

Eugen Fink's Multidimensional Concept of Play

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Eugen Fink and the phenomenological movement

“By playing, we celebrate our existence” (Fink, 1995, pp. 414–415)¹ writes Eugen Fink in his last work on philosophical anthropology, *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins* (“Fundamental phenomena of human existence”, posthumous, first published in 1979).² In my view, this short sentence summarises the multiple dimensions through which Fink approaches play in his thought: play as a symbol of the world; play as a phenomenon deeply rooted in human existence, understanding human existence as a particular form of being in the world that is celebrated by playing. On my way to reaching this conclusion, I will follow Fink’s concept of play through different topics and at different points in time - i.e., by reconstructing the development of his thought and aiming to achieve the final synthesis of three different approaches: cosmology, philosophical anthropology and ontology, which build up a complex philosophical system (Fink 1995; Nielsen & Sepp 2006; Hilt 2011). The thesis defended here is that Fink’s multidimensional concept of play is precisely what would allow a synthesis of these three philosophical fields of study.

Eugen Fink (Konstanz, 1905 - Freiburg, 1975) was a German philosopher and pedagogue, one of the most complex and original thinkers of the phenomenological movement of the 20th century. Though less well-known outside philosophical scholarship than other thinkers in this movement, such as Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, his life and career were closely linked to theirs. To introduce him, I will briefly highlight some relevant aspects of Fink’s biography which we know thanks to his daughter, Susanne (Fink 2006).

In 1929 Fink wrote his PhD thesis under the supervision of Husserl and Heidegger. His research topic was “picture and the unreal”.³ In normal circumstances, Fink would have had a brilliant career inside the German academy, but at an early stage of his academic development he was confronted with a very difficult decision. Husserl, his mentor, was a Jew who had retired from the University in 1930 as Professor Emeritus but continued to teach private seminars, in which Fink was very active. In 1933, the Nazi laws suspended Jews from all public service, and Fink was warned to distance himself from Husserl if he wanted to stay at the University. Out of friendship and loyalty, however, Fink continued to work for Husserl as his private assistant⁴ until the latter’s death in 1938. Together with Husserl’s widow and the monk Leo van Breda, Fink saved Husserl’s *Nachlass* from the Nazis and took his papers to Louvain, where he emigrated with his wife Martl. One of the photographs taken of Fink during this period depicts a handsome young man wearing a hat in the style of Humphrey Bogart;⁵ the whole episode would have made a worthy 1940s *film noir*.

After World War II, Fink returned to Germany with his family. In 1948 he was appointed Professor of Philosophy and Educational Science at the University of Freiburg, where he founded the Husserl-Archive in 1950 and was in charge of several cultural institutions.

Despite their opposite standpoints concerning the “Husserl affair” and the vast differences in their political convictions, Fink maintained a lifelong friendship with Martin Heidegger, and in the winter term of 1966, they taught a joint seminar on Heraclitus in Freiburg which was considered “legendary” among the philosophical scholarly community. Besides his philosophical mentors, Fink was also in close contact with other thinkers of the phenomenological movement, especially Jan Patočka,⁶ Alfred Schütz,⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty⁸ and José Ortega y Gasset.⁹ Fink’s large philosophical work remained at the University of Freiburg.¹⁰

But what we do mean by the term “phenomenology”? Phenomenology designates both a disciplinary field in philosophy and a philosophical school (of course, the first would have been impossible without the second). As a philosophical school, it was initiated by Brentano and Husserl and pursued to some extent by Heidegger, Sartre, Jaspers, Gadamer and Lévinas, among others (Gadamer 1963; Spiegelberg 1982; Sepp 1988; Waldenfels 1992; Vetter 2004; Lembeck 2005; Zahavi 2007). If Fink’s work has not been as popular as that of the thinkers mentioned here, this may merely be due to the fact that his entire *oeuvre* is still to be published.¹¹ Other reasons may be Fink’s rather peculiar style of writing and thinking and the complexity and variety of his interests, most of which went beyond phenomenology in the strict sense.

How do we justify putting all these philosophers together under the same heading, when at first sight they seem to be heterogeneous? Their common motto, as Gadamer (1963: 117) recalls, was: “Back to the things in themselves!”, meaning that philosophy has to be grounded in the primary sources of our perception. Thus, as a philosophical method, phenomenology is generally considered as a method of description of phenomena, i.e., of things in the world as we experience them through the structures of our consciousness. The word “phenomenon” presupposes a distinction between what things are in reality and how they appear to us. However, by focusing on phenomena as the basis of the science of being, phenomenology tries to avoid both the assumption that we can know things as they *really* are (naïve realism) and the contrary assumption that the only access that we have to things is unavoidably the one guaranteed by our consciousness, and, therefore, we can only be certain about our ideas, not about their content (idealism). For phenomenology, these two extreme positions rely on an artificial separation between the subject (the entity who perceives) and the object (the entity perceived). Phenomenology considers that the two entities are indistinguishable in the act of perception.

This general assumption about knowledge can be considered the cornerstone for all phenomenologists. But as we have already seen, phenomenological scholarship includes a wide range of scholars with very different interests. Phenomenology has been described and defined in an infinity of ways by its practitioners.¹² Brentano, for instance, considered it as a sort of “descriptive psychology”. One of the most concise and elegant definitions, in my view, is that of Lembeck who describes phenomenology as “work on facticity” (Lembeck 2005: 5). In a recent introduction to phenomenology, Dan Zahavi (2007: 7-8) summarises the main directions in which the philosophy is currently being pursued. Two of them appear to me to be particularly interesting for introducing Fink’s work on phenomenology and play: the first is that phenomenology offers a model of human existence as a bodily, social and cultural being-in-the world, and the second is that it proposes the concrete analysis of phenomena which are relevant for other sciences, such as “picture”, “encounter with foreign cultures”, “social structure”, and so on.

These two general directions in phenomenology help us to understand why Fink's contribution to the concept of play should be named a "phenomenology of play". According to the first direction, the central assumption in Fink's thought, as we will see, is that human existence is conditioned by its natural, social and cultural character. His analyses of play as a human phenomenon take this into account. According to the second, Fink considers play as a crucial phenomenon which requires a structural and ontological analysis to elucidate its constitutive elements. In Fink's concept of play these two general phenomenological directions have, as we stated above, a threefold basis: cosmology, anthropology and ontology. Fink's approach to play is multidimensional: play as a metaphor or symbol of the world, as a core phenomenon of human existence, and as an ontological distinct phenomenon.

The play of the world: cosmic play

The first dimension of play in Fink's thought is revealed by cosmology, the philosophical discipline that aims to give a philosophical explanation of the nature of the cosmos or universe. Thus, if play has a cosmological dimension, this means that the nature of play is related to the nature of the cosmos.

"Cosmic play" is a recurrent topic in Fink's thought, but I would like to pay special attention to his famous book on Nietzsche. For Fink, Nietzsche "has the vision of the cosmos as a tragic play" (Fink 2003: 13). Fink's references to play in his interpretation of Nietzsche are abundant and substantial, and they cover the majority of Nietzsche's works, from the *Birth of Tragedy* to *Zarathustra*. I will focus specifically on the passages in which Fink elucidates the Ancient Greek influences on Nietzsche's philosophy.

Cosmic play appears in one of Heraclitus' most famous and enigmatic fragments: "*Aion* is a child at play, playing draughts; the kingship is a child's" (Heraclitus 1962: xviii).¹³ Nietzsche's explanation of this fragment in *The Birth of Tragedy* is that Heraclitus' metaphor likens the world's creative power "to a playing child, who sets down stones here, there, and the next place, and who builds up piles of sand only to knock them down again." (Nietzsche 2007: 114). How is the metaphor to be interpreted? Is this innocent, free, purposeless play? Or is it capricious and arbitrary, with no sense of purpose? How can the image of a child playing be analogous to what intrinsically rules the world? For Nietzsche, only children and artists can play in the true spirit of the play of the world:

In this world only play, play as artists and children engage in it, exhibits coming-to-be and passing away, structuring and destroying, without any moral additive, in forever equal innocence. And as children and artists play, so plays the ever-living fire. It constructs and destroys, all in innocence. Such is the game that the aeon plays with itself. Transforming itself into water and earth, it builds towers of sand like a child at the seashore, piles them up and tramples them. From time to time it starts the game anew. An instant of satiety – and again it is seized by its need, as the artist is seized by his need to create. (Nietzsche 1998: 62)

This is the sense of the analogy: things in the world are in perpetual change: appearing, disappearing, transforming or evolving. Only play can represent this endless creativity of movement that is carried out only by means of its intrinsic force, as the artist creates her work.¹⁴ This, for Fink, is "Nietzsche's metaphysical intuition" (Fink 2011: 37). The

metaphor of the child playing finds a broader context within Zarathustra's doctrine of the eternal return. In Nietzsche's appropriation of the eternal return, Fink sees a whole new interpretation of life built upon a new cosmology (Fink 2003: 160-161). Children's and artists' play is the key concept to express the very essence of the world:

Nietzsche makes the human playing, the playing of the child and the artist into a key concept for the universe. It becomes a cosmic metaphor. This does not mean that the human ontological modality is uncritically applied to being in its entirety. Rather vice versa: the human essence can only be conceived and determined through play if man is conceived in its ecstatic openness towards the existing world and not simply as a thing among other things within the cosmos distinguished by the faculties of mind and reason. (Fink 2003: 171)

The new cosmology that understands life in the universe as perpetual becoming (Fink sometimes calls it "ontology of becoming") allows a new perspective on the human's place in the cosmos. Only when we understand the play of the world and the play of the being as a kind of artistic freedom, as a work of art that creates and recreates itself, can we be open to the great game that occurs in front of us and of which we are a part. This comprehension of cosmic play leads us to Nietzsche's formula of the *amor fati*, i.e., loving and embracing our own destiny. *Amor fati* is "the will that does not resign itself to fate, but participates in the cosmic play" (Fink 2003: 172). Participating means accepting play as a positive dimension of freedom, understanding "the playful, risky dimension of human existence" (Fink 2003: 62).¹⁵ *Amor fati* is defined by the playful attitude of children and artists at play that can say "yes" to the world:

The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a wheel rolling out of itself, a first movement, a sacred yes-saying.
Yes, for the game of creation my brothers a sacred yes-saying is required.
The spirit wants *its* will, the one lost to the world now wins *its own* world. (Nietzsche 2006: 17)

Play as a fundamental phenomenon of human existence

Fink's reading of the Nietzschean *amor fati* may be a good example of his rich and suggestive philosophical style. As I stated above, cosmic play as a metaphor of the world's dynamic is just a preliminary step on the way towards a more comprehensive system. Grasping this ontology of becoming as play is accompanied by an attitude towards it as openness to an infinite movement of re-creation. It is interesting to note that the metaphor builds upon a representation of a very common human situation: a child just playing draughts (in Heraclitus' version) or making sandcastles (in the Nietzschean one). This image helps us to understand the intrinsic movement of the universe as a vast game with energies and materials. The anthropomorphic¹⁶ vision of the world's play allows us a glimpse of how things go. But can this vision tell us something about human play? Why is play the only human activity that allows this understanding of the world? How is play related to other human activities?

Fink's approach to this question is a part of a system of philosophical anthropology. Philosophical anthropology, generally speaking, is a field within philosophy that tries to elucidate the specificity of the human being in front of other types of being. It is not, as

Fink understands it, an effort to summarise all the contributions made by the positive sciences (such as medicine, psychology, ethnology, sociology, history, etc.) on the comprehension of man; neither is it a foundation programme for these sciences (Fink 1995: 24-25). That was the justification of traditional philosophy, to serve as a foundation for any possible science. Another traditional assumption that Fink rejects is the one that sees the human being as a being between natural beings, and God as a medium between these two realms of being. Furthermore, Fink's approach tries to avoid the constant comparison with other forms of life (natural or transcendent) that we find in the tradition of Western metaphysics. Fink wants to ground a philosophical anthropology rooted in what distinguishes the human kind of being; therefore, he sometimes uses the term "ontology of the human being" (Fink 1995: 436). For Fink, human existence is the only form of existence that searches for sense in living: (animals cannot give sense to their existence, gods have no need to) and so he attempts a "radical earthly anthropology based upon the self-interpretation of the human existence." (Fink 1995: 29). It is not only reason that characterises the specificity of human existence, it is the fact that all human existence is open to the inescapable mystery of being, open to the world of objects and open to the interpretation of its own situation. Fink seeks to reveal the fundamental structure of human existence attending to the fact that this existence is specifically the one that refers to itself by interpreting itself (Fink 1995: 85). To sum up: this approach is anthropological, because it focuses on the existence of human being, and it is philosophical because it is an interpretation of existence by which existence transforms the self-evident in its existence into questionable.

The structure of human existence is equated to what Fink calls "the fundamental phenomena of human existence". These phenomena are: death, work, power, love and play. In other words: The human being is essentially a worker, a player, a lover, a fighter and a mortal (Fink 1995: 106). Why are these phenomena "fundamental" and "fundamentally human"? By "fundamental" Fink understands a phenomenon that occurs in any individual human existence by which this existence finds itself referring to objects, nature and other human existences. They are fundamental because they cannot be reduced to any other phenomenon, in spite of being intrinsically related to each other. And all of them share another important characteristic: they are all twofold, sometimes ambiguous; they are the expression of deep human contradictions. Death belongs to our condition; we are constantly confronted with our own finitude; work represents our struggle for survival against nature; power represents the struggle for or against domination; love or *eros* is the way we individuals transcend our individual finitude through the perpetuation of the species. And play stands for reference to our imagined, projected possibilities.

Unfortunately, the phenomenological and ontological argumentation for the fundamental phenomena cannot be reproduced in this space. One might be surprised by the list proposed by Fink. It is clear that work and power are exclusively social and historical phenomena and, as such, fundamentally human. In Fink's view, animals and gods do not present any equivalent form of organization to the State or to the world of work, being both the result of very complex historical and social processes. We can also accept that love or erotic behaviour has specifically human traits. But, how can it be that, according to his programme of philosophical anthropology, death and play are essentially human phenomena? He is not denying the undeniable fact that animal forms of life are also mortal. What Fink is saying is that human beings are the only beings in nature that relate consciously to this natural fact and can reflect on the whole sense of their existence in the knowledge of this fact. For this reason he asserts that only humans can *die*. And he gives

the same reason for rejecting animal play;¹⁶ Fink argues that only humans can play because play is the genuine production of symbolic meaning.

Play belongs to the realm of fantasy. It is “the fundamental form of the human dealing with the possible and the unreal” (Fink 1995: 360). This is for Fink a human paradox: that we spend our lives projecting possibilities in the future realisation of our desires and expectations; that those expectations and desires are rarely fulfilled... but that we can always find an “oasis of happiness” when we forget our struggling, postpone our striving, and just play (Fink 1995: 362). In play we can be whatever we want, we can choose our companions, and we can decide when play starts and when it ends. Play is the *representative* human phenomenon *par excellence* because it can bring every human situation to life.¹⁷ As Fink states in a later work: “We play with the serious, the authentic, the real. We play with work and struggle, love and death. We even play with play.” (Fink 1960: 101). Therefore play is not just one human activity among many; it is the most basic and fundamental phenomenon and its special status is due to its unique and extraordinary nature.

Oasis of Happiness: ontology and structural analysis of play

The ontology of play was addressed by Fink a couple of years later in a short essay called *Oase des Glücks. Gedanken zu einer Ontologie des Spiels* (“Oasis of Happiness. Thoughts on an Ontology of Play”, 1957). “Ontology” is, in Fink’s terms, the study of play as a substantive reality, its elements and structure. Why does he use the metaphor of “oasis of happiness” to elucidate the nature of play? The metaphor expresses that play is a “secure point of evasion that allows us to stay (briefly) in the present” (Fink 2010: 18). But Fink does not want to reduce play to the traditional view that identifies it with leisure, time out from work or serious life. This view has been defended by a tradition of scholars of play who ascribed to it very important biological and social functions such as rest, experimentation, or aesthetic enjoyment of the arts.¹⁸ For Fink the relevance of play goes beyond a functional analysis of it.

Play is an autonomous activity that we pursue with no reference to an external purpose because it has “only internal finalities which do not transcend” (Fink 1960: 100). Fink subscribes to a view that is widely held in the study of play, which sees play as autotelic. The absence of an external goal is a perspective of play from outside. What can be said about play’s inner structure? The structural analysis pursued by Fink yields the following elements of play: delight, meaning, community, rules, equipment and play-world.

Fink’s analysis of play tries not only to identify its constitutive elements but also its inherent ambivalence. For understanding this I suggest rephrasing Fink’s structural elements in more general categories. The structure of play is thus explained through the following components: emotions, sociality, rules, objects and play-world. Play is necessarily bound to emotions; there is a “passion of the soul” (Fink 1960: 102). From the perspective of the player, the range of the emotions we can experience is quite broad. Take, for example, tragic play, where we may even cry or feel distress when we identify ourselves with the role we are playing. But deep inside we are always conscious of the double dimension of play: what must prevail is *delight* (*Spiellust*), the possibility of moving in the interplay of the freedom and opportunities that play creates.

Fink sees play essentially as a social phenomenon, as something rooted in every social existence. Play is playing together, playing *with* someone. Even in solitary play, the player “is often playing with imaginary partners” (Fink 1960: 102). Play institutes *community* (*Spielgemeinschaft*), even when the community is not a real but a potential one (e.g., spectators, or future or imaginary players). As in any human community, there is an indeterminate space for creativity in accordance with the *rules* (*Spielregel*) that are freely accepted by the members of the community. There is no play without rules; rules create play. Fink says something very interesting here concerning the normative status of rules in the game: breaking the rules is not the same as breaking the law in ordinary life. The kind of sanctions and the consequences of contravening the agreed prescriptions are qualitatively different. Breaking the law in normal life can have unpleasant consequences; breaking the rules of play means stopping the game (or even starting a new one).

We use objects for play: play-equipment or *play-things* (*Spielzeug*). But play-things are not only artificial objects; we may use ordinary objects in an extra-ordinary way. What makes an object a play-thing is not its natural properties but how we interact with it. Therefore, play-things entail two types of properties that overlap with each other: the “real” object, with its natural, intrinsic properties, and the “magical” property we may ascribe to it in play. For example, within the realm of natural objects a wooden stick is just a piece of wood, but at the same time in a particular play-world it can be a magic wand which is able to cast spells, move things, and so on.

But above all, play is a creation of meaning (*Spiele Sinn*). The final and most important part of Fink’s structural analysis is devoted to this crucial feature of play: its symbolic, magical aspect, the constitution of a play-world that blurs the lines between reality and fiction (Fink 2010: 22). Here Fink introduces a new term in relation to play: the *speculative*. “Speculative” here means a specific type of *reproducing or representing*. The “speculative” is a mirroring of the world performed by something which is structurally equivalent to the world. In this sense, play is a *symbol of the world*. Fink reminds us that there have been other symbols of the world in the history of philosophy. Philosophers of the past have identified particular objects or entities with the essence of the world:¹⁹ for instance, Thales said that “everything is water”; for Plato “everything is light” and for Hegel “everything is spirit”. These symbols are more than a simple picture of the world: they structurally represent the world’s inner and constitutive force.

How is it possible that human play can act as the *mirror of the world*, i.e., *reflect the world’s inner essence*? This mirroring is not a simple *imitation*, but a revelation of world’s deep structure, which is common with the structure of human play (ontology of play) and therefore with the structure of human existence (philosophical anthropology). Play is a kind of activity by which humans can create worlds of meaning (and destroy them) only through a creative force coming from the inside. Play is also pure movement; it presents phenomena in a constitutive order that reflects what it is and what it is not. Play reproduces the dialectic interplay of being and nothingness. Play is also representative, for it can represent any other human action (even play itself can be a part of larger play). Play is the relation to all the possible relations and references in human existence (Fink 1995: 408).

The circle made up of cosmology, anthropology and ontology is closed by Fink’s “speculative concept of play”. I have tried to present this circle following a natural order, but in Fink we do not find any indication that there is a linear ranking among these three

aspects of play. We can reach the core of the matter starting from any of them, as if we were following a Möbius strip. At the end of this journey, we can see why Fink places play not only at the basis of human existence but also at the heart of philosophy (Fink 1960: 3). Philosophy, like play, stands for our openness to the world and for the possibility of interpreting our existence in its multiple dimensions.

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Endnotes

1. The original says "Der Mensch spielt, wo er das Dasein feiert". I have tried to find a more suggestive translation than a literal one, which could be "Human beings play where they celebrate their existence".
2. Following San Martín (2006), his work on anthropology should be understood as a philosophical project in two stages, the first one corresponding to *Natur, Freiheit und Welt* (seminar lessons offered in 1951 and 1952); the second one to be developed in the aforementioned *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins* (1955). In this paper I am only referring to this second stage.
3. The title of his Dissertation is *Vergegenwärtigung und Bild. Beiträge zu einer Phänomenologie der Unwirklichkeit* ("Picture and Presence. Contribution to a phenomenology of the Unreal"). It was reprinted shortly afterwards under the long title "Contributions to a phenomenological analysis of the psychological phenomena conceived under the following denominations: 'think as if', 'imagine something' or 'fantasy'" (*Beiträge zu einer phänomenologischen Analyse der psychischen Phänomene, die unter den vieldeutigen Titel 'sich denken als ob' 'Sich etwas bloß vorstellen, 'Phantasie' befaßt werden*, 1930). This first work already shows Fink's lifelong interest in the phenomena of the imaginary and of the symbolic.
4. This collaboration with Husserl was intense and fruitful; see in Brunzina (2004).

5. Some pictures of Eugen Fink are available online at the website of the Philosophisches Seminar at the University of Mainz. See Fink (2006) in Bibliography.

6. Patočka was one of the promoters of the *Charta 77*, a Czech Human Rights Movement. He died after being interrogated by the police for ten hours. One of his most influential works is *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* (1975)

7. Like many other intellectuals, Schütz emigrated to the United States in 1939. His work was devoted to the phenomenological foundation of social science. *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (1932) is considered to be his major contribution to both, phenomenology and social science.

8. Merleau-Ponty's major contribution to phenomenology was his work *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), in which he developed an "ontology of the flesh".

9. Ortega y Gasset was a Spanish philosopher who introduced the phenomenological movement into the Spanish-speaking countries.

10. The critical edition of his work is currently being published by the Verlag Karl Alber under the auspices of the Eugen Fink Forschungsstelle of the Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz. The project started in 2005. I am grateful to Stephan Grätzel and Annette Hilt of the University of Mainz for their valuable advice concerning Fink's thought.

11. The complete critical edition of Fink's work will comprise 30 volumes (Nielsen & Sepp 2006). My impression is that Fink's contribution to phenomenology and philosophy is already being acknowledged, but he is read far less than his mentors, Husserl and Heidegger, or than other contemporary phenomenologists like Sartre and Lévinas. By the time Fink turned 60, some of his works had been translated into Spanish, French, English, Italian and Japanese, which means that he was beginning to reach a larger audience worldwide (see von Hermann 1970). However, I find it significant that, for instance, Wall proposes a "revised phenomenology of play" after considering the most influential phenomenologies of play, those of Heidegger, Gadamer and Derrida: Fink is not mentioned as a phenomenologist of play even though he paid much more attention to play as an ontologically distinctive phenomenon than the others and his view is closest to Richard Kerney's proposal, which Wall takes as an example of his own developmental perspective, that "play is the endless imagination of life's unfolding possibilities" (Wall 2013: 39). Nor is Fink mentioned in the compilation of definitions of play by Salen & Zimmermann (2013). This absence could be due to the fact that Fink's reception is still, so to speak, under construction.

12. See Smith (2013). It could be said that Husserl's project, his entire life and effort, was devoted to the definition of what phenomenology should be.

13. "Aion" could be translated as "time", but there is no consensus within the scholarly community about the exact meaning of the term. More on this enigmatic fragment in Aichele (2000).

14. Homan (2013) develops the analogy between play and the metaphysics of the artist in Nietzsche in a very interesting direction.

15. Fink's 1946 text entitled "Nietzsches Metaphysik des Spiels" is a very valuable condensation of other insights of his into play. It includes reflections that are developed further in other longer essays, but it is extraordinary complex. I consider Fink's later *Nietzsche's Philosophy* a more mature work that expands on the insights of this earlier attempt.

16. In Fink we find a strong thesis about play: only humans can play in a genuine way, therefore we can only speak metaphorically of the "play of animals" or "the play of gods" (Fink 2010: 13). In this sense, he remains at a non-empirical level, quite distinct to other approaches prior to his work, such as those of Buytendijk (1933) or Gulick (2011). Fink justifies this decision by appealing to the announced program of a philosophical anthropology, seeking a grounding structure for all empirical manifestations of play. Another reason for rejecting the play of animals and gods is that play is a genuine production of meaning and therefore only a being whose entire life is self-interpretation has the imaginative resources to produce meaning.


17. This is true especially in tragic play, in theatre and in other human forms of representation such as ritual and festival. Fink plays here with the many meanings and derivatives of the German word *Spiel*: *Schau-spiel* (theatrical performance) or *Schau-bühne des Lebens* (play and life as a drama, play as staging life. See Fink (1995: 384; 406).

18. For instance, Karl Groos (1922) uses three concepts to explain the benefits of play: *Erholung* (rest, amusement, relaxation, break), *Entspannung* (relaxation, recreation), *Ergänzung* (complement, addition).

19. A symbol is more than a mere imitation or mirroring in the sense of the Ancient *mimesis*. In the case of play, we cannot take it as a "picture of the world". For Fink this is a crucial aspect of play as a symbol of the world: a picture is a product, a result of the representation whereas play is the act of *producing meaning*, an act of mediation (Fink 1960: 111).

Oasis of Happiness: The Play of the World and Human Existence. Eugen Fink's Multidimensional Concept of Play

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