

**Looking at the earth
from a philosophical point of view**

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Introduction

Indestructible and indefatigable Earth ? These are the epithets used in praise of the « August Goddess » in the famous chorus from *Antigone* by Sophocles (verses 332-375). Nevertheless, this chorus is not a Hymn to the Earth. It is Man who is exalted, Man this disturbing marvel. But Man appears here as that being who torments the earth with a view to drawing forth from it the resources he needs to live. He is the master of the instruments and the know-how making it possible for him to surmount his limitations and to break through the obstacles placed in his way : seas, illnesses, etc. It is only when confronted with death that a being such as this is defenseless. But this intrepid mortal, so rich in capacities and aptitudes, is also someone just as capable of pursuing the path of evil as of good.

Sophocles' stanzas still speak to us. We find in them an eloquent image of the human condition, both uplifting and frightening. But who today could, without bitterness, have a chorus singing the epithets « indestructible » and « indefatigable » to refer to the earth ?

We are today more accustomed to listening to a chorus of lamentations on the fate of the Earth, due to Man's threat to it. Yes, the times have changed. What would have been regarded as almost unthinkable only a century ago is now taking place. Our way of being has resulted in such a deterioration of the conditions of life on earth that it is about to bring with it disastrous consequences for living creatures in general. To be sure, in the past, and even as far back as we choose to go, deforestation, the spewing out of waste into rivers, or certain ways of cultivating fields, have polluted, if not exhausted, the soil, thereby compromising the ecological equilibrium. But this had only affected limited parts of the earth's surface. Today the equilibrium of the whole earth is in danger.

The cries of alarm no longer come exclusively from ecologists who, until quite recently, were often presented as « conservatives », enemies of « progress ». Confronted with the chemical and biological modifications resulting from an industrial civilization such as our own, and which is becoming increasingly global, eminent scientists are nowadays more and more worried about the vulnerability of the planet as a *milieu de vie*.

For example, in the « Manifesto for a Sustainable Development », co-signed by several scientists, we find the following : « we only have one planet and we are living beyond our means – by pushing it to its limits and degrading it »¹. The introduction to the Manifesto ends with a wish, even a hope : « we pin our hopes on a vital reversal, enabling men to take their destiny back into their own hands. We can stop the deterioration of the world. We are appealing for just that ».

1. See, *Le Monde*, Tuesday 29th January 2002 : Horizons-Débats', p. 15.

In the same way, benefiting from his experience in a country ravaged by ecological disasters, the former President Mikhail Gorbatchev, under whose Presidency the catastrophe of Tchernobyl took place, has launched a vibrant *Manifesto for the Earth*.² And he is today the President of the movement : « Green Cross International ».

More prosaically, the theme of the Earth is beginning to invade every field, and to such a point that, as one might have expected, it has caught the attention of advertising executives only too ready to exploit the theme for their own purposes or to banalize it. There is now a so called « Earth Objective ». In spite of their occasionally sensational character, certain expressions appearing as headlines in reviews and newspapers can be examined as symptomatic of this « common concern ».

« The Earth calls for help », « squandering our future », « Has the Planet Had it ? », « The Earth : A Sick Planet ». These are also the sorts of words employed by the biologist Jean-Marie Pelt. In the course of an interview entitled : « Jean-Louis Etienne Wants to Save the Planet », the French explorer observes that « nature is alive and we are a part of it ». For his own part, the astro-physicist Hubert Reeves declares : « we are in the process of reversing evolution and of rendering the planet uninhabitable. By showing the long journey the Earth had to make to get to where it is today, the astronomer is able to offer a much broader perspective on our present problems. And this amplifies the idea of wastage ».

The different types of wastage, their diagnosis and the concrete measures taken to deal with them are the subject of an excellent radiophonic programme « Earth to Earth » produced by Ruth Stegassy for France-Culture. Finally, the astronaut Jean-Pierre Haigneré who, thanks to his journeys in space has been able to witness visually what he talks about, warns us as follows : « deforestation, deliberate torching, the drying up of areas like the Aral sea, the persistent opacity of certain atmospheres like those above the East of China, make it difficult to believe in our capacity to manage the resources of the planet ».

As limited as these samples may be, they testify to a growing apprehension concerning the risks the Earth runs, not so much as a planet but as a dwelling place, the « place where we live ». But the notional range of the issue is left undefined. We talk of the earth or of the planet but also of nature and of the world. These notions are employed as though they could be substituted one for the other, even though this is only possible to a limited degree. A more detailed examination is therefore needed in order to come to terms with the shifts in meaning these concepts have already undergone, and are still undergoing.

2. Mikhaïl Gorbatchev, *Mon Manifeste pour la Terre*, Ose savoir-Le Relié, septembre 2002.

The World, Nature

Considerable efforts have already been made in the direction of determining the meaning of « world » and of « nature ». With regard to the notion of the world, I am thinking of the recent work by Paul Clavier, *The Concept of World*, where the author discusses the philosophical questions raised by our experience and representation of, and our living in, the world, as well as by the invention of possible worlds by sciences dealing with cosmology³. The other work that should be mentioned is the more historical study by Remi Brague entitled : *The Wisdom of the World – History of the Human experience of the Universe*, and which retraces the course of the different conceptions of the world that have been entertained in the West since ancient times. The author tries to take account of different conceptions, those bearing on the contemplation of the world (*cosmos*) as a source of wisdom, right up to those dealing with the cosmological requirements presented by present day ethics, not forgetting the epochs when the existential gesture of turning away from the world was considered the way of salvation. « World », then, taking on very different connotations from those it enjoyed when « the world order » (that of the *cosmos*) was taken as an ethical model to imitate.

Marcel Conche's *Presence of Nature* will however provide us with our most important landmark, and one which, as such, paves the way for our thinking about the Earth. What is important is that in his work, Nature (*phusis*) is thought as a Whole, in the manner of the ante-Socratics (this is the name he gives to those who we are more accustomed to call pre-Socratics). This is what he has to say : « the philosopher has in mind Nature in its wholeness, Nature as the whole of reality, as being the Whole. However, the Whole is precisely what science can not deal with »⁴.

I should make it clear from the start that I do not share Marcel Conche's philosophical position. I do not envisage Nature as a self-contained Whole, thereby excluding the very possibility of a beyond. He however does specifically declare : « there can be no beyond to Nature. Nature englobes everything. Anaximander had already thought of Nature as infinite and the worlds were its work »⁵.

Nor, in my view, can Nature, even in the Greek sense of *phusis*, be equated with the Absolute. From the point of view of Marcel Conche, heavily influenced as he is by Heidegger (even though he does take up a distance with regard to the author of *Being and Time*, particularly in what concerns the importance accorded to time), a position like the one I adopt would no doubt be attributed to my Judeo-Christian « beliefs ». To which I would reply that, quite independent of any belief system, strictly philosophical reasons, falling under the auspices of Plato's conception of the Good, make it impossible for me to accept the absolutization of Nature. Let me simply

3. Paul Clavier, *Le concept de monde*, coll. *Philosopher*, PUF, 2000.

4. Marcel Conche, *Présence de la nature*, coll. *Perspectives critiques*, PUF, 2001, p. 56.

5. Marcel Conche, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

remind you of the passage from book VI of the *Republic*, an authoritative passage often evoked by Simone Weil, where it is a question of the essential difference between necessity (that of nature) and the good (Resp. 493 c).

Despite this basic divergence, I am nevertheless much indebted to Conche's work, inasmuch as I have learnt much from it, and inasmuch as it has enable me to deepen my own reflection on the relation between the Earth and the notion of nature, a project I initiated many years ago with an article on « The Withdrawal of the Earth »⁶, and continued with essays on its philosophical status, in particular since the conquest of space. But while I had in mind especially the modern conception of nature, the *Presence of Nature* tries to improve our understanding of Greek conceptions of the *phusis*, in particular those falling outside the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Conche's own personal preference runs in the direction of the pre-Socratics, on the one hand, and Epicurus and Lucretius, on the other. For these are figures for whom Nature can be seen as more or less the equivalent of the Whole. And so the latter englobes the notion of the world – which also comprises the plural, « worlds ». The world then becomes the face, the aspect that Nature offers to each one of us. Moreover, after having quoted Whitehead's claim that Nature is given as autonomous relative to our thinking, in other words not as a phenomenon or as an object for thought but as independent of it, he adds : « the ante-Socratics thought Nature simply by accepting this Presence which it is »⁷.

Listening to a proposal of this kind, one is not surprised to find that Conche is able to bring what he means by Nature into relation with what Parmenides meant by Being : « Uncreated, it is also imperishable, unique, inexhaustible and endless. » (Frag. 8. 3-4). We will not discuss this connection. What is important here is that in his approach to what the Greeks meant by *phusis*, Conche brings out the vital dimension, that of generation and corruption, just as did Heidegger before him, but by relying primarily upon Aristotle's *Physics*.⁸ However, Conche fails to establish the link between just such an idea of nature and the experience we have of it from the standpoint of this Earth we inhabit.

If the Greeks, without possessing the scientific knowledge available to us on the subject of the physical universe as matter-energy in continual transformation, could nevertheless think Nature as the bearer of life or as Lucretius' *natura creatrix* in its generative and destructive power, it was because they necessarily adopted as the paradigm for nature what they knew on Earth. For if we now know that, in the universe, nothing is immutable, that whatever order emerges will finish up one day by disintegrating, it is only on Earth that life and death, genesis and decay, can be experienced as intimately linked to *phusis*.

6. Maria da Penha Villela-Petit, « *Le retrait de la Terre* » in *Interpretazione del nichilismo*, a cura di A. Molinaro, Roma, Herder-Università Lateranense, 1986, pp. 41-61.

7. M. Conche, op. cit., p. 70.

8. Martin Heidegger, « *Die Physis bei Aristoteles* », V. Kostermann, Francfort-a.- M., 1967, trad. fr. par F. Fédier, « *Ce qu'est et comment se détermine la phusis* » in *Questions II*, Gallimard, 1968.

This link had however been clearly seen by Heidegger in his essay on : *The Origin of the Work of Art (Der Ursprung der Kunstwerk)*, where he took account of the « sure emergence » of the Greek temple in its power of disclosing all that surrounds it. These are the words he employs : « the Greeks early called this emerging and rising in itself and in all things phusis. It clears and illuminates, also, that on which and in which man bases his dwelling. We call this ground the *earth*. What this word says is not to be associated with the idea of a mass of matter deposited somewhere, or with the merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises without violation. In the things that arise, earth is present as the sheltering agent »⁹.

Thus when the astro-physicists talk of « stars being born and dying », they are talking metaphorically on the basis of our experience of life on Earth. Which is also the reason why they keep on looking for, and hoping to find, life on other planets.

So we have to get back to the Earth and to Nature just as we find it here on earth. This also obliges us to recognize not merely the anteriority but also the precedence of mythical conceptions. Myth names the sky and the earth as that between which the life of man and of all that lives on earth is played out. Certainly, I am thinking here of the first verse from Genesis : « In the beginning God created heaven and earth. But without wanting to play down the significant diversity of myths, the polarity of heaven and earth is present in every culture to the extent that it corresponds with the vertical axis characteristic of the human body (and its upright posture), and so structures life in its manifold aspects ».

However, with regard to this polarity, the notion of phusis is a principle of unity. If one turns to the first statement of Book B of Aristotle's *Physics*, a text central to Heidegger's interpretation of the Greek conception of nature (*phusis*), one reads : « Some things exist by nature, others are due to other causes. Natural objects include animals and their parts, plants and simple bodies like earth, fire, air, and water; at any rate, we do say that these kinds exist naturally »¹⁰.

Even though *phusis* is not regarded here as the Whole, it unifies everything that belongs to the natural order, making of the earth nothing more than one of the four elements, which it clearly also is when one takes the earth to mean the solid earth by comparison, for example, with the sea, in which fish swim or the sky in which birds fly.

A unification of this kind will have considerable repercussions once one leaves the world of the ancients and enters the modern world, therefore from the time that physics is set up as a science in the sense of classical mechanics by Galileo and

9. Martin Heidegger, *Des Ursprung der Kunstwerk*, trans. Albert Hofstadter as 'The Origin of the Work of Art' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper & Row, New York, 1971. p. 42.

10. Aristotle, *Physics*, 192 b, translated by Robin Waterfield, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, 1996. Cf. la trad. fr. à partir de celle de Heidegger, in *Questions II*, p. 473.

Newton. It would however be a mistake to think that the polarity of sky and earth was relinquished altogether in philosophy. In a passage from the *Gorgias* (507 E-508 A), Plato makes reference to it to get us to understand that since it was an ordering unity that was originally responsible for the constitution of the cosmos the same must also be true of the city, which therefore has to be governed by just relations if it is not to succumb to chaos. This is the passage in question : « Wise men (*sophoi*), Callicles, say that the heavens and the earth, gods and men, are bound together by fellowship and friendship and order and temperance and justice, and for this reason they call the sum of things the « cosmos », the ordered universe, my friend, not the world of disorder or riot ».

Moreover, – as we indicated in our study «Heidegger’s conception of space »¹¹ – this passage from Plato’s *Gorgias* is the non-avowed source of what Heidegger called the Fourfold [*das Geviert*], in « Building, Dwelling, Thinking » [*Bauen, Wohnen, Denken*]¹², a text wholly preoccupied with an habitation (a dwelling) which would offer the possibility of an opening upon being and upon the sense of the sacred founded therein. In this, however, he differs from Plato who was always concerned with the question of justice in the city and sought to establish a homologous relation between the latter and the harmony of the cosmic order.

The Withdrawal of the Earth

Come what may, before any attempt to think about our way of dwelling on Earth, it is important to try to grasp the movement by which modern thought led us to obscure the Earth by reducing it to the status of one planet among many others. And what better point of departure than to recur to what Husserl said when he referred to Galileo, « Galileo, the discoverer – or, in order to do justice to his precursors, the consummating discoverer – of physics », of physical nature, is at once a discovering and a concealing genius [*entdeckender und verdeckender Genius*]¹³. Here it is not a matter of calling in question the formidable accomplishments of science and technology (how could one not recognize what we owe to Copernicus, to Galileo, to Newton or to Laplace, to cite just a few), but to understand that, in being only partial, these scientific discoveries also have their shadowy side and so contribute to a covering over. In the case of classical physics, the Earth was reduced to being but one planet among others, a view that overlooked its generative power, even its living

11. Maria Vilella-Petit, « Heidegger’s conception of space », in *Critical Heidegger*, ed. by Christopher Macann, Routledge, 1996.

12. Cf. Heidegger, « Bauen, Wohnen, Denken » translated by Albert Hofstadter as Building, Dwelling, Thinking, in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, op. cit. While naming the four, Heidegger makes it clear that they figure as a unity. ‘The Four, the earth and the sky, divinities and mortals form a whole on the basis of an *original* unity.’ Although a proposal of this kind is relevant to the notion of ‘dwelling’, it nevertheless excludes any idea of the creation of all that it is by a God transcending the whole of being or of the *phusis*.

13. Cf. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology- An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, transl. by David Carr, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1970, p. 52, [53].

nature. By making nature conform to universal mechanical laws, the Earth began to lose its status as *singulare tantum*, a status it already possessed, as Franz Rosenzweig reminds us, in the Book of Genesis¹⁴.

But it would be wrong to attribute this forgetfulness of the singularity of the Earth to physics alone. Philosophy was no less responsible for this, to the extent that it, so to speak, made of nature a simple object of knowledge for a thinking subject. This objectification included that of our own body and, in the final analysis, covered over our belonging to the Earth, inasmuch as it had become no more than a planet.

In the period of the enlightenment, this devaluation of the Earth gets reinforced in the name of reason. Even for a philosopher like Kant, it is not enough to simply imagine other inhabited worlds (an idea frequently entertained at that time) ; he went on to imagine that the life of spirit might even progress as one moved ever further from the Earth and the sun. This is what he writes in 1755 :

« *The perfection of the spiritual world increases and progresses in the planets in the same way as the perfection of the material world from Mercury to Saturn and even beyond (to the extent that other planets exists), and this in a graduated progression which is proportional to the distance from the sun.* »¹⁵

Kant had very little idea of the very particular conditions responsible for the emergence of life on earth, and which include its distance from its own star and therefore its temperature and the presence of water. Contrary to what he believed, we know today that in order for there to be life on a planet, it has to be solid and not gaseous or, more generally, has to have a physical environment that resembles that of the earth.

But Kant's ignorance was that of his age. As Lucian Boia underlines in his work : *The Imaginary Exploration of Space*, the authors of the *Encyclopedia* illustrated the notion of « problem » by asking « whether the moon and the planets are inhabited by beings who resemble us to some degree»¹⁶.

But it is with Voltaire and for entirely ideological, anti-christian, reasons that the devaluation of the earth reached its climax in the period of the enlightenment. In his famous story entitled : *Micromégas*, an inhabitant of Sirius addresses a satiric greeting to the earthlings we are ourselves and who claim that the Son of God was incarnated as one of us :

14. See, Franz Rosenzweig's reflection on the definite article in the expression 'the' sky, 'the' earth, from the first verse of the book of Genesis, in : *The Star of Redemption*.

15. Cf. E. Kant, *Histoire naturelle générale et théorie du ciel, ou recherche concernant la constitution et l'origine mécanique du système du monde conduite d'après les principes newtoniens*. This extract is taken from the work by Jules Vuillemin, *Physique et Métaphysique kantienne*, PUF, 1955, p. 108.

16. Lucian Boia, *L'Exploration imaginaire de l'espace*, ed. La Découverte, 1987, p. 16.

« Oh! you highly intelligent atoms, amongst whom the eternal being has seen fit to manifest his presence, you undoubtedly enjoy purer pleasures on your globe ; being so insubstantial and so appearing to be entirely spiritual, you surely spend your time loving and thinking ; that is, engaging in the true life of the spirit. I have never encountered happiness anywhere else but it is certainly to be found here. »¹⁷

But even if we set aside the ironic aspect of Voltaire and his contempt for the earth, one has to concede that the reduction of our planet to a simple material entity has delivered it over to the process of industrialization, and to a technical manipulation which today spares nothing, not even life itself.

I enjoy waxing ironic on the subject of Monsanto. To a certain extent they are trying to displace the God of the book of Genesis, by making others pay for their genetically modified seeds, even though the fruits of the earth (« each bearing seeds according to its kind ») were given freely to man... Let us say no more about that.

We should also bear in mind that this relative disenchantment with nature, brought about by the narrow reasoning of the enlightenment, was followed, and in part corrected, by the Rousseauesque and Romantic revolution. But if poets have continued to evoke the beauty, even the sublimity, of nature, and have even sought to deepen the feeling it is capable of engendering in us, their views did not succeed in breaking through the gates of science and were, of course, entirely helpless faced with the process of industrialization. It is also worth noting that their celebration of nature as it appears to us on earth lacked the awareness we have since been able to develop regarding the uniqueness of the Earth as a living planet. For this awareness would have been impossible without today's scientific knowledge. Hence the role that men of science are asked to play vis à vis ecological questions and their responsibility for the earth, a responsibility that only the best of them are prepared to assume.

The New Knowledge

A Voltaire who contempered the earth as no more than « a miserable pile of mud » would be very surprised and disappointed to read what a scientist like Peter Westbroek has to say in the way of a magnificent eulogy... to mud. This is what this representative of geophysiology has to say from the standpoint of a new discipline that studies the interactions of the living with the composition of geological strata and the climate. « We simply do not understand the beauty of the mucus, nor the key role that bacteria play in the regulation of the flux of matter at the heart of the biosphere. We are incapable of grasping that the mud that covers the greater part of the surface of the earth is the universal substrate of life itself. Such are the humble

17. Voltaire, « Micromégas » in *Contes en vers et en prose*, vol.1, édité par Sylvie Menant, Classiques Garnier, 1992, p. 78.

foundations of the living world.»¹⁸

On the subject of this new knowledge, let us now turn to botany. For some time we have known about the importance of chlorophyll for the appearance of living organisms. The botanist Francis Hallé, whose last work is a *Plea for the Tree (Plaidoyer pour l'arbre)*, says of it that it is « the most important molecule on the planet, the one that lies at the root of all the others ». Our knowledge of the canopies of tropical forests, for which he was largely responsible, has considerably enlarged our awareness of the type of interaction that prevails within the world of the living, whether animal or vegetable.

At the other end of the natural sciences, let us now take a look at the astrophysicists, particularly the planetologists. Not only do they tell us about the age of the universe, about the formation of our solar system but they are also looking for other planets, other systems which might « harbor life », to employ their favorite phrase. Given the immensity of the universe and the discovery since 1995 of an abundance of other planets outside our galaxy, it would be irrational not to admit the possibility of there being life on other solar systems, whatever the stage it might have reached.

The Earth seen from space

But it would be entirely unreasonable to continue to destroy the earthly environment on the pretext that one day we will be able to « conquer » other planets, and that in any case ours will be extinct in millions of years. This would be to adopt a laughably suicidal attitude, given the problems with which we are faced today. Nevertheless, certain texts written at the beginning of the conquest of space, moved in this direction, and it was in order to offer a critique of their naiveté that I have written my paper for the International Colloquium : « Frontiers and Space Conquest »¹⁹. What forcibly struck me was the harmful power of certain authors' phantasies. Alongside the conquest of another space, conceived along the lines of the conquest of the American Far West, one could also make out a desire to abandon Mother-Earth, without any hope of return, in a sort of flight that it would be best not even to attempt to analyze... And of course those who rave in this way are unfit to even undertake such spatial journeys. (This was moreover already pointed out during the Symposium). NASA would never take such enormous risks...

In fact those astronauts who have been fortunate enough to look at the planet earth from above, by circulating around it have become more sensitive than others to its

18. Cf. Peter Westbroek, *Vive la Terre-Physiologie d'une planète*, transl. from the English by N. Witkowski, Seuil, 1998, p. 145.

19. Cf. Maria Villela-Petit, « Le Statut de la Terre en question », in *Frontiers and Space Conquest-The Philosopher's touchstone*, ed. by Jean Schneider & Monique Léger-Orine, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988, p. 209-219. Our other contribution to this same colloquium was « Echo philosophique à l'intervention de H. Oser (biologist, working with the European Space Agency, specially on the effects of microgravity on the human body), a contribution which bore the title : « Life sciences in space ».

singularity and, at the same time, to its vulnerability. At the beginning of this paper I supported this claim with a citation from J-P. Haignéré. Another witness who deserves to be called forward was Eugene Cernan who participated in the mission Apollo 17. This is how he relates his impressions.

« ...because the beauty of the earth was so prominent I got the impression that it was the most precious thing a man could hold in mind. I saw the beauty of the oceans and the clouds : the multiples shades of blue, the azure blue of the Caribbean right down to the somber and profound blue of the Pacific ; the white shades of the clouds and of the snow ; and the black of the surrounding space. And I was there, standing on the surface of the moon, contemplating the earth in the full light of the sun... »²⁰.

Could we not see this as the cunning of reason ? It is precisely those who by means of highly technical machinery manage to leave the terrestrial habitat and to travel, as we say, in space, who return with an increased awareness of the marvel that the Earth represents and of the need to preserve it as our living home²¹.

The Philosophical Point of View

Where are we now with regard to the philosophical point of view on the earth ? It is tempting to attribute a central place to Nietzsche in the movement of thought by which the Earth is brought back out of its retreat, its eclipse. The cry of Zarathustra « be Faithful to the Earth » still resounds. But how should it be interpreted ? Certainly as a rehabilitation of the earth faced with an anemic heaven constructed on the basis of the negation of the body. However, with Nietzsche, the return to the earth was animated by the « will to power », inspired less by a genuine spirituality as by his opposition to any fanciful evasion into an imaginary heaven. If he pointed the finger primarily at Christian religion in its apparent contempt for the body and the earth, and so forgetting the incarnation, he made no attempt to come to terms with either the objectification of nature by physical science or with the complicity between science and modern philosophy.

As for Heidegger, one can not deny the importance of his contribution to the critique of modernity and of the technical empire our civilization seeks to impose, and from which the entire earth suffers, reduced as it has been to a simple exploitable resource for human industry. However, as mentioned previously, it is primarily in the context of his meditation on nature in the sense of what the Greeks meant by *phusis*, and in

20. A citation by Christopher Phillips « Une désolation magnifique-La photographie de la Lune », in *Cosmos-Du romantisme à l'avant-garde*, catalogue de l'exposition du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, dir. Jean Clair, Gallimard, 1999, pp. 144-149.

21. See our article : 'Vers une nouvelle Terre ? Approche philosophique de la conquête spatiale » in *Question de... n° 122, Dieu, l'Église et les Extraterrestres*, ed. by Alexandre Vigne, Albin Michel, p.162-201.

order to think about our habitation that Heidegger takes account of the earth. And so one might well ask oneself whether, with him, the question of the body and of life was not sacrificed to the question of being.

And so it is without question to Edmund Husserl that, in the phenomenological movement, we owe the most remarkable clarification of our originary experience of the Earth. This phenomenological clarification was linked to the interpretation he offered of what he called the crisis in the European sciences. A crisis played out at the interface of philosophy and physical science. Confronted with such a constellation and the threat it represents – and Husserl saw the threat primarily at the level of meaning, lacking the elements needed for a diagnosis at the ecological level – we need to revert to the keyword of his transcendental phenomenology : « return to Experience ».

In a courageous text which was actually only a draft, Husserl takes up the question of the Earth not from the Copernican standpoint of a heavenly body moving around the sun but from that of the experience we have of it on the basis of our living body (*Leib*) and of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) with which it is confronted.

The manuscript of the text designated with the title : « the Earth does not move » carries as a sub-title the following indications : « reversal of the Copernican doctrine with regard to the habitual vision of the world. The ab-original Earth does not move. Fundamental research into the origin of corporality, of the spatiality of nature in the original sense of the natural sciences ».

With regard to this program of phenomenological research, Husserl concentrated primarily upon the part devoted to the reversal of the Copernican representation in the name of the originary experience each of us has of space, in so far as (s)he is an incarnate ego. In Crisis, he employs, in addition, the expression « bodily egoity » (*leibliche Ichlichkeit*). But in our originary experience of space, the Earth is not first and foremost a body, or even the nature by which we are surrounded, but before all else the basis (*Boden*) on which the living body of each of us, that body relevant to our « here », stands whether being at rest or moving itself.

And just like the own body (*Leib*) – which is for each the inalienable place where « I am », my absolute here – the Earth-soil, in that primordial experience we have of it, also lies below the threshold of movement and rest. Or as Husserl writes :

*« It is on earth, on account of the earth, on the basis of it and by distancing oneself from it that movement takes place. The Earth itself, as it presents itself to us originally, does not move, nor is it at rest ; rather, it is in relation to it that movement and rest become meaningful »*²².

22. Cf. 'The Earth Does not Move'. This text from 1934 was first presented in English by Marvin Faber in *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1940, p. 309.

Another point to underline is the way in which Husserl, in the course of his thoughts about the Earth, makes use of imaginative variation, to the point of conceiving of the possibility of journeying to another world. Here is an example :

« Why should I not imagine the moon as a kind of Earth, as a kind of animal habitation ? Yes, I can very easily imagine myself flying off like a bird from the Earth towards some other far away body, or like the pilot of a plane who takes off and lands over there. But if perchance I ask : « How did I get there ? » my question is of the same order as that relating to some newly discovered island, where, finding cuneiform inscriptions, I ask : « How did these people get here ? ». All animals, all living beings , all beings in general, derive their meaning of being solely from my own constitutive genesis, and the latter therefore enjoys an earthly precedence»²³.

Of course, now that Man has walked on the deserted expanses of the moon, and that space probes have sent us back thousands of images and data concerning the other planets of our solar system, Husserl's imaginative variations fall far short of reality. A living being could never hope to survive, in the absence of an earthly atmosphere, at least, not unless it were placed in a space ship capable of supporting life, that is, built to reproduce, at least in part, the conditions of life on earth. But where Husserl is not wrong is in according precedence to the Earth, and in his attempt to trace the genesis of the meaning of being in space back to the Earth. And how could one avoid recognizing the ethical dimension to his affirmation of one simple humanity and one single Earth !

It is up to philosophers today, in particular those who call themselves phenomenologists²⁴, to follow up the thinking of Husserl, by trying to carry further still his understanding of our belonging to the Earth, by emphasizing, with other like-minded « guardians » (in particular men of science involved with ecology), the need for mankind to get together and to protect, together, our own earthly environment. It is a matter of our ethical responsibility.

Moreover, in what concerns ecology, to this ethical responsibility it is necessary to add a dimension which, to keep things short, might be called « aesthetic ». For the philosopher who, in principle, ought to be a person receptive to beauty, the uglification of the surface of the earth, its landscapes, sounds a signal of alarm relative to the harm caused by our civilization on Earth. This is something Edward S. Casey reminds us of in his essay : « taking a Glance at the Environment »²⁵.

23. Ibidem, p. 27.

24. The need to link the phenomenological movement with ecological concerns is beginning to make itself felt. For this, see the work by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine : *Eco-Phenomenology – Back to the Earth Itself*, Sunny, 2003.

25. Edward S. Casey, « Taking a Glance at the Environment-Preliminary Thoughts on a Promising Topic », in *Eco-Phenomenology -Back to the Earth itself*, chap. 11, p. 187-210.

The point of view of this author seems promising to me. But it is the conjunction of all the various points of view we have tried rapidly to review that should give the philosopher food for thought if he has to « look at the Earth from a philosophical point of view » and not remain content with repeating *ad infinitum*, and in a sterile fashion that could never make any real difference, Heidegger's theses on technology as the inevitable outcome of Western metaphysics.

For saving the Earth also requires that Man understand, and ever better, the essential interdependence of all those living creatures who have made of the archetypal Earth a life site. In Husserl's choice of the expression « Arch » to name the « Archetypal Earth », one catches a glimpse of the biblical legend of Noah's arch, itself also intimately associated with saving life, whether animal or human.

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