces the beliefs that some elements of the external world unite with people: they are bound with people through a common fate and are mutually dependent. The relationship between people and trees has many manifestations, e.g. the metaphor of “a branch of a tree” to denote a girl’s arm or plait or of “a barren tree” (*бесплодным деревом*) to denote a woman with no children. Finally, we can talk about parallelism between people’s lives and trees, we can talk about similarity of life forces: a tree planted on the occasion of a child being born cannot be felled, it cannot outgrow the child (when the tree trunk is as thick as the child’s neck, the tree must be felled), people are kept in wooden coffins after death (Agapkina 2013), etc.

Another manifestation of “domesticating” the world is the communication between people and the external world, animals, plants, natural phenomena, as well as other people.

## People – animals

### People → animals (personification of animals)

This topic has been researched by a colleague of mine, Aleksandr Gura (2017), an expert in the field of folk zoology and animal symbolism. The author does not only rely on linguistic data and the manifestation of anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism of animals therein, but also considers the apparent functional and other kinds of similarity between people and animals (the observations mainly concern wild animals even though the domain of pets offers more obvious and numerous examples). In this domain,

human proper names are used generically to denote animals, e.g. in Polish *jakubek* as the wolf, in Russian *мишка* ‘bear’, *петушка* ‘rooster’, in Ukrainian *петрику* ‘ladybird’. Animals, especially domestic ones, can also be given human names: *Ivan* the stork, *Mashka* the cow, etc. (similar nominations are widespread in folk texts). Names for animal can also be ethnonymic (cf. *żyd* ‘Jew’ as a name for the sparrow, *prusak* ‘Prussian’ or *cygan* ‘Gypsy’ for the cockroach, etc.) or relate to kinship (*brat* ‘brother’, *kuma* ‘friend’ for the fox). Most examples have to do with physical features, with animals being presented in folk legends and myths as taking the complete human form (perhaps only under certain conditions or in certain situations) or exhibiting only some human features (e.g. bears with human feet). Animals can experience human emotions and possess human qualities and skills (beavers cry when caught, foxes are sly, pigeons are mild). Animals perform certain human activities (mosquitos dance in the air; bees work and steal honey from other bees; birds, snakes, and mice get married, have weddings, etc.). Animal sounds and voices are often perceived as possessing human-like qualities: eagle owls laugh out loud, some birds speak foreign languages.

There is a special bond between people and animals: people greet arriving birds with unique formulas, and birds seem to respond to those greetings; the cooekoo is a witness to people’s regrets and concerns, it is often asked to send greetings and messages to one’s deceased kin (folk beliefs in the region of Pskov); people speak to cattle, wish them a merry Christmas, notify them of the host’s death.

### Animals → people (people as similar to animals)

The animal terminology can often be used in an offensive way, e.g. Russian *скот/скотина* ‘cattle’, *собака* ‘dog’, *гад* ‘reptile’, *гадюка* ‘viper’, *змея* ‘snake’, etc. The names of animal body parts, when used colloquially to talk about people, sound rude and offensive. However, in local dialects, similar nominations may sound quite neutral. In one of the Orlov dialects (South Russia), it is normal (without any negative connotations) to use *морда* ‘muzzle’ in the sense of ‘human face’ (*Самая красивая на морду у них Манька* ‘Manka has the most beautiful face’), *лапа* ‘paw’ in the sense of ‘human arm or leg’ (*Иван лапу вчера повредил* ‘Ivan hurt his arm/leg yesterday’), *шкура* ‘animal skin’ in the sense of ‘human skin’,<sup>2</sup> *когти* ‘claws’ in the sense of ‘nails’ etc. Such language use, typical of many local dialects,

<sup>2</sup> This is different in standard Russian, where the word denoting the human skin is *кожа*, as well as in Polish, where *skóra* ‘skin’ covers both animal and human domains, without an obvious extension from one to the other.

is usually classified by literary dictionaries as colloquial, offensive, or vulgar (Grishanova 2003; Brysina and Kudryashova 2004).

An interesting publication in this field is the volume edited by Ekaterina Rakhilina and her collaborators, titled “Verbs of animal sounds: typology of metaphors” (Rakhilina et al. 2015). The book presents the material collected from more than twenty languages, Indo-European (English, German, Yiddish, Norwegian, Welsh, Greek, Armenian, Hindi), Finno-Ugric (Mordovian, Finnish), Turkish and Mongolian (Bashkir, Tatar, Kalmuck), Caucasian (Adyghe, Aghul), languages of the Far East and south-eastern Asia (Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Indonesian). It is an in-depth analysis in lexical and semantic typology but is also interesting from the perspective of anthropocentrism. The introduction quotes Anna Wierzbicka and her claim that language is anthropocentric: it does not verbalise everything but only that which is significant for its users (as is the case with animal features). Languages group verbs that denote animal sounds in different ways. There are relatively many verbs that code the sounds produced by dogs, cats, sheep, or birds but fewer verbs (if any) that describe the sounds made by exotic or rare animals. All the verbs and exclamations pertaining to animals can be also used to describe people, the sounds they produce, or emotional reactions and related behaviour (aggression, coarseness, gossiping, cheating, etc.). Examples from Russian include: *рычатъ* (like a lion), *реветъ* (like a cow), *выть* (like a dog), *мычатъ* (like a cow), *ржеть* (like a horse, meaning ‘to laugh out loud’), *щебетать* (like a sparrow), *пицать* (like a chicken), *фыркать* (like a horse), *шипеть* (like a viper), *гоготать* (like a goose), *блеять* (like a sheep), *брехаться* (like a dog, in the sense ‘to lie’); cf. Polish. *ryczeć* ‘roar’, in the sense ‘to sing loudly, out of tune’, ‘to cry loudly, ‘to laugh out loud’ (like a wild animal or a cow), *piszczeć* ‘squeak’ in the sense ‘to speak or complain in a high voice’ (like a mouse), *mruczeć* ‘to murmur something under one’s breath’, *kwiczeć* ‘to lough out loud’ (like a pig), *wyc* ‘to howl’ (like a dog or wolf), etc.

## People and plants

### People → plants (humanisation of plants)

This type of anthropocentrism, in both directions, has been researched by Tatyana Agapkina (2013). The author claims that, on the one hand, according to folk beliefs, trees are endowed with human qualities: they are marked for sex (male/female), which determines their features and their fate; they are endowed with human emotions and capabilities (trees can talk, cry,

laugh, worry, etc.). On the other hand, trees and people are believed to share the same fate, the same course of life. It is a kind of parallelism in the sense that people grow in the same way that trees do. However, their respective fates can be complementary (people die when trees grow) or shared (human life continues in the lives of trees). People communicate with trees, e.g. they propose to marry their children with the tree's children hoping to heal the former or to alleviate their night cries (*Сосна красна, у тебя сын, а у меня дочка, давай мы их поженим, криксы-плачки поделим* 'Oh, you beautiful pine tree, you've got a son, I've got a daughter, let's marry them, stop their crying'). On Christmas, the hosts threaten a barren tree and pretend to intend to fell it, or greet trees in the orchard. In the Polesia region, a fruit tree was felled upon the landlord's death, people (mostly children) used to be buried under a tree, etc.

Agapkina (2017) researches ballad songs, with a focus on people's attitude towards trees. A common motif is that of a tree growing on the spot of someone's death. Similarities between people and trees are also recognised: trees have a human body (branches function as arms or plaits), the human psyche, emotions, and reactions; they behave like humans: they sigh, talk, cry, complain, the trees grow at a lovers' grave, interlock their branches, etc. (for research in this domain cf. also Usacheva 2008).

### Plants → people (vegetation of people)

Even simple expressions, metaphors, or similies, such as the Russian *зрелые годы* 'mature years' or *увядшая красота* 'faded beauty', evoke archaic images and semantic models. Some concepts and categories are shared by people, animals, and plants, e.g. the Polish verbs *rosnąć* 'grow' or *rodzić* 'give birth to', the nouns *plód* 'fruit' or 'foetus', *nasienie* 'seed' or 'semen', etc. However, differences do exist. The symbolic representation of animals is mostly related to negative judgements and characteristics; it becomes the basis for nomination and pejorative comparisons. Plants, on the other hand, are mostly viewed positively. However, if male names tend to derive from the names of animals, female names tend to come from the world of plants.

In some dialects of eastern Serbia (the region of Swerlig), according to Nedelko Bogdanowicz, *roditi* 'give birth to' is something performed by either a woman or a plant (or a celestial body) but it cannot be used in reference to animals. Those require other, specific verbs: the cow *тели* 'calves', the sheep *јагње* 'lambs', the pig *праце* 'farrows', etc.

People are universally named after plants, and this was originally connected with anthropopeic magic and fertility (Tolstye 1998). This is quite

a common cultural-linguistic phenomenon for the southern Slavs. In Serbia there are many male and female names derived from the names of trees and bushes: *Врбена, Јаблан, Јаворко, Јаворка, Јасен, Јелица, Грана* (little branch); many are derived from flowers: *Гороцвет, Јасмин, Јасмина, Невен, Невенка, Рузмарин, Ружа; Цветан, Цветанка*; others come from fruits and berries: *Босиљка, Вилиња, Дуња, Јабучка, Јагода, Кајсија, Гроздан* (грозд ‘grape’), *Грозда, Гроздана, Грозданица*, etc.

Some East Slavic groups still use plant-based first names and terms of endearment, such as the Russian *цветик мой* ‘my flower’ or *ягодка* ‘my little berry’, and many more can be found in local dialects. Most are used in wedding and funeral songs.

The phraseology of Slavic languages uses the plant code to refer to the act of conception and extramarital relationships. Russian examples include *покушать горошку* ‘to eat peas’ and *гороху обвесться* ‘to eat a lot of peas’, meaning ‘to become pregnant’; the same is found in Polish: *grochu się objadła* ‘she ate a lot of peas’; cf. Ukrainian *у горох ускакнула* ‘she jumped at peas’, *лізти у капусту* ‘to go to the cabbage’, *скакати у гречку* ‘jump to buckwheat’, *ходити на други грушкы* ‘go to one’s friend’s pears’, Czech *lézt do hrachu* ‘climb into peas’, *lézt do konopí někomu* ‘climb into hemp to someone’, Slovak *chodit do cudzej kapusty/cudzeho taku* ‘go to someone else’s cabbage/poppies’; Russian *ходить по зеленым* ‘walk on greens’, etc.

The majority of metaphors involving plants in folk language and culture are grounded in the domain of flowers and blooming, a concept that is mapped onto young females to describe their fertility. The lexis and phraseology in this regard (with the roots *kwiat-/kwiet-* and *kras-*) is used to code the most important concepts in this domain, to denote sex and sex organs, menstruation, conception, but also symbolizes the wedding ceremony.

Flowers are also referred to in coding the domain of death: the souls of the dead “bloom” on earth, with flowers and greenery being their earthly emanations. According to Ludmila Vinogradova, funeral laments use plants to represent the youth and children (cf. Tolstaya 2008b).

## People and natural phenomena

### People → natural phenomena (humanisation of nature)

In the context of people and natural phenomena, one can mention linguistic and poetic metaphors such as the Polish *milczenie gór* ‘silence of the mountains’, *gwar morza* ‘the hustle of the sea’, *słońce wygląda zza chmur* ‘the sun lurks from behind the clouds’, or the Russian *звезда с звездю*

*zobopum* ‘a star talks to a star’ (from Mikhail Lermontov). One can also mention the sphere of beliefs: *ziemia śpi* ‘the earth/soil is sleeping’, *ziemia jest brzemienna* ‘the earth/soil is pregnant’ (therefore, according to some folk tradition, it is forbidden to touch the soil, dig holes in it, hammer in pegs, etc. before the Feast of Annunciation on March 25).

Anthropomorphism of celestial bodies or natural phenomena is less conspicuous (although there obviously exist folk characters such as the Sun, Month, Wind, Dawn, River, etc.) since those bodies are not endowed with human physical features. However, they are often portrayed as sexual beings (the Sun is male) and in terms of kinship: the Moon (*Luna*) is the older daughter of the Sun, the North Star is the younger daughter, winds are the sons and brothers of the Sun, etc. Celestial bodies lead human-like lives (the Sun has got its home and family: the mother, the wife, children, brothers, sisters) perform human-like actions: the Sun chases the Moon, he rides a winged horse, etc.

According to some Polish folk beliefs, the Sun and the Moon are husband and wife, or fiancés, or two brothers whose sisters are the stars; the male Sun has got parents, a mother, a sister, and a wife. In Christmas carols the Sun and the Moon take care of the newborn Child, they make Holy Mary beautiful; in songs the Sun lowers its head, leans out of the clouds; in fairy tales the Sun travels around the clouds, rides horses around the world, swims in the sea, dances, jumps, bows, goes to sleep, rests behind the mountains. The Sun has got its home and farm; he feeds on honey, laughs, cries, misses others, gets angry, etc. (cf. SSSL 1996- 1/1: 121–125). People interact with the Sun by greeting it.

People also communicate with the Moon by saying: *Мисеч, я дам тебе золотые рога, а ты мне доброва здоровья!* (‘Oh, Moon, I give you golden horns, you give me health!’), the region of Vologda, RKZhBN 5/3: 20). Among Slavs, people also address the Moon with pleas to heal their teeth. They also make all kind of pleas to the sun, fire, and earth. In the Vologda region, some prayers are addressed to streams for medicinal purposes (RKZhBN 5/2: 69). Children ask the rainbow to send down rain: *Радуга-дуга, дай дождя!* (‘Rainbow-rainbow, give us rain!’). When the rains are prolonged and people cannot wait to see the sun, they say: *Радуга-дуга! Не давай дождя, давай солнышка, давай ведрышка!* (‘Rainbow-rainbow, do not give us rain, give us some sun!’), RKZhBN 5/2: 529).

### Natural phenomena → people (people becoming similar to the four elements and natural phenomena)

There is relatively little data on comparing people to the four elements and natural phenomena. There are some linguistic metaphors such as the Polish *kamienne serce* ‘heart of stone’ or *rozzzaleć się jak burza* ‘get angry like a storm’, but more evidence points to the common fate of humans and nature, especially the stars. In the Vologda region, there is a well-known folk belief that when a baby is born, a star is set alight, shining for the whole of that person’s life. The moment the person dies, the star falls out of the sky. The intensity of the star’s luminance depends on the person’s piety (RKZhBN 5/2: 529).

### People and the world of objects (matter)

#### People → objects (humanisation of objects)

The human attitude towards artefacts, which are attributed human names and qualities and so become human-like, is another manifestation of anthropocentrism. Suffice it to recall a few examples of objects, or their parts, named after human body parts, often with the use of diminutives, as in the Russian *ручка дверит* ‘door handle’, *ножка стула* ‘chair leg’, *головка лука* ‘onion head’, or *носик чайника* ‘teapot spout’ (lit. little nose’), etc.

#### Objects → people (objectification of people)

In some etiological legends God created people from matter, e.g. clay (cf. Church Slavonic *бренное тело*), soil (Church Slavonic *яко земля еси и в землю отидеши* ‘you are soil and will return to soil’), sand (Russian *из него песок сыплется* ‘sand pours out of him’), dough (Russian *люди из одного теста* ‘people of the same dough’, Ukrainian *з м’якого тіста* ‘from a soft dough’ – of a weak-willed person). Humans are formed the same way as a potter forms pots (Polish *ulepieni z jednej gliny* ‘made of the same dough’); they are woven or sewn (Russian *неладно скроен да плотно шит* ‘wrongly tailored and tightly sewn’, *человек Божий обшит кожей* ‘God’s person, sewn in skin’, i.e. simple and naïve); they may be forged by a blacksmith (Russian *человек крепкого закала* ‘a person strongly hardened’, Serbian *човек доброг кова* ‘a person well-forged’); they may be carved in wood (Russian dialectal *вырезанный* ‘cut out’, i.e. ‘very similar, alike’), baked in an oven like bread (Russian *недопёка* ‘poorly baked bread’ – of a clumsy person, *поскрёбыш* ‘flour residue’ – of the youngest child in the family) (Tolstaja 2008a).

## People and the world of demons

Two aspects can be distinguished here: the transfer of human characteristics onto mythological creatures (humanisation of demons) and the reverse (demonisation of people). I will not be elaborating on this issue, but see Vinogradova (2000a,b, 2016) for thorough analyses. The author focuses on personification, anthropomorphism, and zoomorphism of mythological creatures, as well as people's attitude towards the world of demons.

## People and the world of God

Again two aspects can be distinguished in this area: a transfer of features from humans to God and saints (humanisation of God and saints) and the reverse (idolisation of people). Very briefly, most linguistic and cultural data on the topic come from legends (e.g. on how God wandered the earth with saints) or the so-called folk Bible (Zowczak 2000), from the Russian "national Bible" (Belova 2004), from the folk calendar with particular festivals devoted to saints, as well as from other texts of folk culture such as commands, curses, prohibitions, etc.

The data concerning idolisation of people by being attributed supernatural powers are not so robust. Usually, such powers (e.g. supernatural sight or vision, the ability to heal or otherwise affect other people, animals, or mythological creatures) can be acquired only on certain occasions, e.g. during conception, birth, etc. It depends on superior forces, sacred beings, or contacts with that which does not belong to this world.

## Final remarks

I would like to end by quoting two diametrically opposite opinions on anthropocentrism. The eminent humanist, recently deceased, Vyacheslav Ivanov<sup>3</sup> delivered a lecture a few years ago titled "New discoveries. Humanity and Future", in which he said:

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<sup>3</sup> Vyacheclav Ivanov died in October 2017. He was an extraordinary personality, with great achievements in many disciplines. The scope of his research was impressive. His death is a huge loss to the scholarship. Ivanov left his mark on comparative grammar, Indo-European languages (mostly Anatolian, Baltic, and Slavic), comparative mythology, studies in the Slavic and Indo-European antiquity, ethnogenesis of Slavs and Indo-Europeans, poetic history and theory, literary studies (mostly Russian avant-garde literature), philosophy, and anthropology, among other fields.

A shocking discovery of modern physics is the probable corroboration of the principle of anthropy or the anthropological principle, which means that from the very moment of its creation, the Universe was arranged in such a way as to accommodate human beings. [...] But why did the Universe, our home, need an inhabitant? I may be wrong, but I reason that if we weren't here, the Universe would have no tools to look at itself from the outside. [...] In order to admire the whole beauty of nature, it needs to be looked upon through human eyes.

This is the anthropological principle in its teleological dimension.

The opposite opinion was expressed by a Serbian folklorist and folk culture researcher, Miriana Detelić (just two days before her death). It was then published in the book she co-edited with Lidia Delić (Detelić and Delić 2017) that I received from our mutual friend, Dejan Ajdačić. This is the fourth work in the series published by our Serbian colleagues: the first one is devoted to the creatures inhabiting the air (birds), the second to those living on the ground (snakes and reptiles), the third to water creatures (fish), and the fourth one to blood, an element of the world (like e.g. fire).

Miriana Detelić says:

Looking at the world from the perspective of non-human creatures leads to a de-anthropocentrism of the maxim "man is the measure of all things". This maxim is not only harmful, as it justifies the destruction of biosphere on a cosmic scale, it leads to endless wars, to the general brutalisation of life, both in its material and non-material aspects [...]. This maxim, to put it simply, is also stupid, as no other creature would put its worst qualities to the foreground: greed, aggression, intolerance. Sadly, it appears that people can talk about the surrounding world only from the human perspective. A well-developed intellect, which we are so proud of, fails here dramatically. I tend to think that the maxim was not an expression of Protagoras' pride but rather a voice crying in the wilderness.

This view of anthropocentrism comes from an ethical perspective. As these quotations show, the problems of the place of humans in the world and the boundaries that separate people from its other inhabitants are relevant and worthy of debate.

*Translated by Konrad Žyško*

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