

The Nature of The Artificial: Augmenting Negrotian Artificiality with Heideggerian-Whiteheadian Naturality.

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ABSTRACT

The expression 'nature of the artificial' can be understood in (at least) two distinct, yet possibly related, senses as denoting (i) the essence (or whatness) of the artificial, and (ii) that which stands as a given 'other' to the artificial. Recently, Negrotti [1] has developed a sophisticated mimetic theory of the artificial grounded in three notions - observation, exemplar, and essential performance - that attempts to articulate the former. In this paper, it will be argued that, notwithstanding the merits of this scheme, principal of which are the self-evident simplicity of its conceptual foundations and its possible overall correctness, it suffers from a number of drawbacks. These can be shown to follow from what are, in fact, highly problematic metaphysical assumptions about the nature (as essence) of nature (as 'other' to the artificial).

For example, Negrotti is committed to the following three metaphysical theses (among others): (1) there are two 'orders' of natural reality, the accessible (sensible or perceptible) and the inaccessible (insensible or imperceptible); (2) accessible reality is 'objectively-relativistic' which means that true yet partial access to such reality is possible; (3) both accessible and inaccessible reality are hierarchically-structured, the former's hierarchy being finite and the latter's being infinite. On this basis, it might be argued that Negrotian realism occupies a position between Kantian transcendental realism and Heideggerian empirical realism: On the former, reality in-itself is independent of any possible knowledge of it; on the latter, by contrast, reality in-itself is independent of any actual encounter with it [2]. However, Negrotti's endorsement of another metaphysical thesis, viz. (4) reality as it is in-itself is inaccessible, situates his realism in a Kantian setting. Yet this position is readily shown to be problematic when the question concerning the ontological status (appearance or reality) of consciousness is raised: As Searle has rightly argued, "where appearance is concerned we cannot make the appearance-reality distinction because the appearance is the reality" [3, p.122]. In short, at least in the case of

consciousness, reality is accessible and as reality in-itself.

On this basis, it appears necessary to embrace some form of empirical realism. In this connection, it is somewhat ironic to note that Heidegger's own brand of empirical realism is highly problematic. This is because in explicitly endorsing an essentially materialistic (that is, non-experiential or 'vacuous') conception of nature on the one hand, while implicitly allowing for the possibility of a scientifically-realist evolutionary account of the origin of consciousness on the other, it gives rise to the 'hard problem', that is, the problem of explaining how ontological subjectivity (or first-person experience) can arise from an ontologically objective (or non-experiential) substrate [4]. Clearly, in order to resolve this problem, it is necessary to reconsider the ontology of the natural.

In this connection, Whiteheadian panexperientialism offers a promising alternative to materialism. On this metaphysics, the fundamental ontological primitives (or 'atoms') of nature are held to be internally-related, experiential, and temporal (or durational). Furthermore, depending on how they are organized, complexes (or 'societal nexus') of such primitives (or 'actual occasions') are either compound individuals enjoying a higher grade of experience than their components or non-experiential aggregates [5]. In Heideggerian terms, panexperientialism is ontologically-monistic yet ontically-pluralistic, unlike simple panpsychism (in which all phenomenal beings are held to be experiential) which is both ontologically and ontically monistic. Ontical (or phenomenal) pluralism under panexperientialism can be shown to provide a basis for drawing a number of negative conclusions about the artificial, more specifically, for the possibility of 'strong' artificiality, that is, the artifactual replication (as opposed to mere simulation or reproduction) of natural phenomena [6]. Although Negrotti has shown that artificial replication is, in general, impossible, it is important to appreciate that his arguments are based on a different metaphysics, moreover, one that has been shown to be, at the very least, incomplete.

However, ontical pluralism, while (arguably) a necessary condition, does not constitute a sufficient condition for undermining 'strong' artificiality, in particular, artificial consciousness. Notwithstanding panexperientialist rejections of 'zombie'-arguments purporting to demonstrate the validity of consciousness-inessentialism (note #1) [7], it remains the case that orthodox (or Whiteheadian) panexperientialism does not provide any criteria other than the behavioural or mimetic by which to

distinguish between experiential and non-experiential phenomena. This is highly problematic since, as Searle [3] and Chalmers [4] have shown, it is quite possible that complex experiential phenomena (such as human beings) might not manifest their experiential natures; additionally, and conversely, Searle's Chinese Room thought experiment [8] ostensibly shows how behaviour (arguably) associated with consciousness can be replicated by unconscious machines such as computers or robots with computational components.

It will be argued that this problem arises as a result of the failure of Whiteheadian panexperientialism to provide an adequate conceptualization of the processual being of artifacts, more specifically, emergent artifacts. In order to address this problem, it is necessary to complement panexperientialism with a phenomenology of artificing, and, in this connection, Heidegger's onto-phenomenological investigations of the essence of technology [9] are highly significant since, at the very least, they provide a basis for constructing - or 'unconcealing' - such a framework (note #2). In closing, it will be shown how such a framework can be used to distinguish between natural and artificial phenomena on the basis of a poietic difference, that is, a difference in their respective ways of coming-to-be [6].

NOTES

1. This is the thesis that the physical universe would evolve in exactly the same way irrespective of whether or not consciousness existed and is based on the assumption that the physical realm is causally-closed and that consciousness is a non-physical (epi)phenomenon.

2. It is important to appreciate the Aristotelian roots of Heidegger's meditations on this issue, particularly given the deep affinity between Aristotelian organicism and Whiteheadian panexperientialism. In this connection, it is significant to note that Ladrière [10] has presented a sophisticated framework for distinguishing between natural and artifactual phenomena based on a synthesis of Whiteheadian and Aristotelian metaphysics.

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