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GLAWCAL COMMENT #162

WHAT IS THE NOOSPHERE?

Based on

J. Mohorčich: "Scale, Noosphere Two, and the Anthropocene"

gLAWcal
Global Law Initiatives for Sustainable Development

A gLAWcal comment on J. Mohorčich's *"Scale, Noosphere Two, and the Anthropocene"* in Pasi Heikkurinen (Ed.) Sustainability and Peaceful Coexistence for the Anthropocene

Terms like biosphere and hydrosphere connotate a spherical understanding of the interrelation of the ecosystems. They usually refer to the ways of thinking concerning organisms and water. There are many –sphere concepts: lithosphere, pedosphere, atmosphere etc. The query of what sort of knowledge is included in this –sphere rubric is still open. The same happens with another suffix: -cene (which refer to Capitalocene, Gynocene, Holocene and so on). The chapter analyzes the noosphere, which has meant different things to different writers, to define the concept of 'noosphere' itself and to offer an avowedly spatial metaphor as a counterpoint to the abundance of temporal metaphors on offer in contemporary planetary thinking. Two main reasons explain why the use of the noosphere concept is fruitful: the noosphere offers a rubric for beginning to think about the thicknesses, depths and uneven sedimentation of thought on and around Earth. Secondly, an analysis of the noosphere begins to backfill one of the persistent gaps that arise in theoretical debates over the competing roles played by material and ideational factors in 'constructing' reality. According to the author, the concept of noosphere can be productively understood. First, the noosphere scales up with human populations and new systems for the production of knowledge. Second, the author argues for a 'material metabolism' between the noosphere and its environment (between, e.g., the noosphere and the biosphere). Third, he emphasizes that the noosphere is not wholly determined by material conditions. He finally believes the noosphere's not human inputs. Thanks to these arguments, he re-sketches the sphere of human thought, deemphasizing the notion of a unified sphere and emphasizing the loops that draw thought on planet Earth.

In Section 1 the author suggested that questions of scale play an increasingly important role in the ways that knowledge circulates and reproduces itself. He then suggests that the academy faces an intensifying problem of scale and that this intensification maps a trend internal to the noosphere. Exponential increases in knowledge production shift at least some portion of the burden of intellectual labor from generating more ideas toward holistically linking and understanding existing knowledge. In the conclusive section, the author suggests considering the noosphere as a system of ideas.

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The gLAWcal comments are insight and short analytical pieces written by the gLAWcal team. The gLAWcal comments are based on, and inspired by, the books and chapters published within one of the gLAWcal book series published by Routledge Publishing (New York/London).

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