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From Mindfulness of Nature to Mindfulness for Nature: The Gestalt-Ontology of Arne Næss

One area of the University of Vienna is called the 'campus'. After its former function as a hospital and madhouse in the 18th and 19th centuries, the campus is nowadays a rather peaceful complex of buildings and courtyards. In springtime, the fields of grass and flowers between the buildings attract many students to contemplate and escape the bustling city for a while. In one of the courtyards, just next to the departments of Indology and Southeast Asian studies, there is a so-called Judas tree (or, to be precise, a Cercis siliquastrum L.) that is about 300 years old and probably the oldest exemplar in Europe. It has no fewer than ten trunks and it only flourishes one week a year, at the end of April, in all its pink-coloured grandeur.

In springtime, I cannot look at this tree without contemplating a passage written by Gestalt psychologist Rudolf Arnheim. In "Daily Paradise", the last chapter of his fantastic novel *A Topsy-Turvy World* (*Eine verkehrte Welt*, 1936-1940), the protagonist and his female companion leave a frightening world full of disorder where every part, person, family, or interest is unable to transcend itself into a harmonious whole. They leave a world in which there was a "silent war" in every "Gestalt" (Arnheim 1997: 270). On their way to another, more integrating world, the nameless protagonist and his girlfriend suddenly become aware of a tree on the side of the road. They stop and take a close look at it. What they experience and what Arnheim describes in detail is that in the diversity of trunks, branches, colours, birdsongs; in the alternation of density and airy ramification; in the balance of internal activity and serenity; in all the diversification the tree offers, there is a clear organization, a lawful and as it were suprasummative structure of the whole. This structure the tree displays stands in contrast to the world of isolated, mixed-up parts in which the previous chapters of the book were located.

As the protagonist was familiar neither with the first world nor with the now emerging new world, he asks his native female companion: "'Does a new land begin here?' [...] 'Do other people and customs prevail here?'" - "'Out here, no people rule anymore'", the girl responds, "'the law rules here'". "'But who can

effectuate the law, if not people?'", the protagonist wants to know. After a moment, the girl answers: "'The law rules in the things' [...] 'and out of the things, it comes to us.'" (ibid.: 271). Well, what does she mean with 'things', one might ask. Certainly not the single tree, as internally rich as it already may be. On their way into the new world, the couple perceive even more trees, a large group of them, and "the closer they converged, the more incomplete a single tree seemed in itself: the trunks were bending, the crowns were leaning heavily to the side, but looking from the one to the other and along the rows, the deviations of the single trees balanced themselves to a new unit, uniting the road. It seemed as if every tree sacrificed its completeness not to be alone; and in the wind they bowed to each other as if they engaged in dialogue." (ibid.: 274) So not only are the single trees supposed to be lawful entities that carry their organization in themselves, but the whole treeline is such an organized structure and it seems that its parts, the single trees, are even communicating with one another. They seem to have what we may call 'mind' or a certain 'mindfulness': the ability to organize, sacrifice, be aware of each other.

Well, all of this may read nicely in a novel or sweeten a day in springtime at the University of Vienna, but what is the philosophical value of such experiences of, let's say, organized reality? Is the immediate experience of a lawful tree or treeline just an aesthetic mode of being in the world or does it comprise a systematizeable world-view, an ontology in a nutshell? In another book, *Visual Thinking*, Rudolf Arnheim seems to tend to the latter intuition by stating that we humans would have "the ability to see visual shapes as images of the patterns of forces that underlie our existence - the functioning of minds, of bodies or machines, the structure of societies or ideas." (Arnheim 2004: 315) Arnheim seems to suggest that reality is composed of patterns of forces, of lawful structures, of wholes and sub-wholes that are not reducible to mere human perception, but "possess structures of their own" as "interactive fields" (Arnheim 1992: 195). Like the girl in his novel explained, the laws, i.e. the ontological laws of reality, are not effectuated by humans, but are underlying our existence and are therefore contained in reality or nature as such. You may agree, partly in light of our Kantian heritage, partly due to the psychological aspects of Gestalt thinking, that this is a remarkable, maybe even a bold claim. Nonetheless, this claim seems to do justice to our ordinary experiences of the world around us, of us being in and with the world around us. Let us therefore attempt to carve out and clarify the ontology involved in this kind of Gestalt experience. I would like to do this by relocating the example of the tree in the 'Gestalt-ontology' of Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss, to see what Næss can teach us about the existence and experience of such Gestalts.

One of the many articles in which Næss elaborates on his Gestalt ontology is called 'The Metaphysics of the Treeline'. Regarding the title, this seems to be a

good starting point for the clarification of the kind of ontology we experience when we perceive, for example, a tree, a group of trees or a whole treeline (which is the habitat in which trees generally can grow) as an organized whole. The article is only three pages long, but in fact it is so rich in content and presuppositions that together with our example provided by Arnheim it will carry us easily through the remainder of this paper. Already the first few sentences of the article demand our full philosophical attention:

> "In many parts of the world, but perhaps most clearly in the far north, the treeline is full of symbolic value: enigmatic, mystical, threatening, liberating, alluring - and repulsive and ominous. No single person or animal has the capacity to experience all these tertiary qualities of the treeline. The same holds true for the drama of crossing the treeline, either from above or from below." (Næss 2005d: 555)

The philosophical term that stands out the most in this passage is probably 'tertiary qualities'. According to Næss, tertiary qualities include 'symbolic values' and can apparently exceed human (and animal) experience in terms of existence. The treeline itself does possess these qualities, but additionally, they can be experienced by others, i.e. by us as perceiving subjects. It is important to know that such a claim concerning tertiary qualities stands at odds with probably the most part of past philosophers as well as with underlying assumptions in the natural sciences. Apart from Galilei and Descartes, it was probably John Locke who held the most explicit and influential position regarding primary, secondary and tertiary qualities. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1975 [1689]), Locke defined primary qualities as the qualities a thing has in itself, such as its extension, size, its solidity, motion, or mobility, in short: temporal and spatial matters of fact. These qualities exist independently of any observer and are noticeable as 'simple', i.e. basic ideas that correlate with the qualities of the object. Moreover, they are the underlying condition for secondary qualities, such as sounds, colours, tastes, smells, sensations: in short, everything that is empirically perceivable by our senses. Whereas primary qualities really exist and we can have adequate ideas of them, secondary qualities merely appear to our mind and senses. They are contingent on these subjective faculties and our ideas of them do not resemble their origin in the objective qualities of a thing (see Nolan 2011).

Finally, there are tertiary qualities that are dependent on the first two classes of qualities. Tertiary qualities are the powers brought forth by primary and secondary qualities. For a better understanding, we could call them the 'qualia' of an experience: what it is like to have a certain sensation or impression of e.g. a colour, a motion, or a physical form; the feeling of a certain atmosphere, mood, emotional disposition, aesthetic idea; or the felt presence or absence of required-ness, values, meaning, transcendence. Traditionally, these tertiary qualities lie at the very end of the causal chain of qualities and, in comparison with primary and

secondary qualities, they seem to be the most subject-dependent and the least 'real'. After all, their complexity can be mechanically reduced to and physically or geometrically explained by occurrences of primary qualities and their simple ideas. Of course, Locke's position regarding these qualities has been neither the first, nor the definite one. The critical Kant, for example, even relocated primary qualities into the human mind, thereby making the remainder of reality theoretically unknowable: a noumenon devoid of any mind-independent qualities (see Hatfield 2011).

Arne Næss, however, surprises us with a radically different point of view. He turns the non-reciprocal hierarchy of primary, secondary and tertiary qualities upside down, thus ranking tertiary qualities as ontologically fundamental, closely followed by secondary qualities. Primary qualities, in contrast, should better be understood as only existing in the human mind, as abstract *entia rationis*. Næss justifies this shift by emphasizing and prioritizing the immediate experience of the concrete contents of which reality - and nature in particular - is full. In his own words: "The ontology I wish to defend is such that the primary properties [...] are *entia rationis* characteristic of abstract structures, but not contents of reality. [...] The geometry of the world is not a geometry in the world." (Næss 2005b: 453) The examples of the tree and the treeline given above may help in illustrating this position. Both what Næss called 'symbolic values' - as tertiary qualities - and, let's say, the empirically perceivable play of colours, the melody of the birds, the smell of the leaves - as secondary qualities - are fully adequate ideas of how the tree as such really is. If we measure the size of the tree, however, or its distance from another tree, or if we indicate its age in years, months and days, then we are dealing with primary qualities our ideas of which do not correlate one to one with the object in question. In other words and contrary to the traditional view, primary qualities are mere subjective and abstract projections, whereas the experience of secondary and tertiary qualities is the experience of reality as such in its concreteness.

> "The secondary and tertiary qualities are the only ones at hand, if the primary qualities are interpreted as they are in the mechanical world description, namely as mathematical-physical ideal abstract relations (length, curvature, wave, etc.). Such abstract qualities achieve one kind of existence, the ideal, they *are*, but they cannot be *found* hiding under a tree or bush, or anywhere else." (Næss 1989: 56)

Thus according to Næss, this view is much more in accordance with our everyday intuitions. It implies, however, that we grant an infinite enrichment of attributes to reality. To one person, for example, a thing may appear as cold, whereas for another person it is warm. Galilei, Locke, Descartes and others would take such a situation as proof that the thing in itself is neither cold nor warm. For Næss, however, drawing on Protagoras, this example evidences that the real thing is both warm and cold. He writes:

> "A thing which is both warm and cold at the same time does not lead to inconsistency, for the thing is a warm thing in one relation and a cold one in another. All statements 'about the thing' are relational statements: statements like 'thing A is B' are [...] abandoned in favour of 'thing A is B in relation to C' or 'the relational thing AC has the quality B'. For example, 'water A is warm in relation to hand B', 'the relational thing "B-hand-W-water" has the quality warmth'." (Næss 1989: 55)

Formulated as such, the principle of non-contradiction is kept from being violated, while at the same time the infinite, qualitative richness of reality is guaranteed via the postulation of "relational fields" (ibid.), as Næss calls it. Moreover, this notion of a relational field not only externalizes the existence of secondary and tertiary qualities, it also implies that every secondary and tertiary quality is constituted by a relational framework composed of single relata and their mutual interactions. Thereby the relata only exist in favour of their relatedness, not in themselves prior to the relation (see Næss 2005b: 451). A perceiving subject can be part of such a relational framework and therefore be a constituent of a certain quality (see Diehm 2006: 25). The composition of this quality, however, is never exhausted by and only by an act of subjective perception. Thus, secondary and tertiary qualities that are experienced are neither reducible to the human mind nor are they completely subject-independent attributes of a reality as such (see Næss 1995: 244). Rather, such an integrating composition of relata suggests a dynamic alternative to both realism and idealism, empiricism and transcendentalism. We will see below how in Næss' view, this relational ontology can result in practical consequences for our interaction with the environment. For the moment, however, I would like to focus again on the relational composition that underlies and characterizes the existence of secondary and tertiary qualities. With the just described notion of a relational field in mind, we can go back to our initial article on the metaphysics of the treeline.

> "As one moves up toward the treeline, there are signs of new challenges being met by the trees. In the strong winds and thinning soil, trees become smaller and take on gnarled and fantastic shapes. Some have fallen over. They tend to clump together, as we would do. Sometime there are only clusters of trees at particular spots, or single trees that are altogether isolated. They may be courageous, haughty, even triumphant, but also miserable. These characteristics of trees, however, are subordinate gestalts, lesser forms of what is real. The higher-order gestalts predominate. One gestalt is that of upward movement, as far as possible, overcoming obstacles, trying to 'clothe the mountain'." (Næss 2005d: 555-6)

It seems that what Næss has called before secondary and tertiary qualities, or relational fields, he now identifies as Gestalts. What is a Gestalt? In his famous two articles 'Untersuchungen zur Lehre von der Gestalt' I and II, Max Wertheimer characterizes a Gestalt as an immediately perceived unity or whole consisting of individual stimuli. These stimuli are not experienced as isolated summands that

arbitrarily enter into an addition or as associations based on successive regularities. Rather, individual stimuli are experienced as already and almost necessarily combined into structures with inner laws and principles that are responsible for the formation of such wholes (Wertheimer 1992). The examples and experiments Wertheimer provides range over the area of secondary qualities: the visual perception of houses, trees, and geometrical patterns; and the acoustic perception of melodies (Wertheimer 1923: 301ff.) Wertheimer's colleague Wolfgang Köhler even tried to identify the existence of Gestalts in the realm of the physical, i.e. in the domain of what we specified as primary qualities (Köhler 1920). Furthermore, he demonstrated that certain tertiary qualities such as values or requiredness are part of the factual world of primary qualities and not merely phenomenal ideas inadequate to reality as such (Köhler 1939).

When Næss talks about 'relational fields' or Gestalts, he implicitly refers to this notion of Gestalts as it was developed by Wertheimer, Köhler and their colleagues in the early 20th century. By introducing the concept of Gestalt and thereby drawing on this tradition, Næss intends to provide an explanation of how and why the parts of a relational field are at all able to create such a field and thus a secondary or tertiary quality. In doing so, Næss explicitly suspends the psychological questions of if and how Gestalt experiences can be reduced to physical, chemical or physiological processes of our brains (Næss 2005a: 126). One of the reasons why Gestalt thinking is so important for Næss, however, is its accentuation of spontaneous experience. We saw that, for Næss, the spontaneous experience of the concrete contents of reality indicates the ontological composition of the latter. If the relational field of such an experience stays in the purely empirical, i.e. second quality realm, then according to Næss we are talking about "perceptive Gestalts" (Næss 1989: 60). Normally, however, our perception is not deliberately focused on a secondary quality. In everyday experience, secondary and tertiary qualities are inseparable. In such cases, we are dealing with what Næss calls "apperceptive Gestalts" (ibid.). Both sorts of Gestalts not only draw on perceptual stimuli, but also include the perceiver as a part of the experienced whole. "*Gestalts bind the I and the not-I together in a whole.* Joy becomes, not *my* joy, but *something joyful* of which the I and something else are interdependent, non-isolatable fragments." (ibid.: 60-1) Pure facts, however, i.e. abstract primary qualities, are not part of complex spontaneous experiences but are simple ideas, isolated entities that can be applied to reality, but are not directly experienceable, not 'there' in the ontological domain of 'what there is' (see Quine 1963). The terminology of Gestalt theory, on the other hand, "helps us avoid the conception that 'what there is' is a mass of things and their external relations." (Næss 2005f: 330) Therefore, subordinate Gestalts are 'lesser forms of what is real', because they are abstracted and isolated from the experienceable richness of reality. They present "a reality we emphatically do not live in." (Næss 2005e: 119)

This consideration of isolation in a negative fashion brings us to yet another reason why Gestalt-thinking is so important for Næss' point of view. We may have noticed that in the last quote concerning the treeline, Næss not only uses the term 'Gestalt', but he additionally introduces a hierarchy consisting of 'subordinate' and 'higher order' Gestalts. It seems that the Gestalt-qualities on the lower end of this hierarchy tend towards ontological isolation, down to the point of misery, as he writes. The more isolated a thing and its qualities are, the less the thing is real; and the less it stands in relation to its environment, the more the inner life of its wholeness becomes empty, pretentious and 'haughty'. Whereas subordinate Gestalts seem to be reducible to primary qualities such as their extension, their partition, or their size, the Gestalts of a higher order, in forming a coalescence with their environment, display a maximum of secondary and tertiary qualities. In the context of our example, trees of a higher-order Gestalt

> "[...] may be only a few feet tall, whereas their lowland kin soar 50 to 100 feet or more. Yet call them stunted and they ask, What am I lacking? These trees have produced cones. They've realized all their possibilities; they've fulfilled essential functions. Mere size has nothing to do with the quality of life." (Næss 2005d: 556)

In this way of scaling Gestalts vertically, Næss can - but does not explicitly - draw on the thoughts of one of the founding fathers of Gestalt psychology, Christian von Ehrenfels. In the concluding reflections on his influential article 'Über Gestaltqualitäten' (1890), von Ehrenfels introduces the idea of a "Höhe", i.e. height or level, of a Gestalt. This height of a Gestalt depends on the intensity of its parts; it "grows with the product of its constituents, its unity and the diversity of its parts." (Ehrenfels 1988: 158). Such an intensity would involve beauty (a tertiary quality par excellence!), whereas the ugliness and therefore lower order of a Gestalt can be traced back to the dominant isolation of its elements. In his 1916 *Kosmogonie* then, in which von Ehrenfels boldly expands his Gestalt thinking into a metaphysical and even religious theory, he specified the definition of the hierarchy of Gestalts. There he says that if the respective parts of different Gestalts have the same degree of diversity, then it is the stricter unity of this diversity that makes a Gestalt rank higher than the others. Also the other way round: if the unity is similar, then the higher diversity determines the higher place in the Gestalt hierarchy (see Ehrenfels 1990; Ehrenstein 1960). It would certainly be worthwhile to further analyse the connection between von Ehrenfels' discussion of subordinate and higher-order Gestalts and Arne Næss Gestalt-hierarchization in this regard. In general, it is noticeable that both von Ehrenfels and Næss tend to interpret the hierarchy of Gestalts in a metaphysical fashion. Thereby Næss may be less systematic and rigorous than von Ehrenfels, but also for him the highness of a Gestalt comprehends a certain spiritual dimension, as the following passage in our exemplary article 'Metaphysics of a Treeline' shows:

> "When rich, high-order gestalts contrast low and high, dark and light, they are apt to acquire metaphysical dimensions. Movement from low and dark toward high and light treeline strengthens this contrast. Lightness is further strengthened by the ease of movement at treeline. Being at treeline becomes an experience of reaching supreme freedom. For some, a change from a tragic to a more cheerful outlook on life occurs." (Næss 2005d: 557)

One consequence Næss draws from his semi perceptual, semi metaphysical notion of a 'good' or 'higher-order' Gestalt, however, can be found neither in von Ehrenfels' philosophy nor in the tradition of Gestalt-thinking at all. In my opinion, it is this consequence that retroactively elucidates Næss' adaptation of Gestalt-thinking and demonstrates the relevance of his ontology. It is an ethical consequence, or to be precise: an 'ecosophical' one. Let us have another look at the article 'Metaphysics of The Treeline'. The very last passage reads as follows:

> "One of today's most chilling realizations is that 'reforestation' projects do not really restore a forest. Artificial tree plantations lack the immense biological richness and diversity of ancient forests, together with their metaphysical intensity and richness. With so many people now reacting negatively to sham reforestation, the time is ripe for a change in policy." (Næss 2005d: 558)

Accordingly, the major consequence the conception of Gestalts and their hierarchization entail is the practical demand for preserving, fostering and being mindful of the inherent value of relational fields. As the relational richness of a Gestalt is valuable as such, it depends on our actions as human beings to sustain this metaphysical richness of contents inherent in reality and nature in particular. The way we act, however, depends on the kind of ontology we actively embrace. This becomes clear in our example of the treeline. In an ontology in which we prioritize primary qualities, the only thing that matters is the isolated existence of trees as such: single, distinguishable objects; external to and independent of subjective qualities we contingently project onto the trees in question. In this ontology, a reforestation may seem the most reasonable thing to do, because it not only provides a useful sameness and therefore processability of the trees, but it also facilitates the separation of the area in which trees grow from the area around it. Clear demarcation lines can be drawn; reality can be measured and controlled. In a natural treeline, on the other hand,

> "There is actually no line but rather a narrow or wide border area. If the terrain is nearly horizontal, the area is wide - perhaps miles wide. If the terrain is steep, the line is narrow but never sharp. Thus it is a shock to see an artificial forest, actually a "tree farm," covering a slope high on the side of a valley and then suddenly coming to a halt. Suddenly, there is not a single tree! From full-grown trees to nothing: an abnormality, an experience of something utterly valuable having been destroyed, the landscape desecrated, a personal loss even if one has never been near the place." (Næss 2005d: 555)

If we commit ourselves to a Gestalt-ontology in the spirit of Arne Næss, it makes no sense to act in favour of the isolation of parts of nature or to act as if the agent, i.e. we, is supposed to be isolated from reality. If we accept the existence of relational fields even without humans as experiencing subjects being necessarily part of them, we even go beyond any phenomenology that places the perspective of the subject into the centre of reality as we experience it (see Rothenberg 2000: 153-4). In an ontology of Gestalts, there is no such anthropocentrism, no such centre. At the same time, this becomes identical to the proposition that the centre is everywhere, 'even if one has never been near the place'. Reality as such becomes full of mind, becomes 'mind-full', precisely because it consists of a multi-layered network of relations and qualities that is not supposed to be cut into parts by human interventions. Fundamentally, we as humans are but knots in this network, and we would cut ourselves loose if we force our abstract ideas of primary qualities onto a reputedly sense- and mind-less reality. Now it may become comprehensible that Næss characterizes his 'ecosophy' as "a philosophical world-view or system inspired by the conditions of life in the ecosphere" (Næss 1989: 38), for which "the simple maxim 'all things hang together'" (ibid.: 36), rooted in Gestalt-ontology, plays an essential role. The prefix 'eco', derived from the Greek *oikos* and translated by Næss as "household" (Næss 2002: 100), exactly points to this structured unity of "life on earth, the ecosphere" (ibid.). The philosophical exploration of this 'household', indicated by the determinatum 'sophy' and elaborated with the help of Gestalt-thinking, draws consequences from the insight that our experiences of reality are co-existent and stand in mutual dependence with the "*profound meaning*" (ibid.: 101) exemplified by reality's infinity of concrete contents.

At this point, however, not only this article comes to an end. The focus of my personal research interest in the philosophy of Arne Næss takes a different turn-off as well. Whereas his ecosophy has been highly influential for environmentalism and the deep ecology movement, I would like to explore how Næss' Gestalt-ontology and his ontological inversion of primary, secondary, and tertiary qualities could contribute to conceptions of contemporary ontology. To conclude, it is remarkable that in the philosophical field of ontology a certain revival is taking place: a fresh look at the world itself, regardless of any epistemological or transcendental constraints there may be for our understanding of reality as such (see Paul 2010). There is a new realistic turn in contemporary ontology in which a realist Gestalt-ontology like the one of Arne Næss could gain ground. At the same time, however, ontology is usually defined as an analytic approach towards the discovery of "the building blocks" (Loux 2006: 15) or "the fundamental constituents" (Paul 2012a) of reality. In doing so, it often is supposed to rely on fundamental physics (see Ladyman 2007). In my opinion, this analytic and partly naturalistic approach risks presenting reality in accordance with our everyday experiences

and it surprisingly mirrors the struggle of early Gestalt psychology with atomism and summativism. A Gestalt-ontology like the one of Arne Næss, on the other hand, could supplement this analytic tendency with a rather synthetic picture; it could offer a *synthetic ontology* that is nonetheless based on scientific verification, i.e. Gestalt-psychological experiments. In my opinion, any analytical reduction of ontological entities like a vivid tree or a naturally developed treeline to their isolated blocks and fundaments cannot fully achieve the pretension of explaining reality as such or being qua being. To approximate this aim, I think we should cautiously continue the work of Arne Næss and, in general, integrate the findings of Gestalt-thinking into the quest of making sense of the world in which we only take part, but in which our experiences ontologically matter.

Summary

The application of *Gestalt*-theoretical ideas is not restricted to repeatable empirical experiments or therapeutic support. It may not even be restricted to purely human perception and cognition. As W. Köhler has already shown in *Die physischen Gestalten* (1920), *Gestalt*-entities can also be classified as existing in certain domains and processes of reality itself. The ontological significance of this claim has been developed in a remarkable and consistent way by Norwegian eco-philosopher Arne Næss (1912-2009). The main hypothesis of his so-called *Gestalt*-ontology consists in the attribution of secondary and tertiary qualities (like feelings, values and other qualia) to reality as its concrete and partially experienceable *Gestalt*-like contents. In his view, reality - and nature in particular - is infinitely rich in *Gestalts* and therefore infinitely full of value and mind. From this ontological position, Næss draws ethical and 'eco-sophical' consequences for a mindful treatment of nature. In this paper, I would like to discuss (a) how exactly Næss' *Gestalt*-ontology and his notion of higher order *Gestalts* can be traced back to the original positions of C. von Ehrenfels, W. Köhler, and M. Wertheimer, (b) the practical consequences Næss' *Gestalt*-ontology entails, and (c) the general relevance and possibility of enriching the ontological quest of delineating fundamental structures of reality with insights and the terminology of *Gestalt*-theory.
Keywords: Arne Næss, Gestalt-Ontology, Nature, Ontology, Qualities.

Zusammenfassung

Die Anwendung gestalttheoretischer Ideen ist nicht beschränkt auf wiederholbare empirische Experimente oder therapeutische Unterstützung. Sie mag nicht einmal beschränkt sein auf menschliche Wahrnehmung und Kognition. Wie W. Köhler bereits in *Die physischen Gestalten* (1920) aufzeigte, können Gestaltentitäten auch als in gewissen Bereichen und Prozessen der Wirklichkeit an sich existierend klassifiziert werden. Die ontologische Signifikanz dieser Behauptung wurde in bemerkenswerter und konsistenter Weise weiterentwickelt durch den norwegischen Öko-Philosophen Arne Næss (1912-2009). Die Haupthypothese seiner sogenannten Gestalt-Ontologie besteht darin, die Wirklichkeit mit sekundären und tertiären Qualitäten (wie z.B. Gefühlen, Werten und anderen *qualia*), verstanden als konkrete und erfahrbare Gestaltinhalte, zu versehen. Næss zufolge ist die Wirklichkeit - und die Natur insbesondere - von unendlichem Gestaltreichtum

und somit unendlich erfüllt mit Werten und Geist. Von dieser ontologischen Position ausgehend, zieht Næss ethische und ‚öko-sophische' Konsequenzen für ein aufmerksames Umgehen mit der Natur. Im vorliegenden Aufsatz bespreche ich (a) wie genau Næss' Gestalt-Ontologie und seine Auffassung von Gestalten höherer Ordnung auf die ursprünglichen Positionen von C. Ehrenfels, W. Köhler und M. Wertheimer zurückgeführt werden können, (b) welche praktischen Konsequenzen Næss' Gestalt-Ontologie mit sich bringt und (c) welche Möglichkeiten eine Bereicherung der ontologischen Bestimmung fundamentaler Strukturen der Wirklichkeit mit den Einsichten und der Terminologie der Gestalttheorie bieten könnte.

Schlüsselwörter: Arne Næss, Gestalt-Ontologie, Natur, Ontologie, Qualitäten.

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