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Geography and Ontology: The Geographical Foundation of Man

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Geography and Ontology: The Geographical Foundation of Man

Geografia E Ontologia: O Fundamento Geográfico Do Homem

Elvio Rodrigues Martins

Resumo- **Este trabalho busca a definição do fundamento geográfico como uma das determinações constituintes do ser do homem. Para tanto, retoma alguns dos fundamentos epistemológicos da ciência geográfica, no sentido de redefini-los, e com isso estabelecer novas bases para a relação entre ontologia e geografia.**

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Introduction

When the topic of 'ontology' comes up in a geographic science debate, the term does not seem to warrant a terminological definition. It is as though in geographic studies speaking of ontology means, at first, discussing whether or not there is an ontology of space – of geographical space, to be more precise. After that, the discussion usually proceeds to a definition of the elements that would supposedly characterize an ontology of space.

The key scholars in this tradition are Armando Corrêa da Silva, who conducted seminal research on the topic, and Milton Santos, who contributed substantially to the debate in the first part of his book "The Nature of Space". Other important names are Antônio Robert Moraes and Ruy Moreira. Moraes addressed the topic once, on a short and rather old study[1], then later on changed his stance to consider the possibility of an ontology of space. More recently, Moreira strays a little from that tradition; his position is presented in more detail below.

However, we must begin by outlining what we refer to as Ontology. The topic first originated in Philosophy and therefore is not a traditional geographic science topic, which calls for exchanges between the two fields of study. Whilst an overview of the history of ontology in philosophical studies lies outside the scope of this essay, we must mention a few key elements.

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[1] "Em Busca de uma Ontologia do Espaço" *in* Geografia: Teoria e Crítica, Ruy Moreira (org.), Petrópolis, Ed. Vozes, 1982.

Parmenides was the first to study ontology, also known as First Philosophy or Metaphysics. This pre-Socratic philosopher established the need to consider beings in their essence, that is, as what they are. Each being is that which they are on account of their Being. Thus, all Being is the Being of a being. This claim proposes a key distinction that is known as the 'ontological difference': the Being is not to be confused with any being, and all Being is the Being of a being.

Another key metaphysical consideration is that the Being is absolute, infinite, and transcendental, while a being is the exact opposite of those things. A being is finite and has no effective bearing on the essential constitution of reality. Ontology studies Being, whereas beings are the province of ontic studies. Once that distinction has been established, then ontology, metaphysics, or the first philosophy must dedicate itself to identifying that which is absolute, infinite, and transcendental; in other words, it must concern itself with Being.

From an idealistic metaphysics standpoint, throughout the history of philosophy Being has been identified as Idea, Form, Monad, and Spirit. There is, however, also a materialistic metaphysics, which has proceeded to its own identification and naming of the Being. Many a Marxist school has struggled with this issue – which we claim to be an issue because the radical refusal of all aspects of metaphysics is supposed to be a cornerstone of materialism, which should have led them to set new ontological foundations. Furthermore, we must also point out that the various Marxisms do not deal with the 'ontological distinction'. One example is the work of György Lukács, whose ideas are evidently no less relevant for this; however, in Marxist terms, the ontological debate is limited when one fails to observe the 'ontological distinction'.

Before leaving the issue of identifying and naming the Being, it is worth raising another relevant aspect of Metaphysics' protagonism on the definition of ontology: the process of objectification[2] of the Being. In other words, even as it names the Being, metaphysics makes it into a being, which requires us to wonder about the Being of that newly identified being. This results in

[2] That which Heidegger calls Vergegenständlichung.

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the search for the *causa prima*, the first cause, therefore rendering metaphysics constitutionally essentialist.

After these introductory remarks, we will proceed to a brief critique of how ontology is usually addressed by geographic science. When we speak of an ontology of space, we must ask whether space is to be regarded as being or as Being. If space is Being, we must inquire as to which being has 'space' as its Being, which would be curious, to say the least, for Being would then consist of Being-space. This path would lead us into a labyrinth of theoretical misconceptions, where the terms of the debate seem to be based on metaphors. Most geographic contributions to the debate seem to regard space as being – all aforementioned scholars seem to suggest that is so. However, when we proceed to characterize space in those terms, the product is not an ontological reflection. And the heart of the problem is what geographers traditionally understand as space.

I. Objectivity and Materiality

A distinctive feature of geographic science is the coincidence of *matter* and *space*, which translates into a subsequent coincidence between materiality and objectivity. Examples of this superposition can be found in seminal geographical studies, such as Ratzel's:

> "The task of Political Geography is to study the political division of *spaces* in each historical period, especially the current one" (Ratzel, p.146, 1987).

La Blache's:

> "(...) – the existence of a high population density, of a large number of human beings cohabiting in minimal *space* where, however, safe living means are assured for that collectivity..." (LaBlache, 1954, p.37).

Or Sorre's:

> "Geographical *space* is not solely characterized by geometric dimensions. As men, we measure it by the existence possibilities that it affords us." (Sorre, 1968, p.98).

Upon reading these excerpts, we address them a common question: what is space to these authors? What has its division studied by political geography, what assures a collectivity safe living means, and what is measured by the existence possibilities that it affords us?

A clear answer to those questions is offered by Milton Santos:

> "*Nature and Space* are synonyms if we regard Nature as transformed nature or, in Marx's terms, as a second Nature" (Santos, 1982, p.10).

Transformed or not, Nature is identified as geographical space; in other words, space is regarded as visible, external to one's consciousness, and endowed with materiality.

This synonymy dates far back and can be better understood by reading the following, capital excerpts:

> "(...) there is no real distinction between *space*... and the bodily substance it contains, the only difference lies in how we are used to conceiving them." (Descartes, 1995, p.76).

In addition, there is also:

> "Matter is that which is movable in space. A movable space is called *material space*, or relative space..." (Kant, 1990, p.25).

These quotes are presented to illuminate the sources of the aforementioned superposition. Although insufficient, those are the foundations on which space comes to be regarded as a being identifiable with transformed or un-transformed Nature. It is something endowed with materiality, or even with bodiliness, and thus visible, and even tangible.

Our main objection to this is that matter, body, and nature are not the same but instead refer to different dimensions of reality, while Space has its own place in that picture and definitely cannot be confused with matter, body, or nature[3].

Therefore, on this basis, we disagree with that superposition. Our stance is actually underpinned by Descartes' words quoted above, about how everything depends on how we conceive things. For instance, when we agree that "space is vital", we are actually stressing what is comprised in that space, or what can be confused with it. Something similar happens to other categories of geographic science discourse, especially territory.

However, the need to assert a dimension of that which defines the idea, i. e. all that it is not in itself, such as Matter, or reality's objectiveness in face of the subject, or even the conceptual definition of Nature, is not the same as claiming that Space is an elementary mode of everything that exists. This is why space can be considered as a Category, that is, one of the characteristics identifiable when we reflect upon the existence of all beings in general. Therefore, by identifying space we are not referring to beings in-themselves, but instead to the existence of those beings. This does not entail denying space's objectiveness, seen as how it is a feature of that being's existence. However, beings only exist inasmuch as they participate in the subject/object dichotomy. All that exists must submit to that dichotomy, in which existence is characterized by assuming certain categories, such as space and time. In other words, existence is characterized by these categories. On this basis, a

[3] Here it is worth noting that "In order to avoid a common mistake, it can be useful to stress the fact that we are dealing with the *philosophical* category of matter, not to be confused with the *scientific* concept of matter, for the latter is conditioned by scientific progress and has therefore *changed* significantly throughout history" (Brando, 1989, p.138-39).

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crucial implication of superposing beings and space becomes evident: doing so blocks the path that leads to ontology, for it prevents us from stressing the characteristics of beings' existence. This becomes paramount when one considers, as we do in this study, that existence precedes essence. When we look at man, it becomes clear that this superposition keeps us from determining how geography can be an ontological condition for man. Little by little, we must get used to the ontological density of the expression *Where*.

There is the being and its essence, its Being, and then there is that being's existence. That distinction is precisely what enables us to regard existence as necessary for a Being, which will, in turn, make a being into what it is. Thus, it would be inaccurate to claim that being *is* space, when actually a being exists and, in so doing, it has or it is in a space, which is a dimension and a mode of that being's existence, which in turn is related to the being's essence, to its Being. Phrased otherwise, modes of existence are foundations of the being in which Being is actualized.

Let us discuss a second implication of not superposing space and being: what happens when we consider the importance and meaning of space in the subject-object relationship, its constituent role in the act of cognizing the world? We find ourselves close to asserting that there is no erroneous concept of space, but rather various concepts tied to different levels of understanding about the existence of the world and of beings in general. Regarded as a constituent of existence, space becomes a category related to ordering, that which enables us to verify beings' relative locations to other beings, and how they fit in the set of their correlations and cohabitations – and, consequently, also their contrapositions. Thus, space is the category pertaining to the order of relationships between beings that coexist. Understanding this order equals conceiving a logical system in which that logic is determinant and cohesive. Therefore, there is a relationship between Logic and Space[4]. While one logic pertains to the abstract understanding of reality, the concrete dimension of that same reality has a different logic. Likewise, while one space pertains to an abstract understanding of the existence of beings, there is another space that encompasses the concrete existence of beings in general. For example, if we are able to see how, in logic positivism, space adheres to a taxonomy based on 'grouping' or 'organization', then we must acknowledge that the constituent notion of space will change when framed by a different worldview.

[4] This topic was discussed in detail in our PhD dissertation, "Da Geografia à Ciência Geográfica e o Discurso Lógico" [From Geography to Geographic Science and the Logic Discourse], College of Philosophy, Languages and Literature, and Social Sciences – University of São Paulo, 1996.

In short, our understanding of space and time is our understanding of the *existence* of beings, and thus there is a relationship between gnosiology and ontology. Space and time are categories of the world. And man is, at his core, world.

Thus, space is also an attribute of the act of cognizing the world. As such, it is not something that exists prior to cognition, but instead a product of social construction, a human attribute, a way of seeing, understanding, and constituting the world we live in. Aside from being an existential expression of beings, the idea of space involves different ways of grasping and understanding the world. Under these conditions, space encompasses all modes of existence and therefore all modes of reproducing the world.

Once again, we must stress that there are no strictly incorrect concepts of space or time because, as explained above, all concepts are consistent with a certain worldview. If anything is 'wrong', that limitation belongs to the respective worldview. A-historical and heavily ideological outlooks are grounded on equivalent perspectives on space and time. A perfect example of that can be found in geopolitics, more specifically in the classic formulations of the notion of 'manifest destiny'.

The sole negative observations applicable to the notions of space and time are those in which we suppose that which space and time are not.

From this standpoint, after having determined that there can be no such thing as an ontology of space, we must return to the question: how, then, does ontology fit into geographical thought?

II. Geography and Space

Space is as frequently associated to geography as time is to history. Hartshorne assigned the study of time periods to history and that of sections of space areas to geography, while Edward Soja addressed the issue in "Post-Modern Geographies". This division is in line with the old Kantian tradition as incorporated into geographical studies by Hettner and could lead us to believe that those fields of study have time and space as their respective objects. This belief is traditionally accepted in geographic science but, when it comes to history, things can be slightly more complex. That is because in this tradition, unlike space, time has neither materiality nor a properly empirical nature, which would render it rather odd as a scientific object. Our own stance on the matter, however, is based on a different outlook.

Firstly, we believe that Geography is not the same as Space; instead, space is *just one of Geography's many constituent categories*.

That statement cannot be fully understood unless and until we establish a distinction between Geographic Science and Geography as a characteristic

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of the reality around us, as well as a foundation of thought.

Through geographic science, we make mental representations of the objective reality around us. This subjectivation process involves a series of methodological procedures. A subjective representation is established by means of logic systematization and expressed in one or more languages. The entire process involves phenomenic and essential aspects of reality.

By its use of methodological procedures, a science is structured around interpretative theories; it builds a theoretical framework and defines its main categories. Therefore, geographic science consists of practical theory acts, of theoretical practices. Geographic science is made and identified by geographers in various contexts. However, although Geography as a subject is identified by practices, its foundations are not themselves practices. Geographic practices can often be quite distant from the foundations of Geography, which rest on the constitution of reality, rather than on professional practices. An incapacity to identify the object of geographic science often leads people to fall back on the last-resort definition according to which "geography is what geographers make of it", as though that did not apply to any and all fields of study. Such a statement aborts the debate in which Geography is called to constitute itself as a subject. At its source lies the *geographical foundation that constitutes reality as such*. When we fail to take that into account, we also fail to grasp the importance and the meaning of geography in the constitution of reality.

A person who cannot identify this geographical foundation cannot possibly know what Geography is, or they might confuse it with the subject and its many different practices.

Geographic science has many names for these geographical foundations; throughout the history of geographical studies, they have been called 'geographic factors', 'geographic facts', 'geographic elements', 'geographic aspects', 'geographic causes', or simply 'the geographic'. It is also possible to speak of a 'geographic determination', or of a 'Geography' of reality. This means that when we identify 'geographic elements' or 'geographic determinations' we are not referring to the science, but to reality instead. It is as though we looked at the world and wondered what in it is geographic, or as though the person asking: "Where are the 'historic foundations' of reality?" now asked about the 'geographic foundations' of that same reality. We do not mean to imply that geography somehow exists by itself in reality, just waiting to be discovered; geography can only be instituted in a subject/object or in a society/nature relationship. Geography does not exist outside such relationships any more than history does. Our existence and our awareness of existing as men require us to own our environment by establishing a spatial order. There is more than one way of establishing that order and acting upon it. The location and distribution of beings are initial clues about the importance of *where*, leading us to grasp the need for a science whose purpose is to investigate the *geography* of subject/object and society/nature relationships.

As a science, geographic science consists of a subject's specific outlook on their reality – or on their 'object', to be exact. This requires us to define this 'object' of geography, as well as what exactly is that geography that presents itself as a constitutive property of that object. Likewise, we must determine the importance of that property to the constitution and characterization of our object.

Answers can be found by studying the etymology of the word geography, or that which used to be called "studies or works of a geographic nature" when the subject had yet to be formalized and receive a name of its own. Shall we?

This geography-bearing 'object' emerges from man's coexistence with and alterity towards his environment, like society towards nature. Thus, geographicity has a double meaning, composed of two complementary, simultaneous (and not consecutive) meanings. This can be ascertained when we follow man's process of owning his environment, and/or society's process of owning nature. That process is externalized in the act of '*describing*', which enacts the etymological roots of the term geography.

But how does that happen, and what are those two complementary meanings? In the act of describing, a subject comes to own their object. It is an intimate, constant relationship in which one founds-and-is founding and determines-and-is determining; the sort of ownership established by 'describing' represents a two-way, *simultaneous* transit between objectivity and subjectivity. The topo-logical aspects that will organize thought and guide a subject's actions on his reality are established during various processes, from immediate sensory perception all through the initial systematization provided in the act of describing. There must be one here and another one there. Owning requires establishing a spatial order.

As we have seen, geography belongs to the relationship between society and nature. It is a characteristic of a Man/Environment relationship in which those members are equivalent – an equivalence that comprises both identity and difference. However, it is first and foremost a property of the world in which Environment and Nature are extensions or projections of Man and Society, insofar as they are human creations.

Now that we have identified the object that has geography as its propriety, we must determine what exactly that geographic propriety consists of.

To that end, the geographic process of 'Describing' can prove rather elucidative. Descriptions result from an observation of phenomenic aspects of the objectivity to which the subject belongs. In order to be

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actualized as an expository act, a description must be filled with the meanings of cohabitation and mutual belonging, which involve Location and Distribution. In other words, describing requires a cognitive procedure in which one must perceive each being's location, and subsequently their distribution. This entails the constitution of the geographic sense.

Another key element of description is permanence: we are able to perceive whether beings remain at a certain location or not, which allows us to establish whether a given distribution is constant. Thus, when we observe something, we are also observing its *duration*. We are ascertaining the regularity of its permanence time. This leads us to suppose that there is a balance which, once broken, causes duration to cease, which means that locations will change, and consequently so will distributions. This change is called succession. Succession is actually the disruption of the balance of rhythms of a given distribution, that is, the localization profile – in which rhythms are dictated by the (distributed) nature of contraposition *relationships* between located beings. Thus, there can be no static description: one must always consider the moment. But moments are immediate, while the very nature of a description is being mediated, in that it shapes one's relationship with the reality that comes after – with the next moment, which amounts to stating that the subject transcends their object. Thus, the relationship of mutual belonging and contraposition establishes itself as yet another category of existence.

In this immediate empiricism, the observation process inherent to the act of describing denotes the stability/instability of locations and the constancy/ changes in distribution, thus ascertaining the mutability degree of what is observed over different time periods (duration). In other words, it is through temporality and spatiality that *movements* happen and are observed.

Therefore, descriptions tell us about the *existence* of what one sees – the cohabitation of beings in general – using the basic constitutive categories of existence: Time, Space, and Movement. It is through description that we become aware of a first geography[5], and this awareness allows us to verify the world's immediate existence.

And in this sense, geography can be regarded as a category of Existence. This category is constituted by space, time, relationship, and movement, which are derived from the coexistence of beings in general, man among them. Like history, geography characterizes man's world. And this World presents itself in the processual unity of man/environment and in the subjective/objective relationship.

Now that we have established the basis on which to regard geography as a category of existence, we can argue that it is an ontological foundation – since the notion of existence is connected to the definition of Being. From this standpoint, geographic science may broaden its horizons with the addition of the ontological dimension and the subsequent dialogue with philosophy. All analysis conducted by geographic science may incorporate a philosophical perspective.

Regarding geography as a category of existence allows us to get even closer to the being who is at the core of our reflections: man.

But before we proceed with this reflection, we should address Ruy Moreira's stance in this debate, as promised in the introductory section. There are some differences between his point of view and ours, which we shall not regard as disagreements but instead as divergences that raise doubts and, in so doing, keep the debate alive. Let us look at three short excerpts of his "Marxism Geography (Geographicity and the dialogue between ontologies)".

"Geographicity is existence in its spatial expression. The ontic-ontological point where the man-environment metabolism is translated into man-space metabolism." (Moreira, 2004, p.33)

"And geographicity itself is the synthesis of the relationship between essence and existence, and thus the very concrete totality of Being." (id., p. 34).

"Geographicity is, therefore, a being's spatial Being. It is a Being's ontological state in time-space" (id., p. 34).

Firstly, we object to Moreira's view of geographicity as spatial expression. As we have argued above, geographicity is not constituted exclusively by space; instead, it is a complex comprising the categories of time, space, movement, and relationship. As such, it is the superior expression of a *complex manifestation of existence* (alongside history) and although geography does characterize man's existence, that does not allow us to regard it as a synthesis of essence and existence – especially because circumstances can reveal a non-identity between man's existence and his essence. We will refrain from mentioning the importance of praxis and work just yet, for later on these aspects will be addressed properly and we shall return to the concept of alienation to demonstrate the divorce between man's existence (his factual life) and his essence.

Lastly, speaking of ontic and ontological requires us to return to the relationship between being and Being. How can one regard geographicity as the translation of man-environment metabolism into man-space metabolism, when space (like time, relationship, and so on) is already comprised in the first one? If

[5] The expression 'first geography' refers to this initial stage of the process of ownership of the world and of oneself that the subject engages in during the act of Describing. The following stages or 'other geographies' are presented in detail in our former work, "Da Geografia à Ciência Geográfica e o Discurso Lógico" [From Geography to Geographic Science and the Logical Discourse].

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space is not the same as environment, and the first can only be attained via the latter, the metamorphosis of the environment by man's actions is certainly a change in man's existence conditions. This amounts to claiming that geographicity changes according to the metamorphosis operated by the man/environment relationship, once more supporting our proposition that movement should be regarded as a constituent of the complex mode of existence that is geography.

III. History and Geography: Ontological Foundations

When regarded as foundations of existence (of which life is the dynamic complex), man, environment, and their relationship cannot be examined in full without considering history. Like geography, history is but the process dynamics of the society-nature and man-environment relationships that constitute humanness. Its constitutive elements are also movement, space, and time.

There is, however, a difference between Geography and History, which becomes visible when one observes the particular manner in which History expresses itself with regards to the time and space dimensions.

While geography is specifically defined by *rhythms* and *durations*, history's temporality is defined by succession. Also, there is history in geography (the discontinuity of *durations*) and geography in history (the discontinuity of *successions*). Among these discontinuities, one particular inequality/imbalance synthesizes the *rhythms of moments*.

Geographic time is the synthesis of rhythms that define a moment's balance/imbalance – a duration. Geographic time results from the speed of the rhythmic cycle intrinsic to various aspects of the man-environment, society-nature relationship; in other words, that which establishes the location/distribution metamorphosis dynamics.

Pierre George wrote that "the notion of geographic time is something original and difficult to define. *Geographic time is at once geological, historical, and contingent*." (George, p.50, 1969). He suggested that we imagine a *sidereal time* composed of *ordinary times*, each of them characterized by *anomalous times*. The latter are defined by memorable events, such as a crisis, a war, a revolution, and a natural catastrophe.

Although George's observation is not without merit, what makes temporalities change is no alteration in time itself, but rather that in relation to what time is a category of existence. Phrased otherwise, beings change, move, transfigure themselves, and are constantly in process because they continue to exist – *and to exist is to situate oneself in a structure of relationships with other beings.*

Transformations come from relationships because relationships are processes of mutual determination of their members (beings). Relationships can determine cycles with different durations, that is, with different rhythms. To be more precise, relationships have a rhythm of their own, and by looking at each rhythm we can see a cycle reach its completion. In the web of relationships in which a being is involved, the cycles of each relationship become complete at different times, for the rhythms of each relationship are unique. This leads us to believe that each being, in the totality of its distribution, is subjected to a unique metamorphosis speed. And distribution will have a stable duration until the moment when the balance of rhythms is broken, and a new distribution is formed.

Throughout the different relationship scales, in the differential spatiality in which a being is located and situated at different distributions, geography is mobile. In its geography, totality is the real as it undergoes its historical process. There is actually a geographic process with a historical character since, as advocated by Herder, *History is Geography in motion*[6].

For thought, balance is moment. And, since there is an unstable synthesis forged in the relationship between rhythms, the disruption of that moment means a recombination of the rhythmic synthesis and the foundation of a new moment; thus, between one moment and the next, between one duration and another, change generates succession. *This is History*, in terms of space and time.

There is temporal discontinuity in distribution, since each being who locates themselves does so in different moments. Thus, the creation of locations – of this order of temporally distinct cohabitations – originates historical space, that is, a space that is generated by different permanencies deriving from discontinuous successions.

Consistent with this perspective, the present is a varying simultaneity of successions and durations, which makes history present through past geographies and also makes history geography in motion. A geography that remains subjected to another, a present one. In the strength of this relationship between geography and history, the existence of beings can be observed in the moment between Being and Not-Being. Actually, there one historical process with a geographical nature.

Existence itself, existing, is the given fact of there-being (Dasein) – 'there', in a specific Geography, and 'there', in a specific History. In a Geography that imposes itself as an ontological foundation.

[6] Herder aput Ratzel (p.84, 1914).

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IV. The Geographical Foundation of Man

Now we can see geography in its identity and in its difference: identity as subjectivation of what is grasped, and difference from reality in its history.

But identity and difference between what, or whom? Between Man and Environment, between Society and Nature. A geography that will be human geography insofar as it is accomplished through an environmental or physical geography, and a physical geography that can only exist as such by addressing the man-environment relationship.

It is given there (in the environment) as it is identified here (in man, in the subject), and thus it is named. It exists. And to exist means existing to one's awareness. There can be no existence outside the subject/object relationship, because existing is an action that requires the presence of two participants, one affirming what exists, and another being affirmed as existent. To exist is necessarily existing-for, or, as Hegel puts it, "I have certainty *through* an other, namely, the item, and this likewise is within certainty *through* an other, namely, through the I."[7] (HEGEL, 2017, p. 61). In other words, 'there' is determined when I identify 'here'. And 'here' can only be conceived *through* 'there' – more specifically, through a 'here' that will be a being there, or a being-there, a presence, Martin Heidegger's *Dasein*.

And an existent cannot be so unless they have a 'where', which allows us to suppose an environment constituted by beings that coexist. There, Dasein is being present as a being in the midst of other distributed beings. On the basis of such observations, we can deduce geography's preliminary constitutive elements. Insofar as it is a mode of human consciousness, geography constitutes itself through which beings are there, and through my relationship as a being that coexists with other beings. The distribution, the spatial order, and the coexistence of beings are the preliminary steps that lead beings to be that which they are as a result of where they are.

However, our observations so far are but phenomenic findings, amounting to a descriptive appraisal. Therefore, we must advance further. As already indicated, these are preliminary elements that subside the understanding of our key proposition: geography is an ontological foundation of man. In order to argue that proposition, we must go beyond this phenomenological manifestation of human geography.

Let us begin by reading the following excerpts:

> "The direct view of *modes of existence* that are more closely related to the environment, this is the novelty we propose to the systematic observation of humankind's most isolated and backward families". (LaBlache, 1954, p.36)

Later on, he adds that:

"(...) we can understand how certain men, placed in certain specific environmental conditions and *acting according to their own inspiration,* have proceeded to organize their *existence."* (id.)

Pierre George's view on the same matter is also solid and crystal clear. A chain directly links the matters of existence and work, understood as a "means to ensure existence, with existence comprising every modality of life – active or passive – unrelated to the exercise of a professional activity or situated at the most basic level of a production activity meant to satisfy daily needs" (George, 1969, p.133). We are also concerned with observing how work modalities exert a global influence on individuals' lives. From this perspective, existence is discussed in terms of Habitat and Habitation.

Although both La Blache and Pierre George raise key elements for this discussion, a few corrections are necessary. If geography is to regard itself as an ontological foundation of man, we must ask about man; in other words, we must determine what characterizes man ontologically. There is more than one answer to this question. Philosophy, theology, and various sciences, such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, and even neuroscience, would have something to say about this – and we have not listed all participants of this debate. But although their specific answers might be relevant, not all of them would be ontological; in effect, most answers would be ontic. Predication is widely used in this sort of discussion. Many of these predicates involve manifestations of gender, race, nationality, and habits that characterize different social types. Again, the contributions offered by those answers are inestimable. The relevance and strength of certain predicates is observable in the degree to which they mobilize social forces; race and gender identity struggles prove our claim: they are genuinely political forces. However, as already indicated, despite being absolutely relevant and necessary, such predicates do not reach man's ontological foundation, and science cannot provide us with a different set of answers.

Therefore, if we look to science for answers to our question, we will be limited to ontic appraisals. We must proceed to the ontological level. But before we can do that, it is worth noting briefly that these two levels (ontic and ontological) are connected. By observing man's ontological condition, we will see how a reflex operates at the ontic level. Thus, we must go from *modes of being* to man's *mode of Being* – and at the latter level characterization does not involve predicates. After all, to receive any predicate, man must first be a man.

[7] "eu tenho a certeza por meio de um outro, a saber: da Coisa; e essa está na certeza mediante um outro, a saber, mediante o Eu." (Hegel, 1992, p.75)

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Thus, it is to philosophy that we must go for our answer. However, we will adopt a critical perspective – specifically, we will attempt to eliminate any position regarding metaphysics, since even philosophy will resort to naming a Being and identifying it to another being, as discussed at the beginning of this essay.

Different metaphysical interpretations comprised within the hegemonic tradition in philosophical studies have regarded man's Being as interiority, as subjective immanence. Not long ago, we have asserted that man is a being among beings and that this condition is not to be dismissed by an ontological approach. In other words, our point of departure must be to consider man from an object's standpoint: man is body, man is nature. This condition cannot be considered an attribute or a predicate, something that may happen as well as not. It was Marx who pioneered this reflexive standpoint; referring to this topic, he explains that:

> "An objective being acts objectively, and he would not act objectively if the objective did not reside in the very nature of his being.[8]" (MARX, 1959a, XVIII).

As this passage makes clear, if man is capable of acting objectively in his relationship with other beings, that is because it is in his Being to be objective. However, this poses a problem. Once we have reduced man to an object – in other words, ascertained that it is in his Being to be objective, we end up reducing man to an essential passivity, for objects are passive. This forces us to try and recover man's condition of subject, without giving up the previously established objective attributes. But how can that be accomplished? The only acceptable solution lies in establishing that activity is also a part of man's ontological condition. Man is his exteriorization through permanent activity – his *conscious vital activity*, to be more precise. Man's Being arises, therefore, from constant creation, from innovation. This activity is carried out generically, as humankind – in other words, socially. This argument is summarized by Marx's words:

> "Conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity. It is just because of this that he is a species-being. Or it is only because he is a species-being that he is a conscious being, i.e., that his own life is an object for him.[9]" (MARX, 1959b, XIV).

Thus, two aspects must be considered: man's species-being and his conscious life activity. Unfortunately, this analysis is not within the scope of the present study. However, the time has come to return to work and praxis, since activity involves both those categories.

Thus, we return to the La Blache and Pierre George excerpts quoted above with the goal of amending the claims made by those geographers. Both of them work with an equivocated superposition of existence and survival. Survival is merely the material dimension of existence. Survival is what man has in common with other living beings, or simply with nature. As we have seen, it represents the object's condition required by this ontological perspective, thereby adding the economic foundation to our discussion. However, this outlook has proven insufficient. Nothing about man can be reduced to nature, to mere biology. Man's ontological uniqueness causes all of nature, or his biological structure, to become the human condition through the owning-one's-world process inherent to conscious life activity. From this standpoint, we can look at the very notion of gender in a new light. A basic example is the inaccuracy of basing the sexual difference solely on biological aspects; sexuality clearly demonstrates the founding condition of man's humanity. *Work* must be regarded on similar terms, and thus P. George's proposal that work be defined through bioclimatic conditioning factors, or characterized by technical or economic factors, no longer suffices. We must go beyond and see work as man's self-producing activity whose result is man's very humanity.

Therefore, we must stress the fact that working means producing the world, oneself, and one's humanity. *Thus, man cannot be reduced to his own subjectivity, seen as how man is world*. *Therefore, geography is one of the characteristics that expresses the world, which amounts to saying that this geography is essentially human. Existing in a geography is part of man's Being*. We must, however, be careful not to reduce human geography to man's 'physical' constructs, for that would be in line with Pierre George's view on work, or with the 'surface facts' listed by Jean Brunhes[10]. Hartshorne disagreed with the division of the geographic science into physical and human geographies. He did not believe they should be considered separate subjects, even though his observations about the distinction between those areas ascertained a superposition of "physical and cultural aspects". However, our point is not the same as Hartshorne's in that we argue that without its relationship to society, nature is nothing, just as that which does not participate in the subject/object dichotomy cannot be

[8] "o ser objetivo atua objetivamente, e não poderia atuar objetivamente se o objetivo não pertencesse à sua determinação essencial". (Marx, 2008, p.84).

[9] "A atividade vital consciente distingue o homem imediatamente da atividade vital animal. É precisamente por isso que ele é um ser genérico. Ou ele é um ser consciente, isto é, sua própria vida é para ele um objeto, precisamente porque ele é um ser genérico." (idem, p. 84)

[10] BRUNHES, J. *Geografia Humana*. Rio de Janeiro: Fundo de Cultura, s/d.

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considered an object, just a thing. All beings exist as part of that dichotomy and have no Being otherwise[11].

It is from this standpoint that we consider work to be an ontological category. Politics and economy are necessary insofar as they translate as survival man's objective condition, his lack, the fact that he is defined by objects, which are ontological requirements to explain man's existence and, therefore, his mode of Being.

Thus, regarded from the standpoint of conscious life activity, existence is not limited to survival. This reflection, which we have tried to present in its bare essentials, suggests we turn to a traditional geographic science category: the *way of life* (*genre de vie*), which contains several suggestive elements, as we can see in Max Derruau's definition of the way of life as "the set of habits through which the group that practices them ensures its own existence" (Derruau, 1964, p.169).

However, man's existence requires a geography. We must say it again: geography must be regarded as a human construct and, therefore, as a human dimension. As one of the world's founding properties. And since on account of his ontological roots man is also world, geography is a condition of the human existence. We must not overlook the identity between this geography that constitutes a basis for existence and man's ontological essence – between his factual life and his essence. Humankind can only achieve its full potential within this identity. Without making his geography, man cannot exist. In other words, man's existence happens in, or through, a geography. Ultimately, geography is man's spatially-temporally constituted humanity.

V. Way of Life, Factual Life, and Everyday Life

The reflection we have been striving towards has an imperative: it must be a reflection at the service of the existence of real men, of real societies. Without that concern, there would be no reason to turn to philosophy. For that reason, we believe that a scalar dimension must be the focus of our efforts, which is why we will return to the notion of way of life. We believe that category to be closely related to another: everyday life, which shows man's factual life in his immediate geography, the *habitat*.

Maximilen Sorre pioneered the study of this concept in geographic science, followed by Pierre George. Both of them conceive the habitat category in connection with the *Way of Life*.

To Sorre, Habitats are typified according to ways of life. He goes so far as to claim that Habitats are the "*most typical concrete expressions of the ways of life*" (Sorre, 1984, p.122). Thus, if we consider the society/nature relationship, which ensures material survival (production and reproduction), a habitat can be defined as a *rural habitat*, then as a rural-to-urban transition habitat, a properly *urban habitat* and, finally, the urban habitat in its most evolved form: large cities.

Sorre's suggestion is stimulating, but it must be developed further. To that end, it can be interesting to look at Pierre George's thoughts written in response to Max Sorre's death and published at the *Annales de Géographie*. Although not short, the excerpt it is rather suggestive:

"With the organization of the assembly line in consequence of machinery developments, with automation, a new era of work began. While economists and industry managers talk of revenue and work efficiency, sociologists know that there is something else at play, a profound revolution in the relationships between men, and between man and things. They also know that this revolution affects men in their entirety. Here we have the connection between Human Geography and global sociology, on one hand, and the sociology of everyday life on the other. Max Sorre mentions the 'beautiful works of George Friedmann', but we cannot forget his fruitful collaboration with George Gurvitch, nor his recourse to the sociology of everyday life and of modernization to which he was introduced by the study of Henri Lefebvre's work." (George, 1967)

And now the elements that we have pursued throughout this study begin to converge. First, the *way of life*, understood by geographers as the set of habits through which the group that practices them ensures its own existence. In the way of life, we have the elements that describe existence based on society's need for material reproduction, which we call survival. And lastly, we find in Sorre's words the association between way of life and its geographical expression, the *habitat*.

Habitats must be understood as part of a larger scalar context, which requires us to involve other categories. Thus, we begin to discern the path to identify the ontological foundation represented by geography. The habitat must be qualified, which means defining the geographicity that characterizes geography. That requires us to assign meanings to Rural and to Urban, since those terms are defined in relation to a way of life, which in turn points to a type of existence. Geographicity, urban, and rural broaden the meaning of urban geography to encompass more than just the city, and the same applies to rural geography. In effect, this process confirms Herder's maxim "history is but geography in motion". This is the process of going from rural geography to urban geography.

From an everyday life standpoint, both urban and rural geographies are scalar contexts, and more precise information is required to identify the geographical foundation of a specific man. Contrary to

[11] In this short reflection we will unfortunately not discuss in depth how the subject/object dichotomy proves insufficient to solve the ontological issue and must be overcome as a foundation for that line of thought.

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Pierre George's beliefs, it is possible to have different habitats in a single city. Each everyday life is specific on account of its unique, singular aspects. In Heller's words: *"la vida cotidiana es el conjunto de actividades que caracterizan la reproducción de los hombres particulares, los cuales, a su vez, crean la posibilidad de la reproducción social*." [everyday life is the set of activities that characterize the reproduction of specific men, which in turn create the possibility of social reproduction] (Heller, 1987, p.19). From this standpoint, habitat is the space and time specific to one's life, the space and time lived by an individual, it is the immediate effectuation of existence, man's immediate relationship with his environment, man-presence in his most immediate of geographies; it is his *Location*. The *Being's Location, his Being-There (Dasein).*

We have reached a capital point: *location*. To properly understand location in this context, we must examine two situations: the first one involves the meaning of the *sense of location* to man, which will allow us to verify its ontological importance. In other words, *by location a being finds themselves specified by a certain geography, which helps define the nature of their existence*. Thus, the next clarification concerns the notion of sense of location, which we will accomplish by investigating what is revealed when one answers the following questions: what does it mean to be located, to belong to a certain location? To fully understand the first question, we must ascertain the meaning of Location; in other words, what is Location?

For our purposes, it is not enough to regard location as systematic cartography does – that is, as a set of geographical coordinates. We must go further. In this geography, *Location* means a man's position in a relational structure – in a structure of cohabitations, where *distance* is measured by the qualitative intensity of the relationships between members, rather than being a quantitative measurement. A being among beings, participating in a cohabitation structure – and thus in a *distribution* context, in which a specific location is part of a scalar web of a certain *extent*. Thus, the sense of location will be determined by the qualitative intensity of a relationship and by the extent of the being's relational position. There is a relationship between *extent* and *qualitative intensity* which, in phenomenological terms, can be described as varying as a result of factors such as identity, belonging, or even the technical aspect of certain sorts of relationship, such as the media and communications. This relational web implies that contraposition relationships regulate the cohabitation of beings. However, another dimension can come into play: the one that addresses man in regard to his existence, or to his geography. In this case, contraposition is replaced by contradiction, and thus by transcendence. There is identity as well as difference between essence and existence. As a species, man reclaims his geography and thus elevates existence to an act of transcendence, of overcoming. Once again, we meet history.

Therefore, the *sense of location* is how a being gains access to the geography to which he belongs, his condemnation to a factual live. This geography is a part of his constitutive present, or ultimately the one whose geographicity is a foundational element to the effectuation of his Being. It is his existential foundation.

Thus, having *geographic awareness* means understanding the *sense of location*: owning the web of qualitative distance relationships of various extensions that man is a part of, with their rhythm nexuses; in other words, understanding which geographic times constitute his everyday life – which geographic context his habitat is a part of. This represents the awareness of the successive geographies that derive from the historical process.

And it is precisely in that geographical environment that man finds his sense of location. It can be grasped by asking questions such as 'Where am I?', 'Where are the other beings that are constitutive to my alterity?', 'What is their distribution?', 'What is their distance from me?' – in short, 'Which geography surrounds me in its extent, and what is my representation of it?' This representation is one's *sense of location*, one's *geographic awareness*.

This leaves us to address one final, crucial matter: the fact that although geography is a man-made dimension of existence, it *does not belong to man*. This matter concerns the notion of *alienation*, the divorce between existence and factual life. Despite only being addressed in the final section, this notion is relevant to our reflection because it characterizes man's current living situation. Alienated work impacts geographicity, the very nature of what is urban. Urban alienation affects the way of life, inhabits it even, revealing an inhuman geography, for an alienated existence amputates a Being's effectuation. In alienation terms, conscious life activity and the human condition as species-being translate into an alienated geography. This geography does not represent man's humanity in spatial-temporal terms. We live in dystopic realities in which geography discloses the loss of both production and its fruits. These are the outcomes of alienated work. Man's modes of Being are not exempt from this situation that infects his ontological roots. We can see alienation in the *mode of Being*, and the reaction to that condition can be found in *modes of Being*. Racism, homophobia, and gender violence have their own geographies.

For every possible dimension of alienation, there is a geographical consideration. We are referring to the ontological dimension in which man alienates himself from nature, from his fellow man, and from himself. If one's self is lost, the exteriorization process is compromised, resulting in a strange geography. As a subterfuge, fetishism rises – a consequence we intend to examine in detail on a future study.

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Whilst it is possible and even necessary to have a geographic awareness of this condition, such awareness is not enough to overcome it. Geography must be socially conquered, and this means finding our way out of this dystopia and into a geography of the future. May we have a utopia.

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