



For the Earth That Has Never Been

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Abstract:

In this article, I advance four main theses:

- 1) that there has never been a philosophy of the earth;
- 2) that the earth has never been itself;
- 3) that the earth has never been defined; and
- 4) that the earth has never been moral.

I suggest that a geophilosophy
worthy of the name
would need to respect these negative qualities
of the earth's non-identity,
non- or indefiniteness, and a-morality.

Keywords:

Earth, geophilosophy, *logos*, *sophia*, metaphysics,
self-consciousness, articulation,
identity,
definition, morality

I.

There has never been a philosophy of the earth. It is too early for philosophical investigations when mythologies offer a satisfactory explanatory framework for the earth's phenomena and veiled (chthonic) realities. And it is too late when mineralogical, geodesic, stratigraphic, and other "earth sciences" take over the work of mythologies, which they continue by other means, as Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer argue in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002: 10).¹ Accompanying the rise of capitalism and debunking the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation (particularly its timeline), the modern scientific perspective on the earth is an appendage to the technologies of exploitation, single-mindedly focused on the extraction of metals, precious stones, and fossils.² Its unapologetically instrumental attitude is the inverse of the premodern fascination with the earthly fold, which gives birth to gods and mortals. Still, this is an inversion upon the same conceptual grounds, where the dominating becomes the dominated, the overpowering sway overpowered.

The composite geo-logy indicates *what happens* to the earth in a transition from myth to science that evades philosophy and *what could happen* were the name of the discipline heard with a different ear. Concerned with types of minerals, their distribution and formation, the processes of sedimentation and erosion, geology drastically limits the semantic range of the Greek λόγος at its core. In line with other modern disciplines, it circumscribes λόγος to the study of—or, at best, a discourse about—the earth, foregoing the other possible translations of the word, such as "gathering," "assembly," or "articulation." While the earth in mythological thinking is an all-absorbent whole, the scientific paradigm expresses the disarticulation, the shattering of one totality at the behest of another—that of capital. Hence, to note that there has never been a *philosophy* of the earth is to suggest that the earth has never been released to its fate as an articulating, an articulated, and, above all, a self-articulating entity.

Very often, and from different ends of the political spectrum, reactions to the technoscientific overreach that yields the ideal and the real breakdown of the earth have sought out the panacea of mythological thinking. Martin Heidegger's distinction between earth

¹ In a similar vein, Aleksey Losev writes: "decidedly, science is not only always accompanied by but also receives its nourishment from mythology, from which it draws its incipient intuitions" (2016: 46, author's own translation).

² See Guntau (1996: 211ff.).

and world (as well as between the elementality of the Greek $\gamma\eta$ and the proto-imperialism of the Latin *terra* heralding a territorial approach) excludes the earth from the ambit of things handed over to understanding without flattening it to a homogeneous background of experience.³ This exclusion is, moreover, a necessary one: the earth can provide support and sustain whatever and whomever it carries only because it is dense, impenetrable, absolutely dark — unworldly but not otherworldly, one might say.⁴ On the contrary, grasping it, penetrating it cognitively or physically (in an extreme instance by fracking), turning it into a thing in and of our world is tantamount to depriving it of the capacity to sustain anything. Heidegger's earth must stay mysterious, despite the work of the world that strives to "raise it completely into the light" (Heidegger 1993: 174); it must be articulating but not articulated, as the unsurpassable meaning horizon and an elemental crossroads, a simple fourfold. Where would geophilosophy begin and where would it end were it to uphold the Heideggerian distinction?

Segments of the ecological movement have, in their turn, tapped the myth of Mother Earth in response to the perilous detachment of technoscience from the milieu of life it aims to regulate, produce, and reproduce (elsewhere), just as it now produces living organisms by means of genetic editing and molecular bioengineering. With this, they have, perhaps inadvertently, undersigned an ideological exhortation to cut the umbilical cord binding us to Mother Earth on the path to a genuine maturation of humanity. From geoengineering to proposals for *Homo sapiens sapiens* to become an interplanetary species, the ideology in question shares a mythological background of Mother Earth with the largely nativist ecological movements, except that it rebels against the very geomatriarchalism such movements embrace. As the history of Nazi Germany has shown, the parochial overtones of the umbilical attachment to and elemental inclusion in the earthly fold are no less dangerous than the dreams of separating from that fold: *Earth First!* and *America First!* are not as alien to one another as it seems at first glance.

³ "The self-seclusion of earth, however, is not a uniform, inflexible staying under cover, but unfolds itself in an inexhaustible variety of simple modes and shapes [*eine unerschöpfliche Fülle einfacher Weisen und Gestalten*]" (Heidegger 1993: 173).

⁴ "The world grounds itself on the earth, and the earth juts through world. Yet the relation between world and earth does not wither away into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to raise the earth completely [into the light]. As self-opening, the world cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there" (Heidegger 1993: 174; translation modified).

In *Facing Gaia* (2017), Bruno Latour reluctantly circles back to the mythological shape of the earth goddess, even as he adamantly and repeatedly insists that there is nothing maternal or harmonious about her (2017: 82). He desperately wants to recover her for science, so much so that — without a trace of irony — he titles the third lecture in this series “Gaia, A (Finally Secular) Figure for Nature.” In the same lecture, he does call her “an exceedingly treacherous mythical name for a scientific theory,” but the treachery is not where Latour locates it (Ibid: 95–96). For him, the danger of the earth-system theory that adopts this name and treats the planet as a superorganism lies in imputing harmony, wholeness, and coherence (hence, “a holistic conception”) to a mesh of oft-clashing things, processes, cataclysms, and so forth that is the earth (Ibid: 95–96). The choice Latour leaves his readers with is between, on the one hand, the Totality of Gaia that, in the guise of scientific theories of planetary self-regulation and superorganismic organization, resurrects the tyranny of old myth with the figure of the earth for a new Leviathan, towering over its constituent parts, and, on the other hand, the belligerent Object Earth. Objecthood, however, ought to be understood in a very precise sense announced in the title of the project, *Facing Gaia*. An object is that-which-is-thrown-against and, arguably, Latour interprets the Anthropocene not (only) in terms of the inclusion and subsumption of human history into the history of the planet but (also) as the unique moment, the first time ever, when human (or, according to Latour, already post-human [Ibid: 144]) beings are confronted with and confront, are faced with and face, the earth. This face-to-face precedes and enables the self-recognition of the collective human (or post-human) subject in the mirror of industrial waste engrained into the body of the earth.

More importantly for our purposes, the figuration that Latour begrudgingly dispenses to the earth is a salient aspect of the mythological legacy he otherwise wishes to secularize. Positively, his peculiar mix of myth and science demonstrates the continuity between the two, ascertained by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer; negatively, it points to the insight these critical theorists approached from various angles without formalizing it, namely that a “clean break” with myth is bound to indulge in the worst excesses of mythological thinking. A case in point here is modern science, which, priding itself on its capacity progressively to demystify the universe, draws a mythic image of itself. The logical conclusion of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* should have been a properly Hegelian one: the consciousness of myth *qua* myth — its self-consciousness — is an enlightenment that remains unsurpassable.

II.

The earth has never been itself. On the one hand, the earth stood for the fathomless dimension of depth, of mystery, dense and impenetrable, that, thanks to this basic resistance, could bear and support all “earthlings” on its surface, allowing them to reproduce, to spring from its womb and to decompose, come back to and melt into it. On the other hand, it was reduced to a collection of natural resources, fertile soils, construction materials, territories to be occupied. It was withholding and always holding something in store for us, with these two moments tethered to one another in such a way that it turned out not to hold anything other than a disaster in store once it no longer withheld itself from the objectifying grasp. Earth consciousness, or earth self-consciousness, develops between these two dimensions.

“Earth self-consciousness” is a response to my remark that the earth is yet to become articulating and articulated, that is, self-articulating. Stated formulaically, self-consciousness is a subset of self-articulation, which, for its part, is an aspect of self-relationality. In the dialectical scheme of things, this division would correspond to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (2018), which deals with self-consciousness; the two *Logics* that are concerned with the self-articulations of becoming as the mediated self-negation of pure being and nothing; and *Philosophy of Nature* (2004), preoccupied with self-relations. If, in this last work, Hegel claims that inorganic nature accommodates a host of relations but is not related to itself, that plants are related to themselves in an entirely extraneous fashion, and that animals owe their animation to self-relationality, it is because he conflates these three levels of interactivity between the same and the other.

In itself, the Hegelian earth can never be itself, as it occupies a conceptual space of sheer positivity, the precondition for all positedness, which is not negated enough and, therefore, not internally mediated with the other: “The earth is initially the abstract ground of individuality,” which “posits itself in its process as the negative unity of the abstract, mutually separating elements” (Hegel 2004: 233). While not as neutral as light, its abstractness parallels the logical category of pure being that has no history, no temporality, until it is negated by and negates nothingness.

Another interpretation of the earth’s non-identity is colored with dialectical hues, namely the surplus of what is not-earth constituting the earth—the earthly fold that encompasses not only the soil but also the atmosphere, the sea, solar light, and heat, that is to

say, all the elements and the planet itself. The earth is the only element that, negating itself, receives all the other elements in itself,⁵ which is why, “consequently,” it is “the real ground and actuality of individualization. Now, in this actuality, the elements present themselves as being unified together in concrete points of unity” (Hegel 2004: 233). So, outside or beside itself, the earth is also not itself, though, this time around, its non-identity is imbued with dialectical energy (*Wirklichkeit*, actuality: “the actuality of individualization”) that, by virtue of its self-negation, becomes the fecund ground for existence that it is.

This *more* of the earth is presented as *less* in metaphysical thought that seeks the true source of and the final reference for meaning elsewhere than in the finite sphere delimited, whether symbolically or not, by terrestrial horizons. According to this perspective, the ontological foundations of the world are neither in the world nor on earth, but behind the world or above the earth—for instance, in heavens or in the sky (*Himmel*), as Marx (1970) puts it in his critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. He writes there, famously: “It is the *task of history*, therefore, once the *beyond of truth* has vanished, to establish the *truth of this world*. It is above all the *task of philosophy*, which is in the service of history, to unmask human self-alienation in its *unholy forms* once its *holy form* has been unmasked. Thus, the critique of heaven (*Kritik des Himmels*) is transformed into the critique of the earth (*Kritik der Erde*), the *critique of religion* into the *critique of law*, the *critique of theology* into the *critique of politics*” (Marx 1970: 132, translation modified).

By inverting the ideological-metaphysical edifice, by unmasking human self-estrangement, Marx hopes that critique would come back down to earth. Yet, analogous to *Himmel*, which means both heaven and sky, *Erde*, earth, has a double meaning. When he grafts law and politics onto the earth, with their corollaries religion and theology pertaining to heavens, Marx really only brings them down to *this world*, built on earth. Due to the doubling of both *Himmel* and *Erde*, the inversion of ideological or metaphysical structures is not a simple upending; it is a passage, in the name of historical materialism, from the ideal part of the former (“the *holy form*”; “the *beyond of truth*”) to the ideal part of the latter (“the *unholy form*”; “the *truth of this world*”). In the materialist critique of idealism, the earth is still (or already) not itself, and the sky, too, is not yet liberated from heaven.

⁵ Fire receives all things by negating them and only incidentally itself—when it destroys the material substratum in which it burns and consumes the oxygen necessary for its activity.

What the geological designation *the Anthropocene* means, at least nominally, is that the world of capitalist technoscience has become the gate-crasher of the earth. Far from a synthesis of the two, it transposes distorted ideological-metaphysical images onto the earth's actuality, insinuating them into geological crusts in the shape of the residues and debris of agricultural and industrial activities. It is a moot point to ask what would have happened were Europe not to have attained its position of colonial world dominance as a precursor to capitalist modernity, were our species never to have had its evolutionary success, or were it to disappear from the face of the planet. Metaphysics and the ideologies it feeds into in a vast majority of world religions see the earth, representing finite existence *in toto*, either as a trash bin or as trash itself, worth throwing away on a quest for true being. The rise of agriculture, the Industrial Revolution, and the aftermath of these earth-shattering events in world history have done no more than give body to that devastating idea. Nor will the extinction of *Homo sapiens sapiens* amount to a significant change after the elements themselves (the soil, the sea, the atmosphere) have been altered, impregnated with plastics and various forms of carbon emissions. The idyll of "the earth without us" is one of the most recently manufactured molds of metaphysics, laced with a large dose of nihilism.

III.

The earth has never been defined. It means too much to us to fit into a neat, formal and exhaustive definition. In various languages, the word itself accommodates enormous variations of scope and specificity: from soil, or types of soil, to one's birthplace, a region, or the planet as a whole (usually marked by way of capitalization). It will be said in contemporary jargon that the earth is inherently global (both global and local), even though its outlines, if it has any, do not overlap with those of the globe, which is an abstract geometrical sphere, or with those of a locality. Such a pronouncement would be largely wrongheaded, insofar as the earth cannot furnish a synthesis of "the abstract ground of individuality" and "the real ground and actuality of individualization" Hegel wants to draw from it. "The" earth is indefinite and undefinable in the face of multiple attempts to capture it in a definition, and it retains its meaningfulness thanks to this indefiniteness.⁶

⁶ In English, capitalization is used in conjunction with the definite article to signal that the noun earth refers to "our" planet. Grammatically, this makes the Earth unique.

Undefinable, generously indefinite, the earth is brimming with a welter of meanings. What are some of the lines, what are some of the veins, along which they have been chiseled? And what do they say about the prospects of a geophilosophy? Let us try to compile a register of these meanings, garnered from different epochs and parts of the world.

The earth has been understood as:

- that which is below, the sublunar world
- that toward which everything (earthy) falls
- the realm of the dead, burial grounds, the underworld – further below still
- an element, dense and impenetrable
- the first surface of inscription for property relations and laws, for communal borders and political units, as much as for everything that falls within the purview of *geography*
- material support for dwelling
- the fold of vitality, combining all the elements
- an infinite source of fertility
- a goddess, a primordial mother, or both – “she,” “her”
- the center of the universe
- a planet in the solar system
- a spaceship
- a playground for fracking and, more generally, for fossil, metal, and stone extraction
- the object of study of “earth sciences”

Not exhaustive by far, this list gives us *a taste of the earth*, leaving us, in particular, with the flavor of indefiniteness and undefinability despite and across its multiple definitions. Take the phenomenological indication that it is that which lies below, replete with spatial-cosmological, political-hierarchical, ethical-axiological markers for orientation. The operative distinction is between the earth and the sky, that which is below and that which is above, stretching, meeting in their suggestive overlay somewhere on the horizon, and engaging in an intercourse so as to birth all else. Immediately, though, a series of questions crops up. How far below? What if there is still something below that which below? Indeed, there is: the division of the earth into the sublunar world and subterranean, chthonic regions complicate the spatial phenomenological scheme. Proponents of a holistic Gaia theory conveniently forget the dark forces of the underworld that is also earth, about which Latour sends them constant reminders. But, from a philosophical point of

view—and rehashing some of Jacques Derrida’s ideas in *Truth in Painting* (1987)—one could say that the introduction of a second bottom, the doubling of the bottom portion of terrestrial existence, knocks the bottom out of things and opens unto an abyss. That which is below has depth, and this realization disorients in the course of orienting, destabilizes in the course of grounding us.

The play of surface and depth, made possible by the finer edges (the depth *of* surface and the surface *of* depth) adumbrating this contrast, reflects the interplay of earthly life and death. The earth gives birth to plants and other forms of life by pushing them from its (her) entrails, but it becomes fecund also by contact with the sky—with water, air, and the solar blaze it receives from above. The chthonic origination of life is followed by its procession upward from the realm of the dead, upon which plants feed as they grow and which include fossil fuels, burned to provide vital heat and energy. (More on this later.) Receiving the dead and bearing, sustaining, supporting life are portions of one and the same loop that poses yet another obstacle on the path of a straightforward definition—the *delineation*—of the earth.

A similar fate is reserved for attempts at defining the earth through its relation to legibility, comprehensibility, and, ultimately, objectification. It envelops us when we are convinced, as Latour is, that we are finally facing and confronting it. Heidegger’s point that the earth is “self-secluded” in its evasion of light seems to put it on the hither side of legibility, yet, the earth’s strife with the world that generates meaning (1993: 173). In Schmitt, the emergence of *nomos* “from” the earth does not preclude the thesis that, in and of itself, the earth is anomic and that, therefore, any radical change in its *nomos* dips into its originary *anomie*. More than that, although it eventually permits the capture and appropriation of territories, the *nomos* of the earth precedes territorialization: “[T]he solid ground of the earth is delineated by fences, enclosures, boundaries, walls, houses and other constructions. Then, the orders and orientations of human social life become apparent” (Schmitt 2003: 42). A comparison to the sea, on which “no firm lines can be engraved [*keine festen Linien eingraben*]” (Ibid), loses its bite: the earth provides relative stability for the divisions drawn upon in, but, in its capacity of a substratum, it is as illegible as the watery element. To resort to a word coined by Derrida, the earth is an archetype of arche-writing, which, not being legible, is legibility itself, the potentiality of making sense and interpreting, which is indissociable from material, terrestrial actuality.

Lest you think that hindrances to a definition of the earth are but deconstructive language games, consider the following possibility.

Were *Homo sapiens sapiens* really to evolve into an interplanetary species, the other planet, on which a permanent human settlement would be established would be... another earth. Not by chance, the study of the mineral composition, stratigraphy, etc., say, of Mars is still called *geology*: “Planetary geology is defined as the study of the origin, evolution, and distribution of matter which forms the planets, natural satellites, comets, and asteroids” (Greeley 1993: 1). The earth, then, has no cosmic-planetary boundaries: any planet that is of our concern and that may yield, or may be forced to yield, the conditions propitious for human habitation is an earth. This distinction is simultaneous with the contraction of the earth, viewed from an imagined or real perspective of space exploration and satellite technologies, to a tiny blue dot in a lifeless sea of black. The contradiction holds a clue to the kind of indefinability, or indefiniteness, which might be said to be definite: the definite indefiniteness of the earth.

The indefinite definiteness in the cosmic aspect of our planet extends to all other provisional definitions of the earth. “That which is below,” for instance, is not absolutely below, thanks to the internal complexity of the vertical axis and to the extraction of fossil fuel from its depth. When these sources of energy are burned, their combustion releases particles of the earth into the air, polluting, in the first instance, the distinction between that which is above and that which is below, the sky and the earth. Since microplastics that suffuse the oceans and the atmosphere are derivative products of petrochemicals, they, too, are the earth sent skywards and seawards. And, scattered in the topsoil, whether having dropped down with precipitation or having been deposited as sewage sludge through effluent discharges from waste treatment plants, they muddle the difference between the earth’s surface and depth.

Already in the nineteenth century, Marx and Engels noted that capitalist modernity raises displacement, destabilization, changes of state, and the like to the status of ontological principles: “All that is solid melts into air” (Marx and Engels 2002: 233). Correcting the lopsidedness of this return to the elements, we may rewrite the emblematic statement from *The Communist Manifesto* as “The earth melts into air.” The replacement of solidity with the earth is justifiable with respect to 1) a transition from land-based feudal relations to urban and contractual relations of production under capital, and 2) the environmental outcomes of industrial capitalism that *actually* sends tons of earth, of unearthed materials, into the atmosphere — except that this sending does not quite melt into but saturates the air and produces smog. Rather than a firm, material support for dwelling, the

earth turns into grounds that must be broken if we are to assert our humanity (the English adjective *ground-breaking* is a good mouthpiece of modern innovation); rather than an infinite reserve of fertility, it becomes a temporary container of potential energy resources.

That, in modernity, the earth denies a place both for the living and for the dead serves as negative evidence for the hidden unity of the welcome, harkening back to the loop of terrestrial “life support.” Before concerns with the disruption of ecosystems and habitats in the wake of immense environmental contamination, there is the unarticulated, taciturn, largely unnoticed event: the expulsion of the remains of long-dead organisms from their subterranean abode. The depths of the earth cease to serve as the untouchable (hence, sacred) burial grounds at the same time that the supporting function of its surface is withdrawn: the burning of fossil fuels converts the air into an unmarked mass grave. The disorienting upward movement of what used to be below intensifies the already felt instability of the earthly substratum that was supposed to be the bedrock for human life, just as the calculus of value predicated on abstract labor expresses and absolutizes the latent vector of abstraction in social existence beyond the family.

The exposure of liquified, gasified, or carbonized remains turns the earth inside out. At the extreme, this exteriorization coincides with the kind of excessive interiorization that renders burial rites absurd. Recruiting thousands of people to “liquidate” the consequences of the explosion of Reactor Number 4 at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, the Soviet authorities issued surreal orders to “deactivate” houses, trees, and the affected layers of the topsoil by burying them inside the earth, something that Svetlana Alexievich astutely deems to be “the new human, yet inhuman task” (2008: 18).⁷ The earth buried in the earth is, thus, the consummation *and* the negation of the posthumous welcome it has extended to whatever and whomever had once existed on its surface.

To phrase what I have called *the unity of the welcome* otherwise: the earth silently testifies to the fact, most evident in vegetal vitality, that all life lives off death. Plants receive nutrients from decomposing organic matter, from the soil that they have in part prepared together with bacteria, microbes, and fungi. They are directly (continuously and contiguously, through their roots) in touch with decay, with which we are familiar in an indirect, fitful manner. The infinite reserve of fertility that is the earth-*qua*-soil depends on the infinite production of finitude. Nuclear waste interferes with the metabolic rhythms of terrestrial life when it prolongs the time

⁷ For an account of these activities, see Alexievich (2008, *passim*).

of decomposition to what, from a human perspective, amounts to an eternity. Less dramatically, if on an expanded scale, plastic clogs every single ecosystem and, in lieu of decaying, disintegrates into ever smaller shreds. The obstinance and ubiquity of its presence are a sad parody of the cornucopia we still attribute to an infinitely fertile Mother Earth in the wake of ancient myths. In the meantime, the pace of soil erosion and acidification is accelerating as the desert advances and forests recede.

Between too much and too little, the excess and the dearth projected onto it, the earth has never been defined. It is this *never* that leaves just enough time and space for a geophilosophy, which would strive not to propose a strict definition for the object of its philosophizing, but to consider what it means to come down to earth when we are no longer certain what is up and what is down, when the earth is everywhere and nowhere, when *earth* and *not-earth* seem to be one and the same.

IV.

The earth has never been moral. And it has never been immoral, or even amoral, either: the earth “itself” is beyond good and evil. Myth makes us believe otherwise, of course. In *Works and Days*, Hesiod says that after Pandora’s box was opened, “the earth was filled with bad things [πλείη μὲν γὰρ γαῖα κακῶν]” (106). Those “bad, evil, ugly things,” κακῶν, were the “gifts,” with which the gods stuffed the infamous box, handed over to Prometheus as punishment for having stolen fire from Olympus. For a theft of one element (fire) another (earth) must be despoiled. If, however, fire stands in for art, craft, and the other connotations of the Greek τέχνη, then the earth that, in turn, stands in for everything and everyone it bears receives the evils unleashed by the technological blaze itself. On this view, the Anthropocene is a moment of reckoning when Prometheus stares at the lid of Pandora’s box as though it were a mirror, or when humanity recognizes itself in an opaque looking glass of its techno-excrements, strewn on the surface and engrained into the earth.

In Latour’s Gaia, we might spot a post-Pandora earth, not only receiving but also actively venting, releasing all the evils it has imbibed over millennia. This dispensation is ecological justice, if not of the kind environmental activists desire. But, regardless of the slant in one’s relation to the earth, the good and the bad are not abstract moral categories; they are attributes that presuppose a Mother Earth (even if this presupposition is explicitly rejected, as in the case of Latour). Subject to valuation, the earth invariably

reappears in the guise of a mother: a good and nourishing one, or a bad and punishing one.

The categories of the good and the bad, consequently, mutate: they are now based on coming back to the earth or on exacerbating one's detachment from it. The detachment in question need not be physical, such as moving to live on another planet, which, as we have already seen, would be yet another earth. The metaphysical variety of separation outstrips the physical in effectiveness, and it can be accomplished thanks to perspectival shifts, notably, from the geocentric to the heliocentric paradigm in astronomy. However accurate, the heliocentric paradigm signaled a rupture with the phenomenological experience of life on earth, and it is this rupture that opened the *metaphysical distance* between us and the earth, enabling the limitless instrumentalization of the planet. The Copernican revolution and its replay in philosophy have a more intimate connection than Kant imagined: the freshly discovered centrality of the subject (the sun) implies the objectification of the earth.

A prevalent reaction to the denigration of the earth as a bad mother and to praise lavished on our capacity to cut the planetary umbilical cord consists in reaffirming the bonds, material as much as emotional, that ties us to it (or to her). Kelly Oliver names this, in an amalgam of Latin and Greek, *terrabilia*, "through which we love the earth enough to take responsibility for it" (Oliver 2015: 207ff.) In a hardly veiled dialectical narrative of love-with-responsibility, humanity is first immersed in a heedless attachment to the earth, which it negates *via* extreme detachment followed by a reattachment on different terms, in keeping with the maturity of humanity and with "earth self-consciousness." It remains, nevertheless, a moral (and not infrequently a moralizing) love, explicable, in light of its dialectical infrastructure, through Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*.

Responsibility is featured in the book's section on morality, where it refers to the right of the will to recognize an action as its own. And, conversely, Hegel writes, "I can be made *accountable* for a deed only if *my will was responsible* for it — *the right of knowledge*" (Hegel 1991: 144). In other words, a love replete with responsibility is saddled with knowledge, or, more precisely, with "*the right of knowledge*," das Recht des Wissens, the right of identifying this or that action as mine. In the shadow of *terrabilia* we find ἐπιστήμη, which is what really allows the subject to make an extra step beyond its immersive attachment to Mother Earth. But the synthesis is deficient, inasmuch as it is stuck at the stage of morality without moving on to that of ethical life, *Sittlichkeit*, where the actions I responsibly know as mine are married to the actuality of the idea in institutions (perhaps,

institutions yet to be invented). Here, love would play a crucial role both as “the consciousness of my unity with another” (i. e., with the earth) and as “the most immense contradiction” — in the first place, between love itself and knowledge. “Love is both the production and the resolution of this contradiction. As its resolution, it is ethical unity” (Hegel 1991: 199).

How to make a passage from the moral love of the earth to the ethical life of this love? In fact, the three components of *Sittlichkeit* — Family, Civil Society, State — are invoked, in one way or another, in connection with ecological concerns. Pope Francis’s appeal in his encyclical *Laudato Si’* begins with the affirmation that the “urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change” (Francis 2015: 12). Between the lines of the encyclical, “the whole human family” monopolizes a loving relation, while putting into practice its responsibility to protect “our common home,” the earth as its οἶκος (hence, basic property). Next, “global civil society,” made of NGOs and informal activist networks, overwrites the earth with its geometrical representation as a globe. Finally, at the political level, Latour’s Parliament of Things (1993: 144) or Michel Serres’s parliament of the four elements plus life (WAFEL for Water, Air, Fire, Earth, Life) (2015: 44ff.) are the tail ends of an unfinished project that is the French Revolution. They grant *liberté, égalité, fraternité* to forms of existence beyond the human in a bid to attend to their complex expressions and modes of assembly irreducible to classical notions of discourse and representation.

Of the three stages in *Sittlichkeit*, only the family is a setting propitious to love in the restricted (human) and general development of ethical life alike. Nonetheless, Hegel detects in love the “production and resolution” of a contraction that culminates in “ethical unity” (1991: 199), which means that it envelops also civil society and the political realm. I recover the consciousness of my loving unity with another in ethical unity, which is a sublimated version of that first unity; *mutatis mutandis*, the family love felt toward Mother Earth would reemerge, unrecognized and unrecognizable, in earth self-consciousness and self-articulation. Faithful to this injunction, geophilosophy — literally, *earth love of wisdom* — would spread love to the entire ethical ensemble of *Sittlichkeit*, primarily by obviating the choice of earth *or* wisdom as the proper recipient of loving affect.

The advantage of transcribing Oliver’s *terrabilia* completely into Greek is that it spotlights the missing piece in the panorama of ethical life. Compared to geophilosophy, *geophilia* lacks σοφία (or,

better: it lacks the lack of σοφία), and, therefore, it lingers on as an immediate sort of love: familial, parochial, and largely sentimental. What does this lack entail? In ancient, Platonic, dialectics, philosophy is predicated on an erotic pursuit, a yearning for the ever elusive σοφία that breathes meaning into all philosophical aspirations. Hegelian dialectics may be interpreted as an elucidation of this elusiveness: nothing substantive in itself, σοφία is the mediatedness of mediation, a middle conscious of its place. Geophilosophy is a loving, if interminable, mediation between *earth* and *not-earth* that seem to be one and the same or that, rather than seeming to be, merge in an immediate unity of familial love. It names, without naming, the courage to love the deeply violated, despite their shared elusiveness, γῆ and σοφία. The courage to admit to our unity with earth and thought fracked, disemboweled, and filled with our garbage, even as we are filled with them. To be on the earth that has never been.

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